

Opening speech by Ms. Sonja Koepfel

Secretary of the Water Convention at the National Workshop on the Water Convention in Botswana

Gaborone, 25 October 2023

Your Excellency, Honourable Minister,

Permanent Secretary,

Ambassador of the Delegation of the European Union to Botswana and
SADC,

Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme in
Botswana,

Deputy Chief of Mission of the United States to Botswana and SADC,

Executive Secretaries of LIMCOM, OKACOM, and ZAMCOM,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to be here with you today at this important National Workshop on the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, also known as the 1992 Water Convention.

. 60% of all water resources worldwide are shared between two or more countries. Almost all surface water in Botswana consists of shared water, as is the case in most southern African countries. Transboundary water cooperation for Botswana and the region is thus crucial for peace, sustainable development and human well-being.

For this reason, it was a great step forward that a requirement for countries to implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation was included among the SDGs. SDG indicator 6.5.2 measures progress in this regard.

As per the 2020 reporting, I can commend Botswana as only one of two countries in Africa, the other being Namibia, with 100% of its surface area of the country's transboundary basins covered by an operational arrangement.

Indeed, Botswana is already heavily involved in several river basin commissions, including the Limpopo, Okavango, Orange-Senqu and Zambezi Basin Commissions. At regional level, Botswana is a party to the 2000 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Revised Protocol on Shared Watercourses. Collectively, these actions, agreements and institutions represent an implementation of the Water Convention and many of its principles are already advanced in these basins.

The Water Convention is a concrete and effective global legal and intergovernmental framework and platform aimed to support cooperation and sustainable management of shared waters, including groundwaters. Accession can enable support by the community of Parties, experience-sharing with basins and countries worldwide, facilitate access to financing and raise the country profile at the international level. For example, already in 2016-2018, the Convention secretariat supported carrying out an assessment of the benefits of transboundary water cooperation with the Okavango river commission.

I welcome that the Botswana Water Investment Plan launched by the Permanent Secretary in May alongside the Convention accession process aims to mobilise and leverage at least USD 10.8 Billion for Climate Resilient Water investments in Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem-Health NEXUS. The Water Convention has a Task Force on the NEXUS which meets regularly to address such issues and develop accompanying guidance materials. Moreover, the Convention's Programme of Work Area on Financing Transboundary Cooperation and its guidance documents would benefit Botswana's investment plans, and the Convention's Global Workshop on Financing this December is an opportunity to exchange experiences, address common challenges and learn. I commend His Excellency President Dr Masisi, President of Botswana for his leadership on the International High Level Panel on Water Investments for Africa, including as current chair of the Presidential Global Change Makers.

It is therefore a logical and welcome step that Botswana considers accession to the Water Convention. Today's workshop represents an important milestone and unique opportunity for thoroughly analysing the obligations of the Convention, the practical tools it offers to support countries' efforts, and the benefits associated with its accession. It is important that this workshop results in a clear commitment and roadmap for accession. Such accession can ideally happen before the 10th Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention which will take place in October 2024 in Slovenia and could be celebrated there.

Botswana is not alone in this journey. The Convention was originally negotiated as a regional framework for the pan-European region. Following an amendment procedure, since March 2016 all UN Member States can accede to it. Chad and Senegal have become the first African Parties in 2018. Then, Ghana acceded in 2020 and was followed by Guinea-Bissau and Togo in 2021, by Cameroon in 2022, and Nigeria and The Gambia in 2023. Iraq acceded in March 2023 as the first country from the Middle East, Namibia in June 2023 as the first country from Southern Africa and Panama in July 2023 as the first country from Latin America.

More than 15 other African countries are in various stages of accession and notably within the Southern African region momentum is gradually building, including several of Botswana's riparian neighbours, whereby after Namibia:

- Zambia is in the Cabinet Memo stage;
- Tanzania held its National Workshop last year;
- Zimbabwe has formally initiated its accession process in recent months.

In the spirit of cooperation of the Convention, older Parties and international experts are available to share their experiences. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them:

- Mr. Peter Kovacs, Water Director of Hungary and Member of the Convention's Bureau, will share the extensive experiences of Hungary which has been Party to the Convention since the mid 1990s;
- Ms. Bernadette Araba Adjei, Director, Legal and Monitoring Department, Water Resources Commission, Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, of Ghana and Member of the Convention's Bureau who will be sharing the motivation, experiences and value add of Ghana's accession in 2020 to both UN global water conventions;
- Ms Ndina Nashipili, Deputy Director: Directorate of Water Resource Management, Ministry of Agriculture, Water & Land Reform, Namibia will be sharing the motivation, experiences and value add of Namibia's recent accession in June;
- Mr Stanley Hantambo, Principal Water Officer - International Waters, Department of Water Resources Development, Ministry of Water Development and Sanitation, Zambia will be sharing the motivation, experiences and value add of Zambia's current accession process.

The secretariat team also includes Mr. Remy Kinna, Legal Officer at the secretariat.

In addition, we have invited several regional and basin organisation experts:

- Mr Sergio Siteo, Executive Secretary of LIMCOM, Mr Phera Ramoeli, Executive Secretary of OKACOM and Mr. Felix Ngamlagosi, Executive Secretary of ZAMCOM - all three will share the rich cooperation experiences from their respective basin organisations.

I would also like to thank the European Union, who financially supports the organization of this workshop as well as the globalization of the Convention and transboundary water cooperation more broadly.

Finally, I would like to conclude by thanking His Excellency the Minister of Land and Water Affairs for your presence and political support, and the colleagues in the Ministry, particularly Mr David Molefha and Ms Ireen Madilola, who have invested heavily in the organization of this event. I would also like to thank Convention partners such as UNDP, which helped us with logistics.

Alone you can go fast, together we can go far.

I wish us all an excellent workshop and fruitful discussions.