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**Statement**

**by**

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**United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

**Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission**

**for Europe**

**at**

**Interactive dialogue 4: Water for cooperation: transboundary and international water cooperation, cross-sectoral cooperation, including scientific cooperation, and water across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG targets 6.5 and 6.b and Goals 16 and 17)**

**23 March 2023**

**15:00-18:00 (New York)**

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**Statement/Intervention limited to 5 min**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Progress on transboundary water cooperation in accordance with SDG target 6.5 is badly off track.** The second monitoring on SDG indicator 6.5.2, carried out by UNECE and UNESCO as co-custodian agencies, revealed that only 24 countries worldwide have all their transboundary basin area covered by operational arrangements. Lack of cooperation on shared waters hinders the achievement of other SDGs and creates risks of conflicts over dwindling water resources. The reporting on 6.5.2 also sheds a light on actions needed, such as strengthening legal frameworks, addressing data gaps, upscaling capacity, mobilizing political will and strengthening financing.

**But we do have tools to accelerate transboundary water cooperation.**

Governments should **fully leverage the existing legal instruments, in particular the two global UN water Conventions** – the 1997 Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses and the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, also known as the Water Convention, serviced by UNECE.

Since 2016, the Water Convention is open for accession to all United Nations Member States. Yesterday Nigeria acceded to the Water

Convention, following Chad, Senegal, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Togo and Cameroon which became Parties in the past few years. More than 20 countries are on their way to join the Convention. 130 countries worldwide take part in activities of its institutional platform.

**How does the Convention help advance transboundary cooperation?**

**More than half of all basins worldwide still lack cooperation agreements.** The Convention provides a sound and flexible legal framework to support the development of agreements in different settings. Since its adoption, more than 100 agreements on shared waters have been signed. They have increased water security and thereby economic development, promoted regional integration, and supported flood protection, early warning and data exchange. The Convention directly supports cooperation on the ground, such as in the Drin Basin or Senegalo Mauritanian Aquifer Basin.

**Lack of capacity is a major barrier to advancing cooperation.** The Water Convention offers an intergovernmental framework that provides policy responses to emerging challenges, such as the integration between water, energy, food and environmental needs and water allocation in transboundary settings. The Convention's framework also promotes the exchange of experiences and builds capacity of practitioners and basin organizations.

**Climate change severely affects transboundary basins.**

Unilateral adaptation measures can lead to maladaptation, transfer of risks and tensions. On the contrary, transboundary cooperation makes adaptation more effective through sharing of data, costs and benefits. Over 15 years ago, the Water Convention was the first forum to support countries and transboundary basins in jointly adapting to climate change through guidance development, pilot projects and the Global network of basins working on climate change. Those activities have supported the development and implementation of many transboundary adaptation strategies and plans, such as in the Chu-Talas, the Danube, the Dniester, the Neman, the Rhine, the Mekong and the Niger basins, making 300 million people worldwide more resilient to climate change.

The **lack of sustainable funding models**, from national and international sources, often prevents countries from starting or deepening their cooperation. It also hampers the maximization of regional benefits from investments in transboundary basins. Therefore, the Convention has brought together international financial institutions, development banks, governments and basin organizations to identify existing and innovative ways to finance transboundary cooperation and basin development. It also raises the capacity of transboundary basins to mobilize financial resources.

Finally, increasing competition over scarce water resources can lead to growing **risks of conflicts. But water is also a leverage for peace.** To enhance the conflict prevention function of the Convention, its Parties established a dedicated Committee to provide tailored assistance in case of difficulties in implementation or cooperation. The Committee's unique advisory procedure has recently proven useful to prevent a potential conflict over hydropower development between two Parties.

The 2023 Water Conference focuses on transformative solutions. **The Water Convention is precisely a solution** offering multiple benefits for sustainable development and climate action. **I call upon all United Nations Member States to accede to it** and to take advantage of its tools and framework. I ask international and regional organisations and civil society to support governments in accession and implementation.

Last December, 40 actors – countries, organisations, IFIs, academia and NGOs – joined forces in the Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition, a multistakeholder partnership to sustain and advance transboundary water cooperation. The Coalition has been a strong advocate for commitments on transboundary cooperation to the Water Action Agenda. Such commitments can inspire future actions to advance cooperation.

Together with our partners, UNECE will continue to work to accelerate transboundary cooperation on the basis of the Water Convention.

Thank you.