



HydrCheck upon delivery

## **GLOBAL WORKSHOP ON DROUGHTS IN TRANSBOUNDARY BASINS**

### **Speech of Andrea Meza UNCCD Deputy Executive Secretary 26 February 2024**

Distinguished delegates,

Distinguished representatives from civil society and international organisations, academia, international financial institutions, and the private sector,

Colleagues and friends,

I welcome each of you to the Global Workshop on Droughts in Transboundary Basins.

I stand before you as the Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNCCD – the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. And, I stand *alongside* you as a fellow citizen of a world in crisis.

Established at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the UNCCD is one of the three Rio Conventions – in addition to climate and biodiversity – with a focus on land.

As the only legally binding framework set up to address desertification and the effects of drought, the UNCCD aims to mitigate land degradation through sustainable land management, drought resilience, and enhanced local livelihoods.

In this capacity, it is a distinct honour and privilege to address this forum of stakeholders and to work in partnership with each of you to enhance drought resilience in transboundary basins.



Yet, there is also an uneasiness in speaking before you today – for this workshop comes at a critical juncture in our work:  
Each decade since the 1980s has been warmer than the previous, and the past decade has been no exception; it has been **our hottest on record**.<sup>1</sup>

We cannot look forward to 2024 and beyond without committing to take immediate and concrete *collective* action to stop this trend.  
I use the word “we” and refer to “collective” action intentionally for WE are in this together.

While some countries and communities are especially vulnerable to climate change and are already bearing the brunt of its impacts, WE all have a responsibility to take immediate action – both in our backyards and in support of the world’s most vulnerable communities.

This is in our individual and our *collective* interest.

You see, climate change does not know – or care about – national boundaries. It transcends them, affecting 3.6 billion people in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change.<sup>2</sup>

That represents nearly half of our world. With nearly half of us *highly* vulnerable to climate change, none of us is immune.

Just as climate change is unconcerned by boundaries, drought too transcends them, affecting 1.84 billion people globally. While the world’s poorest countries are most impacted, high-income countries are also feeling its effects.

---

<sup>1</sup> World Meteorological Organization 2024. “WMO confirms that 2023 smashes global temperature record”. 12 January 2024. [https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/wmo-confirms-2023-smashes-global-temperature-record#:~:text=The%20World%20Meteorological%20Organization%20\(WMO,record%2C%20by%20a%20huge%20margin.](https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/wmo-confirms-2023-smashes-global-temperature-record#:~:text=The%20World%20Meteorological%20Organization%20(WMO,record%2C%20by%20a%20huge%20margin.)

<sup>2</sup> THIS WAS TAKEN FROM THE UNECE INFORMATION NOTE FOR THIS WORKSHOP. THERE IS NOT A SOURCE W/IN THE INFO NOTE.



These effects are not minor. Drought causes famine and displacement. In 2022, 98% of the 32.6 million new disaster displacements were due to drought.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these impacts – and the growing risks across borders – transboundary cooperation is lacking.

Yet, 60% of the world's freshwater is transboundary water.<sup>4</sup> And, globally, 148 states have territory in international river basins – which cover 46% of the earth's land surface, host nearly 40% of the world's population, and account for around 60% of global river flow.<sup>5</sup>

This invariably means that, if our neighbours are experiencing drought, it won't be long before WE, too, are experiencing drought and, along with it, its impacts, like famine and displacement.

With the latest IPCC report<sup>6</sup> warning of an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme heatwaves, floods and droughts in the foreseeable future, this risk is one we all face.

Transboundary partnership and collaboration are more urgent than ever.

As the saying goes, *"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."*

Friends,

We must move away from 'siloed thinking'. Our drought management efforts must recognise the transboundary nature of drought and be designed – like our waters – to be transboundary.

As is often said: *"Water is not a sector but a connector"*. This connection must be a priority for water experts, impact investors, social entrepreneurs, multi-national corporations, and decision makers at all levels.

---

<sup>3</sup> UNCCD.2023. Global Drought Snapshot 2023. The need for proactive action. <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2023-12/Global%20drought%20snapshot%202023.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> UN Water. "Transboundary Waters". <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/transboundary-waters>.

<sup>5</sup> Adelphi. 2014. The Rise of Hydro-Diplomacy Strengthening foreign policy for transboundary waters [https://adelphi.de/system/files/mediathek/bilder/the\\_rise\\_of\\_hydro-diplomacy\\_adelphi.pdf](https://adelphi.de/system/files/mediathek/bilder/the_rise_of_hydro-diplomacy_adelphi.pdf) with further references.

<sup>6</sup> See IPCC 2023. Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report – Summary for Policymakers. [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_SYR\\_SPM.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf)



Parties to the UNCCD are taking joint action in response to drought.

- At its 15<sup>th</sup> session, the Conference of the Parties to the UNCCD called for **enhanced transboundary drought management and cooperation (Dec. 12/COP.15)**.
- Senegal and Spain created the **International Drought Resilience Alliance**. I applaud them for their leadership. Nearly **40 countries and over 30 organizations are working together on drought resilience**. Using this **alliance as a unifying force**, we must commit to concerted policies and partnerships at all levels for global drought resilience. This is especially true for establishing **effective early warning systems that work across borders** and **mobilizing sustainable financing** to improve drought resilience.
- The UNCCD helped **70 countries develop proactive national drought policies** using a joint approach and supported the development of **three regional drought strategies**.
- The UNCCD is also active in establishing **global and regional communities of learning and practice**. By sharing hydrological and other data, best practices and lessons learned, countries can better understand and manage transboundary risks, improve drought forecasting, and coordinate drought preparedness and response.
- **UNCCD advocates for land restoration, integrated land-use planning, and water management**. By collectively anticipating and responding to the challenges posed by climate change and land degradation, riparian countries can ensure water security, drought resilience, protect livelihoods, and maintain regional stability or increase regional integration in the face of uncertainty.

This kind of coordination, communication, and cooperation are needed at all levels. Proactive joint strategies and plans at the basin scale improve coherence in drought management and more efficient and fairer use of resources.



Collective, collaborative action is critical to reverse the trend of increasing temperatures, droughts, and desertification. It is vital to our survival. Together, WE can make change.

I call on you to join us in these efforts. And, I am confident that the outcomes of this workshop will contribute to the 16<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of the Parties in Riyadh in December this year, helping pave the way towards a more resilient future, improving preparedness for climate change and, in particular, droughts, and inspiring collective action, knowledge- and responsibility-sharing.

I wish you fruitful discussions.

Thank you.

(1,042 words)