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Statement

by

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at

9th World Water Forum: Session 3B2

**Promoting peace by developing and implementing legal frameworks for
transboundary water resources**

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Room 4

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The importance of water agreements to promote peace and development cannot be overstated. Let's be reminded that the first international water treaty dates as far back as 2500 BC, when the two Sumerian city-states of Lagash and Umma crafted an agreement ending a water dispute along the Tigris River.

Indeed, transboundary water agreements provide the stability and predictability that societies need to plan, develop and flourish. They prevent conflicts and mitigate risks as they are developed through negotiation processes that ensure that all sides interests are taken into account - and international water laws plays an important role in this respect.

There are many good examples of effective legal frameworks for cooperation, at global, regional and basin level, such as the water charters of the Niger, Senegal and Lake Chad basins, the SADC Revised Protocol on Shared Watercourses, the Danube and Rhine Conventions or the Drin Memorandum of Understanding. We will hear from some of them today.

However, the majority of transboundary basins are not covered by an operational arrangement for water cooperation. The 2020 monitoring exercise for SDG Indicator 6.5.2, carried out by UNECE and UNESCO as co-custodian agencies, shows that only 24 of the 153 countries sharing transboundary waters have all their transboundary basins covered by operational arrangements. Several existing basin arrangements should also be strengthened to ensure their full effectiveness.

We must therefore accelerate our efforts to meet the SDG target on IWRM and transboundary cooperation by 2030. Today's session aims to promote action by sharing good practices and lessons learned in developing such arrangements.

A powerful tool to promote the development of agreements on transboundary waters is the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, known as the Water Convention, which UNECE has the honour to service.

The Water Convention is a global framework Convention which specifically requires, promotes and facilitates negotiation and implementation of legal frameworks at basin level.

Since the Convention's adoption in 1992, more than 90 agreements have been developed in the Pan-European region. These agreements have increased flood protection, saved thousands of lives and protected billions of investments. They have improved biodiversity: the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) brought the salmon back to the Rhine after its disappearance in the '50s. They made hydropower generation more effective and at the same time reduced its negative environmental impacts. They protected water resources and allowed their use as drinking water sources for millions of people. They ensured the predictable availability of water which underpinned investments in agricultural and industrial development. They have promoted regional integration, dialogue and cooperation also in conflict or post-conflict situation.

The many successes achieved in the 30 years since the adoption of the Water Convention will be celebrated at the end of June in Estonia.

The Convention has supported and enabled the development of agreements through many means.

It has provided policy and legal guidance. A perfect example for this is the *Practical guide for the development of agreements and other arrangements* which was adopted at the last Meeting of the Parties last

year and provides step-by-step guidance on provisions to consider when negotiating agreements.

It has promoted the exchange of experience between basins and countries and fostered the adoption of good practices, including on emerging and complex issues such as adaptation to climate change and water allocation in transboundary basins.

The usefulness of the Convention is visible in the fact that more and more countries start accession processes: 15 countries are in the process of accession. And I warmly welcome the recent accession of Ghana and, hopefully very soon, of Iraq.

Indeed, the strength of the Convention is with its Parties and partners and none of what I have mentioned could have been achieved without their strong political (and financial) support. I would therefore like to thank them and congratulate them for their successes.

I wish you all a successful session and fruitful future water cooperation.

Thank you.