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Statement

by

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of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

the Opening session

of the

Special event marking the

30th anniversary of the Water Convention

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Tallin, Creative Hub (Estonia)

Statement/Intervention limited to 5 min

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to be here today to mark the 30th anniversary of Water Convention, which UNECE has the honor to service.

In March 1992, governments gathered in Helsinki with a vision in mind: to manage shared waters in a collaborative and sustainable way, mitigating risks and preventing possible conflicts over a common resource. By the end of the meeting, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, known as the Water Convention, was born.

Since the Convention's adoption, almost all the countries of the pan-European region have established cooperation on their shared basins and concluded more than 90 bilateral and multilateral agreements on shared waters, such as the Danube River Protection Convention, the agreements on the Sava, Meuse, Rhine, and created joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation. These measures have facilitated intersectoral cooperation, increased flood protection, supported early warning and data exchange and enhanced stakeholder participation in water management.

30 years after its adoption, the convention signed in Helsinki remains more relevant than ever, providing both a holistic legal framework and an intergovernmental platform on how to sustainably manage shared water resources and support the achievement of SDG6 and the 2030 Agenda. The convention has contributed to raising the topic of transboundary cooperation at the international level, its inclusion into the SDGs, global climate negotiations etc.

Over the past decades, the work under the Convention has continuously evolved to respond to emerging challenges - like climate change or water allocation - by building capacity, promoting the exchange of experiences on legal, institutional and technical issues, facilitating funding mobilisation for basin development and providing common policy responses.

In many respects, the Water Convention demonstrates the strength of multilateralism and of the rule of law. Moreover, the 2016 opening of the Convention to all United Nations Member States marked the enhancement of this instrument at the global level.

130 countries worldwide take part in its activities and more than 15 countries are on their way to join the currently 46 Parties, which include 5 countries outside the Pan-European region, namely Chad, Senegal, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau and Togo. I join the United Nations Secretary General in calling upon other countries to accede to this crucial framework.

However, transboundary waters are put under increasing threats from climate change and growing water scarcity, pollution, including microplastics, the difficult geopolitical situation and resource and capacity constraints, to name just a few.

How should the Convention evolve to address the new challenges, in terms of its activities, structure and ways of working? Where do we want to be in 30 years from now? What are the lessons learned from the past to take into account? These and other questions will be discussed today in an interactive setting. I invite you all to be active in the discussions and encourage you to continue to be bold, far-sighted and ambitious, as you have been in the past 30 years.

To conclude, I would like to thank the Parties to the Water Convention, non-Parties and all the partners, donors, experts and basin organizations. The success of the Water Convention would not have been possible without your support!

In particular, I deeply thank the Government of Estonia for its current chairmanship of the Convention and for the co-organization and hosting of this event today, together with Finland.

We cannot miss the opportunity represented by the 2023 UN water conference to make transboundary water cooperation a priority for the water community and beyond- and to further promote the Water Convention. UNECE is committed to join forces with all relevant actors in this direction.

Thank you.