

National Workshop on Promoting the Water Convention

Accession Process and Priorities for Panama

6 and 7 December 2022

Objectives of the workshop

To inform interested stakeholders of the objective of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), taking advantage of this forum to share information on the process undertaken by the Government of Panama to accede to this Convention, to discuss the next steps in the accession process and to identify priorities for its future implementation.

The workshop provides opportunities to:

- Learn about the Water Convention as a legally binding instrument that promotes the sustainable management of shared water resources, the implementation of the SDGs, conflict prevention and the promotion of peace and regional integration.
- Identify benefits, potential advantages and strategic objectives of a possible accession to the Convention for Panama.
- Exchange experiences with existing Parties about the benefits of the Convention and its implementation.
- Discuss the practical implementation of the Water Convention to address water resource management challenges in Panama.
- Present the initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Panama's accession to the Water Convention.
- Discuss the next steps and roadmap in the accession process, and the contribution of this process to transboundary and national water management in Panama.

Context

The Republic of Panama shares important surface water resources with its neighbors: the Republic of Costa Rica and the Republic of Colombia. Among the shared basins are the Sixaola River basin, of which approximately 80% is in the Republic of Costa Rica. The length of the main river is 146 km, the total drainage area is 2,850 km² and the maximum elevation in the basin is 3,820 meters above sea level. The basin registers an average annual precipitation of 2200 mm. The Jurado River basin, shared with the Republic of Colombia, has a total drainage area of 918 km² and an average annual precipitation of 3818 mm. Panama has not identified aquifers in either shared water basin.

Considering the current and predicted threats caused by increased demand and competition for the use of water resources, as well as growing impacts of climate change on societies and river basin ecosystems, integrated water resources management (IWRM) at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation, has become imperative to ensure sustainable development. This is underlined in global commitments such as Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development, in which UN Member States committed, by 2030, to implement IWRM at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation, as appropriate.

The Water Convention aims to strengthen transboundary water cooperation and promote the protection and sustainable use of transboundary surface water and groundwater. Building on 30 years of implementation and experience, the Convention provides a useful framework for fostering progress in transboundary water cooperation. Adopted in 1992 in Helsinki (Finland), the Water Convention has been open for accession by all UN Member States since 2016.

The Water Convention requires Parties to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact, use transboundary waters in a reasonable and equitable manner and ensure their sustainable management. Parties bordering the same transboundary waters have to cooperate by entering into specific agreements and establishing joint bodies. As a framework agreement, the Convention does not replace bilateral and multilateral agreements for specific basins or aquifers. Instead, it encourages their establishment and implementation, as well as their further development.

The 1992 Water Convention provides a unique global legal and institutional framework and a multi-sectoral intergovernmental platform, both of which are essential to support cooperative development and prevent tensions related to the management of shared waters.

Background

Aware of the potential benefits of joining the Convention, the Government of Panama has been working with the secretariat of the Convention since May 2022 to identify opportunities and initiate the process of accession.

With a view to Panama's potential accession, a national workshop is being convened to raise awareness of the Convention, identify the benefits and opportunities it would generate for Panama, and develop a roadmap for accession.

Expected results

- Stakeholders are informed of the global framework for cooperation offered by the Water Convention.
- The benefits for Panama of joining the Water Convention have been identified.
- The efforts initiated for Panama's accession to the Convention have been updated.
- The way Panama's accession to the Convention could contribute to the improvement of national water management and transboundary water cooperation has been identified.
- A roadmap with agreed key milestones for accession to the Water Convention has been jointly developed.

Partners

The workshop is jointly organized by the Ministry of Environment of Panama and the Water Convention Secretariat, with the support of the Swiss Ministry of Environment and the European Union.