

Speech of the head of delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan

H.E. Mr.Ambassador Oktay Gurbanov

Madam/MR. Chair,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset I'd like to thank the Governments of Portugal and Kenya for co-hosting this important conference.

Water is a vital natural resource for all livings in the world. Humanity depends on 3% of the world's freshwater resources and without joint efforts and cooperation in ensuring effective and equitable use of water, it is not possible to sustain this priceless wealth for the next generations.

Due to climate change effects, access to water became a critical factor for all countries in shaping their environmental, social and economic policies. Today water deficiency already affects every continent.

Currently, we need to implement large-scale measures for real implementation of formulated objectives on access to water for all. It is clear that integrated water resources management, including the linkage between the water with energy, food security, and environmental protection, is one of the key tools in addressing these challenges.

Azerbaijan is among the countries that suffer from water shortage. Almost 70% of our water resources are formed outside the country, on the territory of neighboring states. Besides climate-related water stresses,

Azerbaijan is facing growing challenges linked to transboundary water management and pollution.

In this context, one of the region's environmental hotspots still under impact is the transboundary river Okhchuchay, polluted by heavy metals and hazardous substances. The main source of this pollution is copper and molybdenum plants in Armenia operated by number of international companies.

Azerbaijan addressed international community urging Armenia to stop the harmful activity which poses a negative effect to the environment of the whole region. Unfortunately, up until now this serious transboundary issues have not been adequately reacted by international organizations. There is an urgent need for rehabilitation of the riverbed from harmful substances. Internally Displaced Persons will be repatriated to their homes and it is crucial that they will live in safe environment.

We call upon our partners from international organizations to share their knowledge and experience on rehabilitation practices to conserve region's unique ecosystem and protect people's health from hazardous impact.

At the same time, the Sarsang water reservoir, built on the Tartar river became a potential source of danger to four hundred thousand people living in the surrounding areas due to lack of maintenance.

The release of water from the reservoir during the winter months without consideration of seasonal needs caused flooding in the settlements and agricultural areas. During summer season, the release of small volumes of water caused water shortages and serious problems in irrigating crops.

To ensure effective management of transboundary water resources and prevent water shortage, Azerbaijan formulated its national water policy in line with the 2030 Agenda.

The government of Azerbaijan has adopted an Action Plan to ensure the efficient use of water resources for 2020-2022. Along with this, the National Water Strategy is being prepared which sets short, medium and long-term goals of country's water security for the next 18 years.

The establishment of the Water Commission has facilitated the proactive cooperation of all stakeholders in water resources management and the implementation of projects in the water sector, as well as in the introduction of modern technologies and innovations.

We attach great importance to cross-border cooperation as it plays a key role in addressing a number of environmental issues. It is obvious that the environment accepts no boundaries. Only consolidated actions at the international and regional levels could bring positive and tangible results.

Azerbaijan joined the UNECE Water Convention in 2000 and took obligations. Unfortunately, most countries in the region has not yet joined the Water Convention. This limits cooperation opportunities for sustainable management of transboundary rivers and the prevention of pollution. When we talk about water security, non-alignment to common obligations and agreements could be considered as unwillingness to be involved into collective efforts for protecting human health and environment.

Azerbaijan being a downstream country faces huge environmental impact. We urge international organizations to encourage upstream states to ratify the Water Convention and take common obligations on equal and responsible use of transboundary water resources. Each and every activity that impacts the condition of river, including construction of water dams should be discussed and agreed.

The use of alternative sources, including treated wastewater, application of water-saving technologies, as well as economic instruments to stimulate rational water use in agriculture are considered to ensure the efficient use and protection of water resources and reduce losses.

And in the end I want to emphasize the readiness of my country to join global efforts to establish a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution by 2024.