

Statement of the Republic of Latvia

United Nations 2023 Water Conference

Delivered by H.E. Mr. Andrejs Pildegovičs, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations

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Mister/Madam President,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, **Latvia thanks** the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Republic of Tajikistan for co-hosting the UN 2023 Water Conference. We also thank the United Nations Secretariat and system for their work in the lead-up and during the conference.

Unfortunately, you **will not find Latvia's name in the attendance list of the first UN Water Conference in 1977**. At that time Latvia was occupied and could not have its rightful place in this organization. We proudly take part in the conference today and appreciate the opportunity to share Latvia's perspective and expertise.

As we do, we have to observe that while the world has transformed considerably, some things have not. International community still has to reckon with state aggression. **Latvia strongly deplores Russia's unprovoked large-scale aggression against Ukraine**, enabled by Belarus. We condemn deliberate attacks by Russia against critical infrastructure and civilian objects in Ukraine. **Its actions have devastated Ukraine's water system**. In OCHA assessment apx. 16 million people needed water, sanitation and hygiene assistance in 2022.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Latvia is among the countries with the richest surface and underground water resources in the world. We have more than 2,000 lakes, more than 12,000 rivers and almost 500 km long Baltic Sea coastline. Available water resources per inhabitant

exceed consumption many times. Long-term and regular droughts or water shortage problems are not typical.

However, due to climate change, periods of extreme weather are becoming more frequent and more prolonged, negatively affecting both water quality and availability. Uncharacteristically early floods this winter put pressure on local infrastructure. Moreover, the state of Baltic Sea environment remains a concern.

Therefore, while **we consider ourselves fortunate for the water resources we have, we share the concern about the water stresses the world experiences. We share the alarm that Sustainable Development Goal 6 is off track.**

Water protection is one of Latvia's environmental policy priorities. Recently adopted Environmental Policy Strategy for 2022-2027 includes dozens of water-related courses of actions and measures. From prevention of pollution and flood risk reduction, to efficient use of water resources and improvement of marine waters.

Latvia is also **starkly aware of the importance of international cooperation in the protection and management of water resources.** More than 50% of river run-off originates outside of Latvia affecting the quality of our rivers and further the Baltic Sea.

Much of our bilateral and multilateral cooperation in this area is facilitated by European Union regulations and various transboundary cooperation programmes.

River basin management plans are useful tools for planning and implementing actions for the protection and sustainable use of water resources, as well as international cooperation. River basin management plans are also an excellent practical **example for links between SDG6 and SDG14** as measures for improving inland waters also contribute to achieving good status of marine environment.

When it comes to sea, Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) is the key cooperation framework in the Baltic Sea region. For the past five decades, HELCOM applies ecosystem-based approach and addresses the main pressures on the marine environment in a holistic and integrated way. Latvia currently holds the rotating two-year HELCOM presidency and implementation of the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan for healthy and

resilient Baltic Sea ecosystem is a key priority. **Source-to-Sea approach** is crucial for that.

UN Water Convention also serves as an excellent platform for transboundary water cooperation, which is critical for sustainable water resource management and promoting peace and stability, especially considering climate change induced pressures. We encourage new parties to join this important UN instrument.

Beyond these international cooperation frameworks, Latvia also actively engages in water-related development cooperation activities, specifically in Central Asia on sustainable water management and clean technologies. Latvia is proud to contribute to the Team Europe Initiative on Water-Energy-Climate Change in Central Asia.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

To conclude, the rich agenda of these three days demonstrate that the **world is thirsty to discuss water at UN**. We support the **call for regular intergovernmental meeting** on water within the UN. We also share the conviction that **an appointment of UN Special Envoy for Water** could help keep water high on agendas inside and outside the UN, mobilize action and strengthen coherence.

I thank you.