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**Statement**

**by**

**Mr. Meelis Münt**

**Secretary General**

**Ministry of the Environment, Estonia**

**at**

**Plenary**

**the United Nations 2023 Water Conference**

**In Person, 22-24 March 2023**

**General Assembly Hall, United Nations Headquarters**

Excellencies, ministers, delegates,

Firstly, I would like to thank the host countries, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Kingdom of Netherlands for their leadership. I am convinced that it is the right momentum to organise the Water Conference, because there is urgent need for water action. There are still 2 billion people who do not have access to safely managed drinking water and the geographical disparities are high. I believe this Conference is uniting the world to combat the global water challenges.

Estonia is a small coastal country in North-Eastern Europe, located on the shores of the Baltic Sea. Everything we do on land affects the status of our sea. Thus, it is very important to prevent unintended negative consequences while securing benefits from interconnected ecosystems.

Our voluntary commitment to the Water Action Agenda is related to the source-to-sea approach and it is the implementation of a framework of actions with regionally coordinated measures to reduce the nutrient pollution load. Also, I would like to highlight the need to continue to promote dialogue between fresh and saltwater communities. Cooperation in the source-to-sea approach needs to be better reflected in the mandates of joint bodies in their action plans and additional mechanisms for cooperation.

Transboundary water cooperation is central to sustainable water management. Hundreds of transboundary river basins and aquifers are

shared between two or more countries. At the last Meeting of Parties of the Water Convention Ministers recognised that the Water Convention offers an essential intergovernmental platform and a United Nations forum for dealing with transboundary water issues.

Estonia, as a current Chair of the Water Convention, greatly supports the global opening of the convention. It is expected that by 2024, at least 5 additional countries will join the Water Convention, and more than 20 countries are in the process of accession. Estonia calls upon all United Nations Member States sharing transboundary waters to join the Water Convention and benefit from its legal framework, instruments.

Being a Member State of the European Union, we apply high and challenging environmental standards. In our small country we have gone through a full-scale renovation of wastewater collection and treatment systems. Over the last decades, we have invested more than 1 billion euros for those purposes. We have also eliminated the most pressing agricultural pollution hot spots and dangerous for environment past pollution sites, but the status of our rivers, lakes and coastal waters requires further modern solutions in smart water management and cooperation with different economic sectors.

Let me end with the words of Mother Teresa: “I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things.”

Thank you!