

Opening remarks  
Global Workshop on Droughts in Transboundary Basins  
Mr Lars Tummers, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to  
the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva  
Monday 26 February, 10:00-11:00  
Palais des Nations, Room XXVI  
**Draft - Check against Delivery**

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

**[Introduction]**

- First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to the Water Convention Secretariat and all the partners for organizing this very important Global Workshop on Droughts in Transboundary Basins. I'm pleased to be here for the opening.
- Drought is not generally associated with my country, the Netherlands. But we actually do have arrangements in place to deal with dry periods in our water management. And recent dry years have shown that additional efforts are needed to cope with more extreme situations as a result of climate change. And as a downstream country, we have been discussing the issue of drought with our neighbouring countries.

**[Impact of droughts]**

- We know that the impact of droughts can be significant, affecting agriculture, industry and other economic activities, as well as the availability of safe drinking water and hygiene. It affects our freshwater ecosystems that make a significant but often undervalued contribution to our well-being and are already under severe pressure.
- Climate change is radically altering rainfall patterns and increasing the frequency of droughts, while temperatures are rising. This makes climate change a major threat to our environmental, social and economic sustainability. This requires an integrated approach, with all sectors working together to ensure that the available water is used wisely.

**[Towards solutions]**

- Given the threat of freshwater scarcity, there is an urgent need to look at ways of ensuring that dry periods do not lead to water shortages. We can see that large-scale infrastructure such as dams and irrigation works have their limits and that we need to invest more in local rain capturing and storing.
- This requires a different way of thinking, working with natural processes rather than only imposing technological solutions. We need to look at nature-based solutions such as forests and wetlands that can improve water capture and storage.

### **[Being prepared]**

- To ensure that we are prepared for dry periods, it is imperative that meteorological and hydrological data and information are shared within countries and between riparian countries, and that early warning systems are in place. Early identification of an expected dry spell provides the opportunity to take timely action to reduce water use and direct available water to the highest priority users.
- For example, in the Netherlands, we have an early warning system that looks at upstream water availability and uses models to predict possible water shortages. In the event of water scarcity, we have a priority list in which irreversible damage to aquatic ecosystems and drinking water are given the highest priority.

### **[Transboundary cooperation]**

- As I mentioned earlier, droughts cannot be tackled in isolation. In a shared basin, all human activities can affect water availability.
- By working together, riparian countries can help each other find the most effective measures and the best locations for them. Where water knows no borders, water management should not be limited by borders.
- Another issue I would like to highlight is the need for greater international attention and cooperation on the interlinkages between climate and water. Greater attention can lead to better sharing of knowledge and experience, and thus to better action. It also opens up better opportunities for financial support.
- In March last year, as co-host of the UN Water Conference in New York, we united the world for water and worked to put water at the centre of the global political agenda.
- One of the outcomes of the conference was the Water Action Agenda. More than 800 commitments, pledges and actions were formulated in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Almost half of these actions address drought. I encourage you all to follow up these actions.

### **[Closing]**

- In closing, I wish you all a very productive and fruitful workshop, full of mutual learning from examples from around the world on how to make water management more climate resilient, especially when it comes to droughts.
- Thank you.