

Opening speech by Ms. Sonja Koepfel

Secretary of the Water Convention at the National Workshop on the Water Convention in Uganda

Lusaka, 26 May 2022

Your Excellency, Mr. Minister,

Mr Permanent Secretary,

Mr Ambassador of the Delegation of the European Union to Zambia and
COMESA,

Mr Resident Representative of the United Nations Development
Programme in Zambia,

Madam Secretary General of the Commission for the Congo-Oubangui-
Sangha - CICOS,

Mr Executive Secretary of the Zambesi Watercourse Commission -
ZAMCOM,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to be here with you today at this important National Workshop on the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, also known as the 1992 Water Convention.

Water is necessary for our health and survival, for all economic activity, for energy and agriculture and for the integrity of our environment. 60% of all water resources worldwide are shared between two or more countries. In Zambia this percentage is even higher with almost 75% of your country's land mass covered by the Zambezi River Basin and roughly 25% by the Congo River Basin. Transboundary water cooperation is therefore crucial for peace, sustainable development and human well-being.

For this reason, it was a great step forward that not only an integrated and dedicated goal on water was included in the SDGs but also a requirement for

countries to implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation, as appropriate. SDG indicator 6.5.2 measures progress in this regard.

In 2018, Zambia has submitted its national report on SDG Indicator 6.5.2 to UNECE and UNESCO as custodian agencies. Almost 70% of the surface area of the country's transboundary basins are covered by an operational arrangement.

Indeed, Zambia is already heavily involved in several transboundary basin bodies, including the Zambezi Watercourse Commission, Zambezi River Authority and the Lake Tanganyika Authority. At regional level, Zambia is a party to the 2000 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Revised Protocol on Shared Watercourses. Collectively, these actions, agreements and institutions represent an implementation of the Water Convention and many of its principles already advanced in these basins.

However, other basins, including aquifers, do not yet have basin agreements and bodies and even existing mechanisms still need to be strengthened in order to ensure their full effectiveness. For example, Zambia is not yet part of CICOS, known in English as the Congo Basin Commission, but Zambia considers joining it; and there are plans to develop an agreement and river basin authority for the Luapula River shared between Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Water Convention and the recently adopted guide can be very useful here.

The Water Convention is a concrete and effective global legal and intergovernmental framework and platform aimed to support cooperation and sustainable management of shared waters, including groundwaters. Accession can enable support by the community of Parties, experience-sharing with basins and countries worldwide, facilitate access to financing and raise the country profile at the international level. The creation of new basin agreements such as the Memorandum of Understanding currently being finalised for the Sio-Malaba-Malakisi basin Uganda shares with Kenya, which the Water Convention supported in the early stages of this process together with IGAD and IUCN, is one such practical example.

It is therefore a logical and welcome step that Zambia considers accession to the Water Convention. Today's workshop represents an important milestone and unique opportunity for thoroughly analysing the obligations of the Convention, the practical tools it offers to support countries' efforts, and the benefits and risks, if any, associated with its accession. It is important that this workshop

results in a clear commitment and roadmap for accession. Such accession can ideally happen before the United Nations water conference (March 2023).

Zambia is not alone in this journey. In 2018, Chad and Senegal became the first African Parties to the Convention and we will hear more from Senegal during this workshop about the rationale and practical benefits underpinning their accession. Since then, Ghana joined in 2020, and Guinea-Bissau and Togo last year. Several other African countries are in advanced stages of accession including Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire and The Gambia, and other states are engaged in starting the accession process, including Uganda, Tanzania and also Namibia which is where I and colleagues will travel to next week for their own National Workshop. From other regions, I can inform that Iraq will soon be a party.

In the spirit of cooperation of the Convention, older Parties and international experts are available to share their experiences. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them:

- Mr. Harry Liiv, Special Envoy for Transboundary Waters from the Ministry of the Environment in Estonia and Chair of the Bureau of the Water Convention and Mr. Peter Kovacs, Water Director of Hungary and Member of the Bureau, will share the extensive experiences of their respective countries which both have been Parties to the Convention since the mid 1990s; and,
- Mr. Amary Ngoné Sembène, Legal Unit Coordinator, Ministry of Water and Sanitation of Senegal who will be sharing the motivation, experiences and value add of accession to the Convention.

The secretariat team also includes Mr. Remy Kinna, Legal Officer at the secretariat.

In addition, we have invited several regional experts:

- Ms. Judith Enaw, Secretary General of CICOS and Mr. Felix Ngamlagosi, Executive Secretary of ZAMCOM who can both share the rich cooperation experiences from their respective basin organisations; and,
- Ms. Joanna Fatch, Technical Advisor to the Transboundary Water Management in SADC Programme of GIZ, will provide a regional perspective of transboundary water resource management in SADC.

I would also like to thank the European Union, who financially supports the organization of this workshop as well as the globalization of the Convention and transboundary water cooperation more broadly.

Finally, I would like to conclude by thanking His Excellency the Minister of Water Development and Sanitation of Zambia for your presence and political support, and the colleagues in the Ministry, particularly Dr Howard Mpamba and Mr Stanley Hantambo, who have invested heavily in the organization of this event. I would also like to thank Convention partners such as the EU, GIZ, WWF and UNDP, which helped us with logistics.

Alone you can go fast, together we can go far.

I wish us all an excellent workshop and fruitful discussions.