



# WATER ACTION DECADE

2018 - 2028

**HIGH LEVEL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON THE  
INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR ACTION “WATER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”  
2018-2028  
6-9 June 2022, Dushanbe, Tajikistan**

**TEMPLATE FOR THE WRITTEN REPORT OF SESSIONS**

*to be completed by co-organizers by 16 June 2022  
(5 pages maximum)*

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| <b>Title</b><br>Transboundary water cooperation for economic growth and sustainability<br>(7 June 2022, 16:30-18:00)  | <i>The same as in the Conference Program</i> |
| <b>Subtitle</b><br>Mobilizing for action to achieve the Agenda 2030   | <i>If any</i>                                |
| <b>Co-organizers or Co-conveners</b><br>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)<br>United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)<br>The Water Institute at UNC<br>Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)<br>European Union (EU)<br>Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)<br><u>Partners</u><br>•International Association of Hydrogeologists Commission on Transboundary Aquifers (IAH)<br>•International Groundwater Assessment Center (IGRAC)  | <i>Up to four main co-organizers *</i>       |
| <b>Background information and rationale</b>   | <i>2-3 paragraphs maximum *</i>              |
| <p>More than 300 river and lake basins and over 450 aquifers are known to be shared by two or more countries and support more than 40% of the world’s population. These systems are coming under increasing pressure from population growth, pollution, mismanagement, and climate change. To ensure conflict prevention and sustain long-lasting economic growth, countries will need to work closely to optimize the benefits and decrease the risks from these shared systems equitably across all stakeholders. These are not easy problems to solve. In many cases, these basins involve complex interactions between surface and groundwater systems which need to be better understood, are strongly coupled to food and energy security, and can touch on regional relations and economic growth.</p> <p>The second monitoring of the SDG indicator 6.5.2 reports that only 24 of the 153 riparian countries sharing transboundary water have operational arrangements for water cooperation across all their shared waters. Ensuring cooperative management of shared water resources at the basin level is critical to ensuring food, energy, and water security; responding to the impacts of climate (including resiliency to and mitigation of both floods and droughts); reducing migratory pressures; promoting regional integration and development, peace, and security.</p> |  |

The goal of this session is to identify concrete actions to promote cooperation on shared waters in support of national efforts to reach the SDG targets by 2030. The session will:

- review the current state of cooperation on shared waters;
- identify barriers and tools to strengthen cooperation and to foster the engagement of stakeholders at all levels;
- identify specific steps national governments can take to build capacity, to improve data collection, management, and collaborative modelling and planning, as entry points for technical and scientific collaboration and decision-making; and
- showcase examples of effective transboundary cooperation from Central Asia and beyond, and explore steps to strengthen governance of shared waters and actions to encourage the adoption of good practices including those consistent with international norms.

### **Main questions for discussion**

*3-4 questions maximum*

1. What and where are the key challenges (i.e., where should attention be focused / what's changing)?
2. What are the successful models and tools available to support cooperation on shared waters?
3. How can we create the enabling environment (technically, financially, diplomatically) for greater cooperation on shared waters?
4. How to facilitate greater access to knowledge, information and data to initiate and/or strengthen cooperation at the technical, scientific and political levels?
5. What are the steps national governments can take to advance inclusive, sustainable and cooperative development and management of shared waters, including groundwater, in support of economic growth?

### **List of interventions**

*Please include a short summary of each intervention, if possible*

#### *Chair:*

Ambassador Igli Hassani, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Ambassador Igli Hassani, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), opened the session by highlighting the role of water as a strategic resource and an essential element of national and regional security. He stressed the importance of transboundary water cooperation, pointing out at the potential of water to act as a source of cooperation, enhanced security, prosperity and sustainability.

#### *Welcome and Opening*

- Ms. Olga Algayerova, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of UNECE

Olga Algayerova, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of UNECE, highlighted transboundary water cooperation was critical for realizing SDG 6 and also served as a catalyst for other SDGs and for the promotion of peace and regional stability. Significant efforts, greater commitment and political support are needed to ensure the coverage of all transboundary waters by operational cooperation arrangements by 2030. Ms. Algayerova stressed the need for capacity-building and addressing data gaps in order to ensure the establishment and strengthening of cooperation, including on groundwaters. She highlighted the need to scale-up finance for cooperation and sustainable development of shared basins. She urged to fully leverage powerful legal instruments like the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, to advance cooperation, prevent conflicts and build resilience.

- Ms. Shamila Nair-Bedouelle, Assistant- Director-General for Natural Sciences, UNESCO

Shamila Nair-Bedouelle, Assistant- Director-General for Natural Sciences, UNESCO, highlighted the role of transboundary waters for peace and dialogue in the context of climate change and the importance of transboundary water cooperation for water, food, economic and social security. She mentioned the role of the monitoring of SDG indicator 6.5.2 in measuring progress of transboundary water cooperation, and her appreciation of the joint work of UNECE and UNESCO, as co-custodian agencies for this indicator. She called for transboundary water cooperation to be on the top of the agenda at the UN 2023 Water Conference,

highlighting the need to advocate for sustainable management of groundwater and transboundary aquifers as an essential contribution towards dealing with water scarcity, conflict situations, and climate change. She described the role of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme and IHP-9 (Science for a Water Secure World in a Changing Environment (2022–2029)) in increasing the knowledge about water resources for their better management and protection. Ms. Nair-Bedouelle recalled the availability of other tools such as the PCCP (From Potential Conflict to Cooperation Potential) programme. She informed that UNESCO would launch the water education indicator to enable countries establish and track the level of water professionals at national level. She also informed of the importance of the UNESCO Open Science recommendation and a new initiative on capacity development for water to start soon under coordination of UNESCO and UN DESA as part of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework.

#### *Keynote speakers*

- Ms. Marjeta Jager, Deputy Director-General of DG INTPA, European Union

Marjeta Jager, Deputy Director-General of DG INTPA, European Union stressed the importance of stakeholder engagement at water cooperation at regional and local level, as practiced under the EU Water Framework Directive. She highlighted that transboundary cooperation should offer solutions to meet human and environmental needs and to share benefits among riparian countries. Good examples in this regard could be found in the Danube and Senegal river basins. The EU strongly supports multilateral relations and dialogue on water, including the globalisation of the UNECE Water Convention of 1992 and calls for partnership in these efforts. Under the EU's Global Gateway strategy, the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) will place a strong focus on de-risking investments, in particular through blending and guarantee instruments, across different priority areas, including water. The "Team Europe Initiative on Transboundary Water Management in Africa" and the soon-to-be-launched "Team Europe Initiative on Water, Energy and Climate in Central Asia" will promote transboundary and integrated water management and effective water governance in respective regions.

- Mr. Guy Bonvin, Swiss Special Envoy for Water in Central Asia, Ambassador

Guy Bonvin, Swiss Special Envoy for Water in Central Asia, Ambassador, highlighted the role of water diplomacy as a powerful multidisciplinary tool to move forward the discussion about shared waters beyond the water sector. He recalled the Blue Peace – a diplomacy initiative of Switzerland – and described the Blue Peace for Central Asia. Blue Peace for Central Asia focuses on reinforcing the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), addressing data and information gaps, capacity development, and incentivizing the development and management of shared infrastructure. He highlighted the nexus approach as key approach for the UN 2023 Water Conference and underscored the role of strong and capable institutions such as the river basin organizations as key actors for implementing the nexus approach. He recalled the Water Convention as a solid framework for transboundary water cooperation, peace and stability.

#### *Moderator*

Dr. Mark Zeitoun, Director, Geneva Water Hub

Dr. Mark Zeitoun, Director, Geneva Water Hub, opened the panel discussion by emphasizing that principle-based water arrangements are becoming increasingly common but coordinating across political boundaries requires serious diplomatic efforts to seize and create opportunities. Panellists were asked to share their experiences how to overcome obstacles to transboundary water cooperation.

#### *Panellists*

- Mr. Sergio Siteo, Executive Secretary, Limpopo Watercourse Commission (LIMCOM)

Sergio Siteo, Executive Secretary, Limpopo Watercourse Commission (LIMCOM), recalled the 2000 Revised Protocol on Shared Watercourses in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The Revised Protocol serves as a platform for transboundary water resources management in the subregion. It encourages the SADC Member States that share watercourses to enter into agreements and establish joint

institutions that facilitate the management of shared watercourses. In spite of this achievement, efforts still need to be made to address persisting challenges related to: high levels of poverty in the Member States; differences in water resources development priorities amongst riparian countries; limited human and technical capacities; limited financial resources for programs implementation; over-reliance on funding from international cooperation partners; disjunctions between what Members States perceive as key priority interventions in water resources investment versus the perspectives of international cooperation partners. At the governance level, regional institutions are challenged to review the governance structure to accommodate aspects related to transboundary aquifers management in order to better advise the countries on management of the aquifers. In this regard LIMCOM is currently reviewing its governance structure, with support of UNESCO and SDC with the establishment of a Multi Country Cooperation Mechanism as well as data and information sharing among riparian countries. Mr. Siteo highlighted the importance of identification, quantification and communication of benefits for cooperation.

- Ms. Dinara Ziganshina, Director, Scientific Information Centre of Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (SIC ICWC) in Central Asia

Dinara Ziganshina, Director, SIC ICWC, highlighted the diversity of examples of successful transboundary water cooperation across the world, at the same time emphasizing that joint institutions should have the ability to adapt and evolve. Central Asian countries have built a strong cooperation framework over the past 30 years, characterised by high commitment and strong ownership by riparian states. Recent bilateral agreements along with the ongoing work on the legal and institutional strengthening of IFAS show the ability of this framework to evolve. Building “a habit of cooperation” by maintaining contacts and working at technical level when cooperation is not easy is another important lesson learned from Central Asia. Support from regional and global cooperative platforms such as the Water Convention with its legal norms, guidance instruments and other tools has been particularly useful in driving cooperation in the region.

- Mr. Gidon Bromberg, Director, EcoPeace Middle East

Gidon Bromberg, Director, EcoPeace Middle East, described the activities of EcoPeace to promote cooperation in the Jordan River basin. Degradation of the Jordan River, coupled with the increasing impacts of climate change, presents remarkable opportunities for cooperation. EcoPeace leads numerous advocacy and education activities in the basin. It also acts through a top-down approach by preparing evidence-based fact-finding reports to build up political will for cooperation. EcoPeace prepared the Jordan River Masterplan which helped attract USD 100 million investments for sewage removal. In November 2021, Jordan and Israel signed a declaration of intent. This document paves the way for mutually beneficial cooperation whereby Jordan would sell renewable energy to Israel that will use it in desalination plants on the Mediterranean and will sell desalinated water back to Jordan. Another initiative launched by EcoPeace in 2020 is the Green Blue Deal for the Middle East which aims to advance climate security and regional peace and can potentially be adapted to other regional contexts.

- Ms. Jennifer Sara, Director, Water, World Bank

Jennifer Sara, Director, Water, World Bank, highlighted that many World Bank projects leverage transboundary water cooperation to reduce poverty and increase climate resilience. The improvement of transboundary water resources management is achieved through three “i”s: information, institutions and investments. Whereas investments are the most difficult part, investing in information and institutional capacity at the national level is also essential. She highlighted that transboundary cooperation can be moved forward by sharing the investments, risks and benefits together and expressed the commitment of the World Bank to help countries look for innovative financing mechanisms.

#### *Moderated discussion*

H.E. Mr. Cheikh Niang, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations, shared an example of the Organisation for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS), which enabled the riparian countries to achieve shared benefits such as increase in irrigated lands, secure energy supplies

and provision of drinking water. He called for investing in transboundary water cooperation through establishing solid cooperation frameworks.

H.E. Mr. Osama Mahmoud Abdel Khalek, Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations, underlined that political dialogue and water diplomacy were critical in the framework of conflict prevention. He stressed that countries within crisis zones and those that host large numbers of refugees and displaced persons should receive special support. He also mentioned that capacity building and training programmes were needed especially in developing countries to build water negotiation and mediation capacities.

Ms. Gayane Gabrielyan, Deputy Minister of Environment, Armenia, described bilateral cooperation on transboundary waters with Turkey and Iran and the ongoing efforts to develop and conclude a bilateral agreement with Georgia. She also highlighted that Armenia was exploring public-private partnership mechanisms to attract investments to the water sector.

Mr. Aleš Bizjak, Ministry of Environment of Slovenia and Vice-Chair of the Water Convention Bureau, described the long-standing experience of Slovenia in bilateral cooperation on transboundary waters as well as in the framework of the multilateral bodies such as the International Sava River Basin Commission and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River. He highlighted two positive examples of cooperation on transboundary waters: the Mura-Drava-Danube 5-country transboundary biosphere reserve and the cooperation of Slovenia and Austria on the Karavanke groundwater body. He also expressed strong commitment of Slovenia to contribute to the activities of the Water Convention.

Mr. Magtymguly Akmyradov, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, described water issues in Central Asia as an important factor determining key decisions and activities in the subregion. He stressed that water and energy cooperation in Central Asia should be based on mutual respect and consideration for the needs of all countries of the subregion.

Mr. Jelle Beekma, Asian Development Bank, described a recently introduced water pillar of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Programme.

A representative of Iran referred to good cooperation of his country with Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Ms. Isabela Espíndola, a youth representative, urged the participants to involve young water professionals in transboundary water cooperation processes.

Ms. Karin Marmsoler, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Germany, expressed readiness to share Germany's long-standing experience of cooperation in transboundary basins. She also highlighted Germany's strong support to the Water Convention and to transboundary water cooperation in the context of the UN 2023 Water Conference.

#### *Rapporteur*

- Ms. Francesca Bernardini, Chief of transboundary cooperation section at UNECE

Francesca Bernardini, Chief of transboundary cooperation section at UNECE, presented the conclusions of the session as described in key messages below.

#### **Key messages**

*8-10 messages maximum \*\**

- **Transboundary water cooperation is vital and crucial to promote sustainable economic development, human and environmental health, climate action, disaster risk reduction, and peace.** While the existence of cooperation can be a catalyser for virtuous progress, such as regional integration or driving cooperation in other areas, its absence is at best a waste of resources and at worst a multiplier of risks that can contribute to the destabilization of societies.
- A greater commitment to cooperation is needed. **Action must be accelerated to meet SDG target 6.5 by 2030** and to ensure that all transboundary river and lake basins and aquifers have effective arrangements and institutions, in order to be able to reap all the benefits of cooperation. Acceleration is

particularly needed to address gaps in terms of data, knowledge and cooperation over aquifers, through increased capacity and better consideration of groundwater resources and their benefits.

- While transboundary water cooperation is a complex endeavour, **solutions and tools exist.**
- **Powerful tools to promote cooperation are both global agreements such as the two UN conventions – the 1992 Water Convention and the 1997 Watercourses Convention – and bilateral and basin agreements and institutions.** These global and basin arrangements have clearly proven to be effective because they provide the necessary framework for sustaining dialogue and cooperation – in good times and in bad times – on the basis of the principles of sustainability, equality and no harm. It is important to use these tools.
- **Water diplomacy is a powerful tool** to move the conversation beyond the water sector, with multiple actors engaging in process of decision making about the use of shared waters.
- **There is a need for more capacity among various stakeholders, including institutions at national, transboundary and regional levels, to be able to deal with intersectoral issues** and to build a common understanding across borders and across sectors, based on evidence and science. **We need to invest in the capacity of youth.**
- **There is a need for more and better information, information that is trusted, understood and shared.** Information that can provide a solid basis for cooperation, that is information which illustrates well the many interlinkages between water, energy, food, environment and climate. Modern technologies can help us, and we need to take full advantage of them.
- **There is also a need for more investments,** and more easily accessible investments by reducing risks. Investments should be designed to incentivize cooperation on both surface waters and groundwaters, through sharing benefits.
- **All actors are to be part of the solution, including local authorities, population and civil society organizations. Inclusive participatory approaches are key for integrating voices of all stakeholders, including women and youth, in water processes.** Bottom-up movements are important to build a sense of urgency of cooperation, and also to guide it.
- There is a need for the capacity to imagine solutions which are fit for purpose - because as existing successful arrangements show, there is not one-size fits all for cooperation.
- And with imagination, **we need persistence and courage as building cooperation takes time.** Not only the actors directly involved, but also their bilateral and international partners, the UN system and financial institutions, have to have courage and persistence.
- It is also important to have the ability to compromise, and not look at cooperation as a zero sum game.
- **Transboundary water cooperation should be among the priorities of the UN 2023 Water Conference. We have to build on the conference to accelerate progress on transboundary water cooperation.**

#### **Follow-up actions and partnerships**

*Please indicate all major proposals (1-2 minimum) \*\*\**

1. Transboundary water cooperation should be among the priorities of the UN 2023 Water Conference.
2. The UN 2023 Water Conference should prompt acceleration of progress on transboundary water cooperation to meet SDG target 6.5 by 2030. To accelerate action, greater efforts should be directed at: addressing data and information gaps; capacity development; stakeholder engagement including local authorities, civil society organizations, women and youth; legal and institutional strengthening, by greater use of global UN water Conventions (1992 Water Convention and 1997 Watercourses Convention) and bilateral and basin-wide agreements and arrangements and by developing stronger institutional mechanisms to support cooperation on shared waters. The periodic monitoring of SDG indicator 6.5.2 will continue, allowing to take stock of progress until 2030.
3. Acceleration can be driven by strong partnerships such as the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, a new initiative on capacity development for water under coordination of UNESCO and UN DESA, the EU's Team Europe Initiatives and other partnerships.
4. Water diplomacy needs to be promoted and used more intensively to foster transboundary water cooperation, in particular by building the understanding of shared benefits from such cooperation and sharing experience among regions and basins.

#### **Any other relevant information**

[https://www.unece.org/water/transboundary\\_water\\_cooperation\\_reporting.html](https://www.unece.org/water/transboundary_water_cooperation_reporting.html)

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| <b>List of annexes</b>  | <i>Presentations, distribution material, key publications, etc.</i> |
| <b>Contact person</b>   | <i>for the session</i>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ms. Alice Aureli - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (<a href="mailto:a.aureli@unesco.org">a.aureli@unesco.org</a>)</li> <li>- Ms. Sonja Koeppel - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (<a href="mailto:sonja.koeppel@un.org">sonja.koeppel@un.org</a>)</li> <li>- Mr. Aaron Salzberg - University of North Carolina's Water Institute (<a href="mailto:salzbergaa@unc.edu">salzbergaa@unc.edu</a>)</li> </ul>  |   |

*\* Please indicate only if changed from the latest version of the concept note that was shared with the Conference Secretariat.*

*\*\* For possible inclusion in the Co-chair's Summary*

*\*\*\* For possible inclusion in the Call for Action and Partnership*