

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mukhtar Babayev,
Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

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**Mr. Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Water is a vital element for human life and a cross-cutting factor in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. Growing population, increasing demand for water, and climate change pose a direct impact on the sustainability of water resources.

As we have reached the halfway point of the International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development, it is the very moment to accelerate progress towards the water-related goals and targets.

With over 400 freshwater lakes and 8,000 rivers, Azerbaijan pays special importance to the protection and conservation of water resources.

Azerbaijan's geographical location and its diverse climate make the country's water resources extremely sensitive to climate change and other environmental impacts.

Azerbaijan is particularly affected by the uneven distribution of water resources across its territory. More than 70% of our water supply comes from sources that originate outside the borders.

Azerbaijan continues to work with international partners to implement the relevant instruments of the UN, including the UNECE Water Convention. Unfortunately, most countries in the region have not yet joined the Water Convention which therefore limits the cooperation opportunities for sustainable management of transboundary rivers.

In order to ensure effective management of transboundary water resources and prevent water scarcity, Azerbaijan formulated its national water policy. Moreover, Azerbaijan's National Water Strategy is currently underway to develop an action plan based on integrated approach to water-climate policies in line with the SDGs.

Harnessing the potential of SDGs in restoring the liberated territories is currently one of the priority directions for the Government of Azerbaijan. In this context, we are actively working with UN organizations to address environmental risks, including those related to water resources, in order to ensure the safe return of IDPs to their home.

I would like to emphasize the international conference on "Promoting water partnership and action for sustainable water management" held last year in the smart village of Aghali, Zangilan District of Azerbaijan. The first settlement where IDPs returned 30 years after they were forced to leave. Furthermore, our recent next round annual high-level strategic consultation between Azerbaijan and the United Nations country team held in the liberated Aghdam District once again reaffirmed the close cooperation between the UN and Azerbaijan. Water was one of the top priority agenda issues of this important event.

Besides the negative impacts of climate change on water resources, Azerbaijan faces growing challenges in transboundary water management and pollution. To that end, Azerbaijan regularly monitors the level of pollution and the associated impact on transboundary rivers flowing through its territory. Given the high importance of these rivers for the whole region, close cooperation between the States of the region is necessary to protect these shared water resources. Azerbaijan welcomes opportunities for both multilateral and bilateral coordination and cooperation.

Climate change is progressing day by day. In order to ensure resilience to hazardous hydrometeorological events, Azerbaijan is developing nationwide projects on establishing early warning systems. In addition, the modernization of hydrological observations has been ensured through the creation of automated observation systems. Azerbaijan has built the necessary capacity to monitor and manage water resources through the "Digitalized Water Management" information system.

As a contribution to the UN Water Action Agenda, we would like to express our readiness to act as a Regional Data Hub bringing together water information from the countries of the region on one platform to create the Global Water Information Services. We are also considering the establishment of a platform for regional cooperation on an early warning system to ensure better information exchange and to strengthen the resilience of the countries of the region in identifying adequate measures.

It is high time for all countries to move beyond words and start to act. We are confident that today's Conference will become an effective platform for the implementation of new targeted ideas.

Thank you for your attention.