

## **Opening Remarks – Sonja Koeppel, Secretary of the Water Convention**

**Eighth meeting of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus (07 - 08 December 2023, Geneva)**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

I would like to welcome you all to the 8th meeting of the Task Force on the Water, Food, Energy, Ecosystems Nexus. This occasion is particularly significant as we commemorate 10 years of dedicated work on cross-sectoral cooperation under the Water Convention.

To celebrate this anniversary, we are over 200 people here today (among in person and virtual participants)!

This is a diverse group of policy makers and experts coming from 77 countries, representing 46 UN member states and more than 50 international organizations, basin organizations, and NGOs working on sustainability, water, energy, and environmental issues. Many participants also come from academia and research centres, confirming the importance of this Task Force as a meeting point between policy and science.

Reflecting on our journey, a notable increase in participation to the Task Force meeting over the last years coincided with the global expansion of the Water Convention. At the first meeting of the Task Force in 2013, the Parties to the Convention were 41, all in the Pan-European region. Today, with the accession of The Gambia to the Water Convention in July, the total number of Parties to the Water Convention grew to 52, and we have new Parties and several interested countries across Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Today's broad global engagement in the Task Force is a testament to the recognition of the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus approach. Originally emerging in policy and development discussions in 2011, this concept is now universally acknowledged as pivotal for sustainable development and achieving the SDGs. It was also high on the agenda at the UN-Water conference, We simply know that, given the interplay of water, land, energy,

and nature management, it is imperative to adopt integrated, holistic approaches to development

However, we must acknowledge the challenges that we face when we try applying a nexus approach: from inadequate governance to insufficient data and information. The process of “breaking down sectoral silos” can be very difficult in practice, and all these challenges are magnified in the transboundary setting.

The establishment of this Task Force aims precisely at overcoming these challenges. It strives to bridge science and policy by advancing our understanding of the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus in transboundary basins and by promoting best practices in its application.

The success of this Task Force is due to our visionary lead Party Finland and the collaboration of our esteemed partners. I extend heartfelt thanks to Finland, a steadfast leader in this initiative since the beginning, as well as to FAO, ESCWA, ECLAC, DESA, GIZ, GWP, GEF, IUCN, KTH, OECD, and other invaluable contributors, particularly the river basin organizations that facilitate basin-level work and that are regularly participating in our meetings, enriching our work with their experiences.

Over the next two days, we will take stock of the work done so far and discuss the future activities of the Nexus Task Force. We will hear insights from countries, river basin organizations, academics, project managers, donors, and partners. The agenda encompasses key topics, including financing cross-sectoral solutions, the role of transboundary water cooperation for the energy transition as well as water allocation in the transboundary context.

Parallel to our meeting here, global leaders are meeting in Dubai for the annual United Nations conference on climate change to tackle worsening global warming problems. In light of the ongoing COP28, we will also emphasize during our meeting the mainstreaming of the nexus in global climate and environmental processes of cooperation.

Let me highlight for a moment the increasing recognition of the Task Force as a platform to discuss water-energy in transboundary contexts. Some of the speakers today address us from COP28, made great efforts to participate despite very busy schedules at the COP28 and I would like to warmly thank them. One of our contributions to this COP is, in fact, a COP28 Presidency Event titled “Watering the Clean Energy Transition”, and it is my hope that the Task Force will continue a lively discussion on this topic in the future.

The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary is not only an occasion to tack stock of what happened in the past but it’s also the moment also to shape the future. The agenda features a special session on the Future of the Task Force, on Friday afternoon. There, we will delve into small group discussions and try to shape together the work of the Task Force in the next programme of work 2025-2027 under the Water Convention.

The Task Force's mission is to catalyse much-needed action across water, food, energy, and ecosystems through transboundary cooperation. We look ahead to the 2024 Summit of the Future, taking place in September 2024, where Member States will convene in New York to lay the foundations for more effective global cooperation that can deal with today’s challenges as well as new threats in the future. Let us start with our Nexus “Summit of the Future” today and let us define how we want to effectively cooperate in the coming years to tackle the challenges and embrace the opportunities of the nexus work.

I thank you for your attention and wish you all a productive and impactful meeting.