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Statement

by

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at

the Global Workshop on Droughts in Transboundary Basins

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Statement/Intervention limited to 7 min

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to speak at this global workshop today, addressing the growing challenge of droughts.

Droughts know no boundaries, affecting both developed and developing countries around the world. Their impacts go far beyond the immediate lack of water, encompassing food and energy security, forced migration and natural resource conflicts, with devastating consequences on both ecosystems and communities.

In Europe, during summer 2022 the Rhine, Loire and Danube fell to critically low levels. The same happened in Latin America, where in the La Plata basin in Brazil–Argentina drought conditions were the most severe since 1944 and in the Greater Horn of Africa region, experiencing the longest sequence of consecutive poor wet seasons in 40 years. Since the beginning of February, Barcelona and the region has been in an official drought emergency.

Droughts will become more frequent due to climate change. This requires different measures such as developing drought management plans, water storage, ecosystem restoration, reduction of water losses, sustainable groundwater management, etc.

Against this background, the importance of water cooperation is immediately evident considering that 60 per cent of the world's freshwater resources are shared by two or more countries. Transboundary water cooperation can help addressing water shortages for both people and productive activities through the reduction of over-abstraction and improved water allocations at basin level, for example. Cooperation among riparian countries on transboundary early-warning systems can also improve preparedness and minimize losses due to climate related extremes.

Nevertheless, still too many transboundary basins lack the necessary cooperation frameworks to cope with these growing challenges. For example, according to the second reporting exercise for SDG Indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water resources management in 2020 less than half of responses (46%) included droughts as an area of cooperation under transboundary agreements.

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, also known as the Water Convention, serviced by UNECE is a key tool to enhance efforts in this regard.

By providing a set of common principles such as the equitable and reasonable utilization of water resources and the protection of ecosystems, the Water Convention fosters collaborative approaches to address water-related challenges, such as climate change, thus increasing certainty and predictability in relations between riparian States and ultimately promoting peace and regional stability.

The Water Convention provides a crucial and unique global legal and intergovernmental platform which has mobilized political support, accelerated transboundary cooperation and supported addressing new challenges such as climate change for more than 30 years. Five new Parties acceded to the Convention in 2023 alone, and an additional 20 countries are currently in the process of accession. More than 130 countries take part in its meetings and activities. I call on other countries to join the Water Convention and on those in the process to join this year.

For more than 15 years, under the leadership of the Netherlands and Switzerland, the Water Convention has helped countries to jointly adapt to climate change through capacity-building, exchange of experience, development of guidance and projects on the ground. We have also addressed the topic of drought, through the development of the words into action guide with UNDRR on addressing

water-related disasters and transboundary cooperation or a global workshop on water scarcity in 2017. We supported development of transboundary adaptation strategies in the Dniester, Neman and Chu Talas basins, and the establishment of transboundary water cooperation on the Senegalo-Mauritanian aquifer basin.

These and other good practices will be discussed in the coming days. We will hear and learn from the experiences of a different set of stakeholders working to develop resilience to drought in transboundary basins. Tomorrow, the summary handbook on water allocation in transboundary basins prepared under the Convention will be launched.

This workshop will be followed by the 14th meeting of the Convention's Task Force on water and climate, aiming to discuss – among other - future work on climate change in transboundary basins under the Water Conventions next Programme of Work that will be adopted at the 10th Meeting of the Parties. I invite you all to join us at this crucial event taking place from 23 to 25 October 2024.

To conclude, I would like to sincerely thank the donors for this workshop, namely Switzerland and the Netherlands, and the partners involved in its organisation namely UNCCD, UNDRR, World Bank, WMO and INBO.

The upcoming World Water Day on 22 March will focus on leveraging water for peace. Let us all work together so that disasters such as droughts and floods are turned into opportunities for peace and regional integration, as it has happened in the past, rather than sparking conflict.

Thank you.