Economic Commission for Europe
Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes
Tenth session
Ljubljana, 23–25 October 2024
Item 11 of the provisional agenda
Financing of the Convention

Draft decision on promoting equal and effective participation of all Parties in sessions of the Meeting of the Parties and other meetings under the Convention through translation and interpretation into Arabic, Chinese and Spanish

Submitted by the Bureau in cooperation with the secretariat

Summary

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which provides the secretariat to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) has three official languages: English, French and Russian. Translation of Water Convention documents and publications, as well as interpretation at Convention meetings, has consistently been provided in these languages with funding from the United Nations regular budget.

Following its global opening, the Convention has seen significant worldwide interest. Since 2018, 11 new Parties from Africa (Cameroon, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo and Zimbabwe), 1 from Latin America (Panama) and 1 from the Middle East (Iraq) have acceded to the Convention. More than 20 other countries, including 5 Spanish-speaking countries and 2 Arabic-speaking countries, are in the process of accession.

Despite the Convention’s global reach, it has only been possible to provide translation and interpretation services in Arabic and Spanish sometimes, on a limited basis and through voluntary extrabudgetary contributions. This undermines the effective and equal participation of all Parties and other countries in the activities of the Convention. The Bureau therefore decided to prepare a draft decision for consideration and possible adoption by the Meeting of the Parties at its tenth session (Ljubljana, 23–25 October 2024) on promoting equal and effective participation of all Parties in sessions of the Meeting of the Parties and other meetings under the Convention through translation and interpretation into Arabic, Chinese and Spanish.
Background

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), which provides the secretariat to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), has three official languages: English, French and Russian. Translation of Water Convention documents and publications, as well as interpretation at Convention meetings, has consistently been provided in these languages.

2. Following decision III/1 on amendment to articles 25 and 26 of the Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/14), which opened the Water Convention to accession by all United Nations Member States, the Convention has seen significant global interest. Since 2018, 11 new Parties from Africa (Cameroon, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo and Zimbabwe), 1 from Latin America (Panama) and 1 from the Middle East (Iraq) have acceded to the Convention. Additionally, more than 20 other countries, including 5 Spanish-speaking countries and 2 Arabic-speaking countries, are in the process of accession.

3. The Convention offers the only United Nations intergovernmental framework for policy and technical discussions on the sustainable management of transboundary water resources, making it a valuable platform for all countries sharing water resources. Currently, approximately 130 United Nations Member States are involved in its activities.

4. Despite the Convention’s global reach, it has only been possible to provide translation and interpretation services in Arabic and Spanish on a limited, occasional basis and through voluntary extrabudgetary contributions. This reliance on voluntary contributions undermines the effective and equal participation of all Parties and other countries in the activities of the Convention.

5. In the light of multiple General Assembly decisions emphasizing the importance of multilingualism and the equality of the official languages of the United Nations, there is a need to ensure the consistent provision of translation and interpretation services.

6. The draft decision, prepared by the Bureau for consideration and possible adoption by the Meeting of the Parties at its tenth session, calls upon the Secretary-General to provide translation and interpretation services in the other official languages of the United Nations, in addition to English, French and Russian, through the United Nations regular budget, in order to guarantee a sustainable solution for the effective and equal participation of all Parties and other countries in the Convention’s activities.

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The Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes,

Recognizing the significant progress made since the entry into force in 1996 of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), which has provided a sound legal framework and an effective intergovernmental platform for the promotion of cooperation and the sustainable management of water resources at the basin, regional and international levels that are key for peaceful and sustainable development,

Recalling its decision III/1 opening the Water Convention to accession by all United Nations Member States and its entry into force in 2013,

1 For example, General Assembly resolutions 61/266 (A/RES/61/266), 73/346 (A/RES/73/346) and 76/268 (A/RES/76/268) on multilingualism.

2 ECE/MP.WAT/14.
Welcoming the significant global interest in acceding to the Water Convention, which since 2018 counts 11 new Parties from Africa (Cameroon, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo and Zimbabwe), 1 from Latin America (Panama) and 1 from the Middle East (Iraq),

Welcoming also the fact that more than 20 other countries are in the process of acceding to the Water Convention and should soon become Parties, including 5 Spanish-speaking countries and 2 Arabic-speaking countries,

Highlighting that, in addition to the current 54 Convention Parties, around 80 other countries take part in meetings and activities under the Convention, making a total of more than 130 participating United Nations Member States,

Emphasizing that the Convention offers the only United Nations intergovernmental framework for policy and technical discussions on the sustainable management of transboundary water resources, and that its platform and work are useful to all countries sharing water resources, not only to Parties,

Recalling multiple resolutions of the General Assembly on multilingualism, including A/RES/71/328 of 2017, A/RES/73/346 of 2019 and A/RES/76/268 of 2022 which emphasize the paramount importance of the equality of the six official languages of the United Nations,

Welcoming past efforts by the Convention secretariat to translate at least some documents and publications, as well as, among other things, circular emails, into Spanish and, less frequently, Arabic, using voluntary extrabudgetary contributions,

Expressing appreciation to those Convention donors and partners who have in recent years voluntarily provided extrabudgetary contributions for translating some Convention documents and publications into Spanish and, sometimes, Arabic, as well as for enabling interpretation at some Convention meetings in those two languages,

Recognizing that reliance on voluntary extrabudgetary contributions to ensure translation and interpretation into Arabic, Chinese and Spanish undermines the effective and equal participation of all Parties and other countries in the activities of the Convention,

Recalling rules 23 and 44 of the rules of procedure for sessions of the Meetings of the Parties (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2), adopted at the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Astana, 10–12 October 2018), according to which interpretation into Arabic, Chinese and Spanish should be provided, pending availability of resources,

1. **Decides** that translation of all official Convention documents and publications into Arabic, Chinese and Spanish shall be ensured in order to enable equal and effective participation of all current and future Parties and other countries in Convention activities;

2. **Also decides** that interpretation into Arabic, Chinese and Spanish at sessions of the Meeting of the Parties and other official Convention meetings shall be ensured in order to enable equal and effective participation of current and future Parties and other countries in Convention activities;

3. **Requests** the United Nations Secretary-General to provide translation and interpretation services into Arabic, Chinese and Spanish, in addition to English, French and Russian, at future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties and other meetings under the Convention from the United Nations regular budget, including the translation of official documents and publications of the Convention into Arabic, Chinese and Spanish, in order to enable effective and equal participation by all Parties and other countries.