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Opening statement

by

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at

**Tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use
of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes**

23 October 2024, Ljubljana

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Colleagues,

It is my honour and privilege to welcome all of you to the tenth Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention.

Just in the past few years, we have moved from a situation in which we struggle to make water more visible in global policy dialogues, to one in which we are overwhelmed by water emergencies.

Climate change is disrupting water systems at the global scale, and we are not prepared. The biggest rivers in the world - such as the Amazon - run dry. Extreme floods are becoming common, affecting millions of people, as it happened in Slovenia last year, or at the moment in the Sahel region and in Central America.

We urgently need to improve water management and governance at all scales, deploy best available technologies globally, and truly rethink the way we use water, in our economies and our daily lives.

And we need to do this *together*, if we want to be successful. We need to use transboundary cooperation to elevate our ambitions, to increase our impact and our efficiency.

Through the SDGs, countries committed to cooperate on transboundary waters – which make up more than 60% of water resources worldwide.

SDG indicator 6.5.2 measures transboundary water cooperation by the existence of operational arrangements in shared rivers, lakes, and aquifers. However, today, only 43 UN Member States reach a significant coverage, with an indicator of more than 90%. This is *less than one third of the countries sharing transboundary waters*. We must act, fast.

The Water Convention has spurred progress greatly over the last 30 years, during which its intergovernmental platform has continued to grow. It now counts 55 Parties and 20 countries in the process of accession. At the same time, more than 130 countries take part in its activities.

I wish to welcome the 9 countries that joined the Convention in the last three years, especially those that joined from new regions - such as Southern Africa, Latin America, and Middle East. As I call upon all countries, from all regions of the world, to accede to the Water Convention, I also encourage existing Parties and all committed partners to support them.

The past three years brought important achievements for the Convention. To name a few:

Firstly, new partnerships were built, for example between the freshwater and oceans communities as part of the work on *source-to-sea*. New actors were involved in transboundary cooperation, such as the private sector, at the occasion of the global workshop on funding and financing transboundary cooperation in December 2023.

Secondly, the Convention helped to develop new agreements, for example on the Luapula basin. 13 agreements were signed by Parties to the Convention the last 3 years, some of which may be signed today.

The Convention, along with the Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition and others, helped to position transboundary cooperation higher at the global level: at the 2023 UN Water conference and within the first UN system-wide strategy on water and sanitation, launched in July this year.

On climate change, we have contributed to a critical breakthrough: for the first time, the importance of transboundary cooperation is recognized in the decisions on the global stocktake and global goal on adaptation from COP28 in Dubai last year.

But we cannot relax. I call upon you all to continue to advocate for the catalytic nature of transboundary cooperation in future global discussions, towards the 2026 UN water conference, at COP29 and beyond. Let us use the collective power of the Convention.

The Water Convention also helped to mobilize funding for transboundary cooperation, for example through investment concepts like those developed together with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Thanks to this approach, over the past three years countries improved their capacity to *implement* the Convention, with concrete results. For example, 14 million USD were mobilized to strengthen cooperation on groundwater in the Senegalo-

Mauritanian Aquifer.

The matchmaking event yesterday, attended by over 120 participants and dedicated specifically to new Parties, proves that there are huge needs, but also huge opportunities for support. At the event Parties and partners engaged with each other - through peer-to-peer discussions, twinning activities and regional discussions. These activities make the Convention a living instrument, and a platform for exchange of real-world experience.

This Meeting of the Parties represents an important milestone to lay the ground for the future of the Convention, in line with its new global nature.

You will take important decisions on the future of the Convention, first of all by adopting a new programme of work for 2025-2027, which includes activities responding to different needs of different Parties and which will advance the Convention's work in areas of common importance such as water quality, or ecosystems and biodiversity.

Key decisions will be taken on *translation and interpretation* into the six official UN languages, for an equal and effective participation of all Parties in the Convention's discussions. On *strengthening strategic partnerships* with financial partners -such as the Global Environment Facility and the World Bank - as well as with regional organizations.

Finally, you will have the opportunity to take an important step forward in shaping the future financing of the Water Convention's work to make it more

sustainable – a decision that has been nearly a decade in the making. While I recognize the challenges of addressing financial matters in these uncertain times, I encourage you to approach this with boldness and foresight. The risks we face—growing water scarcity, cross-border impacts, and sectoral challenges—demand a well-resourced and effective Convention. Now, more than ever, we need robust mechanisms to ensure the Convention can continue its vital role in managing transboundary water risks.

Before concluding, I wish to congratulate, and thank, Estonia for the past three-year chairmanship that carried so many achievements. I also thank Slovenia, for hosting this memorable Meeting.

Finally thank you to all Parties, partners, and all committed individuals who support the Convention and whose vision and action guide us.

Let me close by reiterating the importance of transboundary water cooperation:

It is an act of *empowerment*: it's beneficial for those who step up and engage. It's an act of *trust*: we acknowledge that we depend on each other and that we need each other's help to tackle water challenges.

And finally, it's an act of *hope*: in the face of increasing uncertainty and instability, we can still do something very tangible: protect and value our most common resource, for all, and for the next generation.

Thank you.
