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Statement

by

Ms. Olga Algayerova

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission

for Europe

at

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New York and online

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Progress towards SDG6 in the UNECE region and worldwide is lagging behind.

As highlighted through the regional preparatory meeting for this Conference, which we organized in 2022, the UNECE region is suffering severe costs due to **increasingly frequent and severe floods and droughts**, exposing the vulnerability of our societies and economies to climate change and other pressures.

At the same time our region has a **long history of cooperation** that helps addressing environmental and water problems, in particular thanks to our **unique multilateral environmental agreements**. Some were developed as regional instruments and successively, because of their global relevance and applicability, were opened for accession to all UN member states.

This is the case of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes – the Water Convention – which is a **powerful global instrument to advance transboundary water cooperation**. Since the Convention's adoption in

1992, more than 100 agreements on shared waters have been signed. These agreements have brought many benefits to the population in their basins, from sustainable development to regional integration and conflict prevention, and have advanced the implementation of other SDGs, in particular those related to health, food, energy and ecosystems.

Today, the Water Convention is rapidly expanding. We heard the voice of many new and prospective Parties joining from Africa and Latin America. Yet yesterday's discussion on "Water for Cooperation" showed that **we need more cooperation in transboundary rivers and lakes, and even more in shared aquifers**. For this, we need to use UN normative instruments, namely the Water Convention, to ensure their sustainable, equitable and peaceful use.

Recognizing the complexity of the challenges, UNECE has joined forces with other actors under the **Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition** – a diverse, multi-stakeholder partnership of governments, intergovernmental organizations, regional integration organizations, international financial institutions, academia, and NGOs. The Coalition is committed to accelerate action at different levels - from governance to investments, from data management to capacity building.

Another tool to tackle water challenges and accelerate progress towards SDG 6 is the Protocol on Water and Health, that UNECE jointly services with WHO/Europe.

Through its progressive target setting mechanism and reporting framework, the Protocol supports the realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, increases resilience of the water and water-dependent sectors to climate change, and helps countries prevent possible future epidemics.

UNECE is determined to support the acceleration of progress towards SDG 6 in the pan-European region and worldwide, through its tools and programmes.

I invite all countries to accede to and implement the Water Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health.

Thank you.