

**Economic Commission for Europe****World Health Organization  
Regional Office for Europe**

Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on  
Water and Health to the Convention on  
the Protection and Use of Transboundary  
Watercourses and International Lakes

**Sixth session**

Geneva, 16–18 November 2022

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

**Opening of the session and adoption of the agenda****Procedural matters of relevance to decision-making at the  
sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties due to the hybrid  
format imposed by the circumstances associated with the  
coronavirus pandemic****Note prepared by the Bureau in cooperation with the secretariat***Summary*

Due to public health and social measures and travel restrictions related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the risks and uncertainties involved, the Bureau of the Protocol on Water and Health decided at its twenty-seventh meeting (Geneva (hybrid), 2–3 February 2022) that the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol would be organized in a hybrid format (i.e. with in-person and remote participation), at the United Nations Office at Geneva, on 16–18 November 2022.

At its thirteenth meeting (Geneva (hybrid), 19–20 May 2022), the Working Group on Water and Health welcomed the organization of the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties in hybrid format and entrusted the Bureau and the secretariat with the finalization of the preparations.

At its twenty-eighth meeting (Geneva (hybrid), 17–18 May 2022), the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol discussed extensively the preparations for the sixth session, including the development of an official document on procedural matters of relevance to decision-making due to the hybrid format imposed by circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. It was highlighted that the document should build on the experience gathered at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Geneva (hybrid), 29 September–1 October 2021).

The present document aims to clarify how the proceedings will be undertaken at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties in the context of in-person and remote



participation, including decision-making procedures, based on the rules of procedure of the meetings of the Parties (ECE/MP.WH/2/Add.1–EUR/06/5069385/1/Add.1).

The Meeting of the Parties is invited to take note of the present document and apply it during its sixth session.

## I. Introduction

1. Since March 2020, coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic-related public health and social measures and travel restrictions have prevented or limited physical participation of delegations at intergovernmental meetings.
2. In these extraordinary circumstances, Parties to all multilateral environmental agreements under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) have proceeded with their scheduled meetings, particularly the meetings of their highest governing bodies, with decisions being made either in a “virtual” mode, with Parties participating remotely, or in a “hybrid” mode, which allows for both in-person and remote participation.
3. Since March 2020, representatives of Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health have held a number of scheduled intergovernmental meetings in “hybrid” format,<sup>1</sup> which have demonstrated the ability of the Parties to the Protocol to adopt decisions in meetings organized in a “hybrid” mode under these extraordinary circumstances.
4. Due to public health and social measures and travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the risks and uncertainties involved, the Bureau of the Protocol on Water and Health decided at its twenty-seventh meeting (Geneva (hybrid), 2–3 February 2022) that the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol would be organized in a hybrid format, at the United Nations Office at Geneva, on 16–18 November 2022.
5. At its thirteenth meeting (Geneva (hybrid), 19–20 May 2022), the Working Group on Water and Health welcomed the organization of the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties in hybrid format and entrusted the Bureau and the secretariat with the finalization of the preparations (ECE/MP.WH/WG.1/2022/2-EUCHP/2219533/3.1/2022/WGWH/06, forthcoming).
6. At its twenty-eighth meeting (Geneva (hybrid), 17–18 May 2022), the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol discussed extensively the preparations for the sixth session, including the development of an official document on procedural matters of relevance to decision-making due to the hybrid format imposed by circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. It was highlighted that the document should build on the experience gathered at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Geneva (hybrid), 29 September–1 October 2021).
7. Since the Rules of procedure for the meetings of the Parties to the Protocol (ECE/MP.WH/2/Add.1–EUR/06/5069385/1/Add.1) continue to apply at the sixth session, their contents are not extensively replicated in the present document. However, the rules of procedure were developed with in-person meetings in mind and do not elaborate on remote participation. The present document, which is based on a similar document developed for the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/2021/1), provides guidance on the application of some of the provisions of the rules of procedure to remote participation and decision-making at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties, owing to the extraordinary circumstances that limit in-person participation.
8. The present document also takes into consideration international good practices and procedures under other multilateral environmental agreements regarding decision-making in hybrid settings in the context of the pandemic, particularly agreements hosted by ECE.

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<sup>1</sup> The intergovernmental meetings included, for instance, the eleventh meeting of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting (Geneva (hybrid), 3 November 2020); the twelfth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health (Geneva (hybrid), 14–15 April 2021); the twelfth meeting of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting (Geneva (hybrid), 17 November 2021); and the thirteenth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health (Geneva (hybrid), 19–20 May 2022).

## **II. Procedural matters of relevance to decision-making**

### **A. Terminology**

9. For the purposes of the present document:

(a) “In-person participation” means physical participation in a room in the Palais des Nations, Geneva, designated for the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(b) “Remote participation” means participation through an Internet connection to a virtual meeting platform, whereby representatives can remotely hear other participants and address the meeting.

### **B. Official languages**

10. The sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties must be conducted in the three official languages of the Meeting of the Parties (English, French and Russian), in accordance with rule 44 of the rules of procedure. Remote and in-person participants will have access to interpretation in the above-mentioned three official languages of the Meeting of the Parties. Official documents of the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties shall be drawn up in one of the official languages and translated into the other official languages, in accordance with rule 46 of the rules of procedure.

### **C. Registration and credentials for remote participants**

11. All representatives of Parties, States and organizations identified in rule 5 (2) of the rules of procedure shall register for the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties as early as possible, but no later than 1 October 2022, through a link provided by the secretariat. When registering, participants must indicate their intention to participate either remotely or in-person. To register via the online registration system currently in use (Indico), all participants must have created and activated an online account providing detailed contact information. Participation in the meeting is subject to review of the registration form and its approval by the secretariat. Subject to restrictions on the number of in-person participants in a room in the Palais des Nations, Geneva, at the time of the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties, the secretariat may restrict the number of in-person participants per delegation and ask some participants to follow the meeting remotely.

12. The email address of the participant provided in the online registration form will be that used by the secretariat for communications and dissemination of materials related to the meeting in advance of and during the meeting. Prior to the meeting, the secretariat will generate the list of participants based on the registrations, which it will verify and adjust, as required, during the meeting.

13. According to rules 14–16 of the rules of procedure, for sessions of the Meetings of the Parties, representatives of Parties must submit credentials to the secretariat. The credentials should be signed by the Head of State, Head of Government or Minister for Foreign Affairs, as applicable. In accordance with the established practice, to facilitate the verification of and subsequent reporting by the Bureau on the credentials to the meeting, scanned copies of the credentials should be emailed to the secretariat, with a copy to the permanent mission, in advance of the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties, by 1 November 2022. The credentials should list all official representatives of Parties, whether they intend to participate in-person or online/remotely and also designate the head of delegation. The originals of credentials for the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties should be submitted to the secretariat either in-person or by post prior to the start of the

meeting<sup>2</sup> or, in extraordinary circumstances that prevent such submissions from being made, as soon as possible thereafter.

14. The provisional agenda of the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.WH/23), as well as the invitations to the sixth session, provide further details concerning registration and credentials.

15. For the attention of those registered participants who intend to participate remotely, the secretariat will provide information on remote participation in advance of the sixth session, including logistical and practical information on the means of connecting to the virtual meeting platform, remotely hearing other participants and addressing the meeting.

16. All registered participants intending to participate remotely should ensure that they test their audio and video connections in advance of the meeting, and follow the technical guidance and recommendations that will be provided by the secretariat to ensure that they are able to participate remotely (in particular, by ensuring a strong and stable Internet connection, via Ethernet (LAN) cable, and by using a personal computer or laptop and a USB headset with microphone).

17. Participants from Parties and States identified in rule 5 (2) of the rules of procedure anticipating technical problems with remote participation are encouraged to contact their Ministry of Foreign Affairs or other governmental institutions to arrange for the use of facilities equipped with a strong and stable Internet connection.

18. Parties and States identified in rule 5 (2) of the rules of procedure are strongly encouraged to include representatives of their permanent mission to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva in their delegations, so that in-person participation by such representatives can be ensured, including to serve as a back-up in case of any technical problems faced by remote participants. For Parties, representatives of their permanent mission should be included in the credentials in such a case.

#### **D. Determining a quorum with remote participation**

19. In accordance with rule 25 of the rules of procedure, the Chair may declare the Meeting of the Parties open and permit debate to proceed when representatives of the majority of the Parties to the Protocol (at least 14 of the 27 Parties to the Protocol) are present at the time of the sixth session.

20. The “presence” of representatives of Parties will be established by counting both in-person and remote participants as “present”. For Parties represented remotely, the Chair, with the support of the joint secretariat, shall establish a Party’s presence by confirming that the Party representative is connected to the virtual meeting platform and appears on the screen where remote participants are displayed.

21. In order to facilitate the establishment of presence, participants logging into the virtual meeting platform shall indicate, in the name tag of the virtual meeting platform, first the country or organization that they represent and then their first name and last name (COUNTRY/ORGANIZATION – NAME). Participants are strongly encouraged to log in at least 30 minutes before the start of each session.

22. A check will be carried out to ensure that a quorum has been secured at the opening of the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties – specifically prior to the delivery of the report on credentials by the Bureau – and when adopting decisions and organizing elections and, if required, voting. For the purpose of verifying that a quorum has been secured, the Bureau, with the help of the secretariat, will count the number of Parties present. A Party’s presence through remote participation will be established as described in paragraph 20 above.

23. Where a quorum has not been secured, or there is a connection failure on the side of the virtual meeting platform provider or the secretariat, the meeting may, depending on the

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<sup>2</sup> When submitting credentials by post, delegations are requested to do so sufficiently in advance of the meeting to enable their receipt by the secretariat by the beginning of the meeting.

decision of the Chair, be suspended until an Internet connection to the platform of the meeting has been re-established.

## **E. Interventions**

24. During the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties, participants shall be provided with the opportunity to take the floor. Remote participants wishing to take the floor should signal their wish to speak, as will be indicated in the informal documentation outlining the use of the virtual meeting platform system.

25. In accordance with rule 26 (2) of the rules of procedure, the Meeting of the Parties may limit the time allowed to each speaker. In view of the limited duration of sessions and the time zone constraints, it is proposed that the duration of individual statements be limited to three minutes during the high-level segment and two minutes during the rest of the meeting.

26. Delegations are requested to inform the secretariat in advance of their intention to make a statement(s) and to specify under which agenda item(s) they wish to do so.

## **F. Facilitating decision-making**

27. In accordance with rule 34 (1) of the rules of procedure, “the Meeting of the Parties shall make every effort to reach its decisions by consensus”.

28. Taking into account the fact that all documents submitted for adoption by the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties were prepared in advance of the session and most documents were submitted for review and feedback by the Working Group on Water and Health at its thirteenth meeting, with some documents also open for comments after the thirteenth meeting, it is expected that a consensus will be reached among Parties on the respective documents during the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties and that those documents will be approved without changes. With regard to any pending comments on proposed draft decisions, Parties are requested to communicate proposed revisions by email to the secretariat as soon as possible and no later than three weeks before the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties (i.e. by 26 October 2022), so that the necessary clarifications may be provided and informal discussions organized, if and as needed, with a view to reaching a consensus.

## **G. Voting**

29. In line with rule 34 (1) of the rules of procedure, if all efforts to reach a consensus at the Meeting of the Parties have been exhausted, and no agreement has been reached, the Chair may put the matter to vote. Except for elections, according to rule 40 of the rules of procedure, voting should be by a show of hands, or, if requested by any Party, by roll call or a secret ballot. According to rule 43 of the rules of procedure, in the absence of a consensus, elections shall be decided by means of a secret ballot. Voting by secret ballot will require in-person participation by representatives of Parties from the capitals or the permanent missions. Any representative voting needs to be included in the credentials.

30. In all previous sessions, the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health was able to reach all decisions by consensus. It is expected that this practice will continue at the sixth session. If required to facilitate consensus, the Chair, in consultation with the secretariat, may invite Parties to participate in-person and/or remotely in targeted side meetings held on the margins of the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

31. If, despite all efforts to reach a consensus, voting becomes necessary, it shall be carried out by roll call, with a view to ensuring reliable outcomes and avoiding challenges, including in the counting process. The roll call shall be conducted as follows:

- (a) In accordance with rule 40 of the rules of procedure, the Chair will call on participants in the English alphabetical order of the names of the Parties participating in the meeting, beginning with the Party whose name is drawn by lots by the Chair;
  - (b) The heads of delegations of Parties will indicate “yes”, “no” or “abstention”, either in-person or, if participating remotely, verbally by speaking on camera through their audio device connected to the virtual meeting platform;
  - (c) Should any head of delegation of a Party fail to cast a vote during the roll call for any reason, including possible remote connection failure, that head of delegation will be called upon during a second, final roll call after the conclusion of the initial roll call;
  - (d) The head of delegation may authorize a member of the delegation to vote on behalf of that delegation by communicating this to the secretariat;
  - (e) The secretariat will assist the Chair in administering the vote and in counting its results;
  - (f) If, for any reason, any Party fails to cast a vote during both the initial and the final roll calls, that Party will be considered as being absent from the voting process;
  - (g) The Chair will announce the results of the vote during the meeting.
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