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**Opening remarks**

**by**

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**United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

**Executive Secretary**

**of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

**at**

**HLPF online Side Event**

**“Starting at the source to protect the sea: Looking upstream to achieve SDG 14”**

**7 July 2022, 7.30-9.00 am (EST) / 1.30-3.00 pm (CET)**

Ladies and gentlemen, dear Excellencies,

It is my great pleasure to open this side event on source-to-sea during the High-level Political Forum.

Today, SDG 14, which aims to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources, is under review at the HLPF. As highlighted by the 2022 UN Ocean Conference last week, further efforts are needed in the coming years to achieve this goal, including by leveraging interlinkages with other SDGs.

Today, we will reflect together on these interlinkages and in particular on how applying the source-to-sea approach is critical to achieve SDG 14 and to contribute at the same time to SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation and SDG 15 on life on land.

Like blood flows in our veins, freshwater flows in rivers, lakes and groundwaters in our planet. We should be aware that 60% of our rivers are shared by two or more countries and they support the incomes and livelihoods of more than 3 billion people.

Water follows its own path on the surface, under the ground, across borders, to ultimately reach seas and oceans across the globe. Through their meanders, rivers sustain us, connect us. However, as pollution is increasing in several regions of the world, these connectors are under threat, putting at risk the health of our oceans.

Wastewater discharged without adequate treatment, together with plastics pollution, is a major threat to the freshwater and marine environment, causing ecological damage, health risks and economic losses

Addressing these challenges requires solid, collaborative, and sustainable water management and governance - this is where SDGs 6 and 14 meet.

Ecosystem protection is a shared concern of SDGs 6 and 14, with SDG target 6.6 seeking to protect and restore water-related ecosystems, and SDG target 14.2 endeavoring to protect and restore marine and coastal ecosystems.

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Cooperation is also a key element for both SDGs. SDG target 6.5 seeks to implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation, as appropriate. SDG target 14.A looks to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which requires cooperation at different levels.

To ensure the protection and sustainable management of freshwater and marine ecosystems, cooperation between regional seas organizations and river basin organizations, and between upstream and downstream riparian countries, is crucial.

The source-to-sea approach, which addresses the linkages between land, water, delta, estuary, coast, nearshore and ocean ecosystems, supports a holistic natural resources management and economic development.

To implement the source-to-sea approach, countries worldwide need technical tools and platforms to exchange good practices.

In this regard, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, also called the Water Convention, serviced by UNECE, provides a unique global legal and intergovernmental framework and platform which could be used to bring together coastal, freshwater and ocean communities to address these issues at political and technical levels.

The Water Convention, under which 130 countries worldwide participate, requires countries to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impacts. These efforts can help to reduce pollution of the marine environment, in particular coastal areas, from land-based sources. Indeed, the Convention's core obligation of cooperation aims at protecting the environment of transboundary waters as well as the marine environment influenced by them.

In addition to these specific provisions, since 2019, the Water Convention devotes specific attention to the source-to-sea approach in its programme of work. A global workshop on the topic is foreseen in December 2022.

The United Nations intergovernmental conference on water will be held in New York in March 2023. The event aims to bridge divides between different sectors, including the ocean community. The source-to sea approach and transboundary

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water cooperation clearly need to be discussed and advanced at this conference.

As a conclusion, SDG 14 will not be achieved without meeting SDG 6. I believe that through this event today, we will make the case for the further cooperation and synergies needed between the freshwater and ocean communities.

Finally, I would like to thank our partners with whom we organized this event, namely Estonia, Slovenia, the Stockholm International Water Institute, the Global Water Partnership, the Global Environment Facility and its IW: LEARN platform and the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan.

I wish you a fruitful side event.

Thank you.

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