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Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on
the Protection and Use of Transboundary
Watercourses and International Lakes

Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment

Eighteenth meeting

Geneva, 17 and 18 October 2023

Report of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment on its eighteenth meeting

I. Introduction

1. The eighteenth meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) took place at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 17 to 18 October 2023. It was held back-to-back with the Global workshop on conjunctive management of surface water and groundwater: National to transboundary level (Geneva (hybrid), 16 and 17 October 2023). All relevant documentation for the meeting is available on the dedicated website.¹

2. The focus of the meeting was to discuss the implementation of activities on monitoring and assessment under the Convention in 2022–2023, notably completion of the publication *Updated Strategies for Monitoring and Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters* (ECE/MP.WAT/70) and preparation of the publication *Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Transboundary Data-sharing*. Another objective was to discuss the strategic directions for future work on monitoring and assessment, building on insights from reporting under the Convention and Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and the outcomes of the above-mentioned Global workshop.

A. Attendance

3. The eighteenth meeting was attended by delegations from the following countries: Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Botswana, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Chad, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea-Bissau, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mauritania, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Netherlands, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Senegal, Slovenia,

¹ See www.unece.org/environmental-policy/events/eighteenth-meeting-working-group-monitoring-and-assessment.



Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, State of Palestine, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Togo, Tunisia, Türkiye, Uganda, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe.

4. The European Union was also represented.

5. In addition, representatives of the following United Nations system organizations participated: International Atomic Energy Agency, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN-Water and World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

6. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic and other institutions were present: Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands, Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), Mono Basin Authority, Niger Basin Authority, Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, Global Water Partnership (GWP), GWP – South-East Asia, GWP – South America, Inter-American Development Bank, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, International Sava River Basin Commission, International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre (IGRAC), National Institute for Research and Development in Environmental Protection (Romania), Regional Centre for Groundwater Management in Latin America and the Caribbean, Southern African Development Community Groundwater Management Institute, Sahara and Sahel Observatory, Scientific-Information Centre of the Inter-State Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia, Trilateral Commission of the Trifinio Plan, Arab Water Council, Arnika, International Association of Hydrogeologists, International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC), International Water Management Institute, International Office for Water (France), Subjective Physics Sciences Organization, The Water and Ecology Environment NGO (Mongolia), National Scientific and Technical Research Council (Argentina), University of the Philippines Los Baños, Ankara University, University of Pavia (Italy), Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, University of Tlemcen (Algeria), Jordan Pulse Academy, Mutah University (Jordan), American University of Beirut, Hassan II Institute of Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine (Morocco), University of Karachi, Educons University (Serbia), Geneva Water Hub, Water Cycle Innovation, University of Lausanne (Switzerland), Institute of Hydrogeology and Engineering Geology (Uzbekistan), Groundwatch Global Limited, VŠB-TUO/Majaczech (Czechia), Hydrogeoecological Research and Design Company "KazHYDEC" (Ltd.) (Kazakhstan), Raura Mining Company (Peru).

B. Organizational matters

7. The Co-Chairs of the meeting, Ms. Anna-Stiina Heiskanen (Finland) and Mr. Niokhor Ndour (Senegal), opened the meeting and presented the main objectives.

8. The Working Group adopted the agenda (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2023/1).

9. A representative of Ukraine made a statement regarding environmental concerns, including the ecological disaster in the aftermath of the destruction of the Kakhovka dam (Ukraine). A representative of the Russian Federation replied, followed by a statement from a representative of the European Union and a statement of reply from the representative of Ukraine.²

10. The Working Group adopted the Report of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment on their fourth joint meeting (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2022/2-ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2022/2).

² The statements by the representatives of the Russian Federation and Ukraine are available on the meeting website.

II. Recent developments and processes related to monitoring, assessment and data-sharing at the global level

11. A representative of UN-Water presented recent developments regarding the water agenda at the global level. The speaker reported on the 2023 Data Drive currently ongoing as part of the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for Sustainable Development Goal 6. Through the Data Drive, data were collected on the majority of Sustainable Development Goal 6 indicators. Synthesis reports on individual indicators would be produced by summer 2024. The speaker highlighted the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028 (New York, 22–24 March 2023) (United Nations 2023 Water Conference), in particular the Water Action Agenda, which had brought together more than 830 voluntary commitments. In July 2023, UN-Water had published the *Blueprint for Acceleration: Sustainable Development Goal 6 Synthesis Report on Water and Sanitation 2023*,³ among other things, to inform the discussions at the High-level Political Forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (New York, 10–19 July 2023), where Sustainable Development Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation) had been under in-depth review.

12. The representative of UN-Water described the UN-Water country- and regional-level engagement in support of United Nations country teams and reported on the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Capacity Development Initiative of UN-Water, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNESCO to develop national capacities to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 6.

13. The Co-Chair (Senegal), as co-host of the Interactive Dialogue “Water for Cooperation: Transboundary and International Water Cooperation, Cross Sectoral Cooperation, including Scientific Cooperation, and Water Across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Sustainable Development Goal targets 6.5 and 6.b and Goals 16 and 17)” during the United Nations 2023 Water Conference together with Switzerland, reported on the outcomes of said Interactive Dialogue, as well as on the efforts of Senegal and Switzerland to disseminate those outcomes. He also reported on General Assembly resolution 77/334 on follow-up to the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028, adopted upon the proposal of Senegal, the Netherlands, Tajikistan and other countries.⁴ The resolution provided for the organization of two United Nations conferences on water, in 2026 and 2028, as well as the development of a United Nations system-wide strategy for water and sanitation, which would guide the way that the United Nations system worked on water issues at different levels with a view to strengthening such work.

14. A representative of the secretariat described the main achievements related to transboundary water cooperation and the Water Convention resulting from the United Nations 2023 Water Conference, including increased interest in accession to the Convention, manifested in the accessions thereto of Nigeria and Iraq during the Conference and the subsequent accessions thereto of Namibia, Panama and the Gambia. She stressed that over 40 commitments had been submitted to the Water Action Agenda on the issue of transboundary water cooperation, including enhanced data- and information-sharing. She described the activities to promote the Water Convention during the High-level Political Forum and activities planned for the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 30 November–12 December 2023).

15. A representative of WMO gave a briefing on the publication *State of Global Water Resources 2022: Report*.⁵ He highlighted the “Early Warnings for All” initiative, under which

³ United Nations publication.

⁴ A/RES/77/334.

⁵ World Meteorological Organization (WMO), WMO-1333 (Geneva, 2023).

WMO was engaged in the implementation of the second pillar on detection, observation, monitoring, analysis and forecasting.

16. A representative of the European Commission reported on current developments in European Union water policy, in particular the recast Drinking Water Directive⁶ (EU 2020/2184) and the proposal to amend the Water Framework Directive,⁷ the Groundwater Directive⁸ and the Environmental Quality Standards Directive.⁹

17. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed accessions to the Water Convention during and after the United Nations 2023 Water Conference by Nigeria, Iraq, Namibia, Panama and the Gambia and encouraged those new Parties to fully engage in the activities of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment;

(b) Called upon Parties and other countries and partners to follow up on the implementation of commitments in the Water Action Agenda related to transboundary water cooperation and data and information;

(c) Called upon Parties and other countries and partners to promote transboundary water cooperation in the process towards the United Nations 2026 Water Conference.

III. Reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention

18. The Co-Chair (Senegal) recalled the ongoing third reporting exercise on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals and under the Water Convention, under which countries sharing transboundary waters had been invited to submit their national reports by 30 June 2023. Representatives of ECE and UNESCO, as co-custodian agencies for indicator 6.5.2, highlighted the preliminary outcomes of the third reporting exercise, in particular the improved quality of data manifested in: (a) more precise information on surface areas of transboundary river and lake basins and transboundary aquifers provided by many countries; (b) new information on smaller basins included by some countries; and (c) generally, more information on groundwater and aquifers provided by countries.

19. Representatives of Iraq and Namibia emphasized the lack of data on transboundary aquifers as an impediment to the reporting process. The representative of Namibia highlighted that data collection on transboundary aquifers might not be a priority for some countries sharing such aquifers. The representative of Peru emphasized that data provided on transboundary aquifers must be reliable.

20. Representatives of ECE and UNESCO stressed that the use of indicator 6.5.2 data at the highest political level could be used as an argument to motivate Governments to invest in strengthening knowledge and providing data on transboundary aquifers. Even when precise and complete information on transboundary aquifers was not available, countries were encouraged to submit the available data with explanatory information to indicate its provisional character. Furthermore, countries were encouraged to make full use of open

⁶ Directive (EU) 2020/2184 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on the quality of water intended for human consumption, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 435 (2020), pp. 1–62.

⁷ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 327 (2000), pp. 1–73.

⁸ Directive 2006/118/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on the protection of groundwater against pollution and deterioration, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 372, pp. 19–31.

⁹ Directive 2008/105/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on environmental quality standards in the field of water policy, amending and subsequently repealing Council Directives 82/176/EEC, 83/513/EEC, 84/156/EEC, 84/491/EEC, 86/280/EEC and amending Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 348 (2008), pp. 84–97.

databases, such as those on aquifers compiled by UNESCO with the support of partners on the basis of information from national sources, and to contribute to the improvement of such open databases.

21. A representative of Lebanon emphasized the importance of verifying data on transboundary aquifers provided by researchers through official data collection processes by national authorities. The representative of UNESCO highlighted that the reporting processes provided opportunities to call attention to existing gaps and advocate for resources to be allocated to monitoring and studies of transboundary aquifers.

22. A representative of IGRAC presented the Transboundary Aquifers of the World map (Update 2021),¹⁰ prepared by IGRAC in cooperation with UNESCO and WMO, and explained how it could support countries in the reporting process on indicator 6.5.2. He invited countries to share information that could help to update the map, such as new transboundary aquifer delineations and reports or publications on transboundary aquifers.

23. A representative of ESCWA spoke about support provided by the regional commission to the third round of reporting on indicator 6.5.2 in the Arab region through the organization of a dedicated workshop (Beirut, 30–31 May 2023) and support to the preparation of national reports by the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

24. Several countries described how they had benefited from reporting or strengthened information exchange in transboundary basins as one of the operationality criteria under indicator 6.5.2:

- The representative of Ukraine reported on recent developments in cooperation between the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine on the Prut River and the upcoming signing of a trilateral declaration on the Prut River. The declaration would facilitate efforts to harmonize national management plans for the Prut River basin, to develop monitoring and advance flood and drought management.
- According to a representative of Georgia, reporting on indicator 6.5.2 served as encouragement for the country to further strengthen its transboundary water cooperation. The speaker reported on a protocol of intention signed in 2022 by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia and the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan, with the aim of expanding cooperation and exchange of information on geology, hydrometeorology and climate change.
- A representative Poland reported on progress in the designation of a common Polish–Slovak transboundary groundwater body.
- A representative of North Macedonia reported on progress in the exchange of data and information in the Prespa Lakes basin.

25. A representative of Kyrgyzstan expressed his country's commitment to submit a report on indicator 6.5.2 and reported on two bilateral agreements concluded with Uzbekistan in 2022.

26. The Working Group:

(a) Invited all countries sharing transboundary waters that had not yet submitted their third reports on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 to ECE and UNESCO to do so by 1 November 2023;

(b) Called on countries to make use of their national reports in order to improve their transboundary cooperation, including by focusing on regular exchange of data and information, as relevant;

(c) Called on river basin organizations, regional economic communities and other partners to make use of data collected through national reports in order to support transboundary water cooperation, including by focusing on regular exchange of data and information, as relevant.

¹⁰ See www.un-igrac.org/resource/transboundary-aquifers-world-map-2021.

IV. Recent activities related to monitoring and assessment under the Convention

A. Outcomes of the Global workshop on conjunctive management of surface water and groundwater

27. The Co-Chair (Senegal) invited Estonia and Slovenia as lead Parties for programme area 3.1 on “Promoting integrated water resources management in transboundary basins” to present the key outcomes of the Global workshop on conjunctive management of surface water and groundwater: National to transboundary level.¹¹

28. A representative of Estonia highlighted the main outcomes of the Global workshop, in particular the need to: (a) increase understanding and awareness of the benefits of conjunctive water management, especially for climate change adaptation; (b) move from spontaneous to planned conjunctive water management; (c) create enablers for conjunctive water management; and (d) create frameworks for conjunctive water management in transboundary contexts.

29. A representative of Slovenia presented a summary of the next steps for potential work on conjunctive water management under the Water Convention and globally, based on the outcomes of interactive sessions during the workshop. The next steps were suggested in the areas of: policy recommendations and guidance; best practices collection and dissemination; projects on conjunctive water management; capacity-building and sharing of experiences at the global and regional levels; and support to negotiation of agreements/arrangement and resource allocation.

30. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the organization of the Global workshop on conjunctive management of surface water and groundwater: National to transboundary level (Geneva (hybrid), 16–17 October 2023), recognized the successful collaboration with partners, and took note of the workshop’s preliminary conclusions.

(b) Entrusted the secretariat, together with the co-lead Parties Slovenia and Estonia and partners, to finalize the workshop’s conclusions and submit them for the attention of the fifth joint meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 6–8 May 2024).

B. Updated Strategies for Monitoring and Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters

31. The Co-Chair (Finland) presented the publication *Updated Strategies for Monitoring and Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters* (ECE/MP.WAT/70), developed under the auspices of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment and published in early 2023. She thanked countries and partners who had contributed to the publication. She thanked the Netherlands for providing a lead expert who had helped to prepare the text. A representative of Hungary praised the new publication for providing useful guidance on financial aspects of establishing joint monitoring systems and for reflecting on the developments in technological knowledge.

32. The Working Group invited countries and partners to use and promote the new publication *Updated Strategies* in their national, regional and global activities in support of transboundary water cooperation.

¹¹ See www.unece.org/info/events/event/374652.

V. Gathering feedback on the draft publication “*Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Transboundary Data-sharing*”

33. The secretariat presented progress made in the development of the new publication *Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Transboundary Data-sharing* (Second draft) (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2023/INF.1), including the outcomes of the Expert Meeting on Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Transboundary Data Exchange (Geneva (hybrid), 18–19 April 2023) and subsequent work to take into account the inputs provided by experts.

34. The Working Group reviewed the draft publication chapter-by-chapter and provided feedback on the text, lessons learned, case studies and key messages.

Chapter-by-chapter review of the draft

35. Representatives of the European Union-funded EU4Environment programme, Water Cycle Innovation and Slovenia expressed their satisfaction with the progress made in improving the draft publication. The representative of the European Union-funded EU4Environment programme suggested developing an online toolbox based on the content of the publication. The representative of Slovenia suggested adding a visual scheme to highlight the interlinkages between lessons learned and case studies.

36. Several participants commented on chapter 2 of the draft publication, “The monitoring and assessment context”, introduced by the secretariat. Representatives of Bangladesh and ACTO welcomed the structure and contents of the chapter. The representative of ACTO suggested including a map to enable visualization of the global nature of the publication. She also emphasized the need to submit the text for editing by a professional and to streamline the linkages between case studies and lessons learned. She agreed with the benefits of developing an online toolbox. A representative of the State of Palestine commented on the challenges in undertaking data-sharing and assessment in the Middle East.

37. Chapters 3 (Set-up of the data-sharing) and 4 (Types of data and information shared) were introduced by the secretariat. Representatives of Finland, Greece, Georgia and the International Sava River Basin Commission expressed their overall satisfaction with the chapters. The representative of Finland suggested including the topic of source-to-sea management in the publication. The representative of Namibia highlighted the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission data-sharing protocol as an important example of data-sharing. The representative of Greece reported on written comments provided by Greece to case study 31 on the design and pilot application of a transboundary monitoring scheme for the Prespa Lakes basin and supported the idea of an interactive electronic toolbox. The representative of the International Sava River Basin Commission committed to provide an update on financing of sharing of data in the Sava River Basin (case study 10). A representative of the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission requested clarification about a submitted case study related to the input of nutrients in the Baltic Sea catchment area. A representative of Germany highlighted the usefulness of the annex, which mapped case studies against lessons learned, and suggested the identification of a case study for lesson 25, on innovative monitoring technologies. A representative of the Southern African Development Community Groundwater Management Institute offered to provide a case study for lesson 25 related to machine learning. A representative of Georgia highlighted case study 39, on early warning systems in Georgia, as an important example of information-sharing in the Caucasus, and case study 30, on supporting decision-making in the River Plate Basin, as a good example of data availability for informed decision-making. The representative of the State of Palestine commented on the lack of information in the Middle East region. The representative of the European Union-funded EU4Environment programme suggested adding a new case study describing river condominiums. The representative of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development highlighted the need for a platform to build trust in challenging contexts.

38. Participants commented on chapters 5 (Harmonization and quality assurance), 6 (Data management, processing and sharing) and 7 (Reporting and use of data), introduced by the

lead expert (Netherlands). The representative of North Macedonia provided a positive assessment of the chapters. The representative of Finland offered to submit an additional case study on joint research and monitoring data on fish stocks as the basis for sustainable development for lesson 35, to illustrate how the information collected could serve the purpose of better management. The representative of Hydrogeoecological Research and Design Company “KazHYDEC” (Ltd.) expressed appreciation for the annex with the matrix and committed to provide further comments in written. The representative of Moldova highlighted the need for quality control, international cooperation and the idea to link information systems and platforms to be able to improve data analysis. The representative of the European Union-funded EU4Environment project noted the lack of case studies from the Danube River basin and suggested contacting the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River for additional case studies. The representative of WMO suggested additional case studies for lesson 29, on joint monitoring for harmonization, and lesson 31, on common repositories for data. The representative of Montenegro thanked the Implementation Committee under the Water Convention for the mediation process between Albania and Montenegro under advisory procedure WAT/IC/AP/1.

39. The secretariat introduced chapters 8 (Impacts and benefits) and 9 (Main difficulties and challenges). The representatives of the State of Palestine, El Salvador and IGRAC supported the idea of developing an online toolbox based on the contents of the publication. The representative of IGRAC suggested including a short summary on the role of data-sharing in a transboundary context at the beginning of the publication. The representative of the European Union-funded EU4Environment programme stressed the need to add case studies in the final chapters and suggested the inclusion of a case study about the experience of Germany and Austria under lesson 43 on reducing differences between countries to enable sharing of data and information.

Discussion on key messages of the draft

40. Participants discussed the proposed key messages of the draft publication in small groups. Outcomes of those discussion were then presented to the Working Group in a panel format. Several groups expressed their agreement with the proposed key messages, but suggestions for revisions and additional messages were made. General suggestions included streamlining the key messages and adding visuals and graphics to improve readability. Several groups stressed the need to ensure that experiences from all regions were represented in the publication.

41. Group 1 suggested adding references to the triple planetary crisis and pollution issues, as well as ensuring that all regions were represented in the publication. The group highlighted possible additions of examples on the benefits of data-sharing, on transboundary aquifers and on data harmonization.

42. Group 2 suggested revising the key messages related to monitoring networks, sharing data in a timely manner and differentiating between a technical approach and a political approach. The group suggested adding key messages on communication (how to share data, communication channels), cultural sensitivities, data-sharing policies and promoting the use of open data.

43. Group 3 suggested revisions to key messages, including the addition of mapping and modelling, the salt wedge phenomenon, information on flow exchanges between surface waters and groundwater, and highlighting the importance of common understanding for co-management, disaster risk reduction and joint planning.

44. Group 4 indicated the need to highlight the complexities and sensitivities of certain regions, limitations due to financial constraints and the importance of basin agreements. The group called for additional emphasis on climate change and the need for technical knowledge on groundwater management. It also highlighted the limitations of mathematical modelling and proposed that science-policy interaction be highlighted in the key messages.

45. Group 5 noted the usefulness of identifying and acting on data gaps and highlighted the difference between “data” and “information”. The group stressed that it would be important to explain in the new publication that it had been compiled by different actors. The group also emphasized the importance of validation of data by countries.

46. Group 6 highlighted the need for additional emphasis on validity and reliability of data and financial support to data- and information-sharing. The group emphasized the need for a comprehensive understanding of the basin as an important objective for data-sharing between countries. It suggested additional key messages on infrastructure projects, open databases, metadata-sharing and the inclusion of warning procedures in regulations and agreements.

47. Group 7 suggested the thematic clustering of key messages. The group noted possible additional ideas to be covered in the key messages, including stakeholder engagement, the importance of finance, the impacts of climate change and the aspects of comparability and harmonization.

48. Group 8 noted the importance of translating data and information into easily understandable language to support policymaking. The group also suggested highlighting the importance of political will at all levels and adding a message on civil society engagement.

49. The Working Group:

(a) Invited countries and organizations to provide additional inputs to the draft publication *Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Transboundary Data-sharing* (Second draft) (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2023/INF.1) to the Water Convention secretariat in writing, no later than 15 November 2023;

(b) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the lead Parties, to finalize the publication based on the comments made at the meeting and additional inputs received, and to present its key messages for final review by the fifth joint meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 6–8 May 2024) so that the publication could be launched at the tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Ljubljana, 23–25 October 2024);

(c) Thanked the Netherlands for expert support provided to the development of the publication.

VI. Projects on the ground and regional events

A. Projects related to monitoring and assessment under the Convention

50. The Co-Chair (Finland) recalled the inclusion of tailored assistance and support for developing joint or coordinated monitoring or information and data exchange upon request and subject to the availability of dedicated resources in the programme of work for 2022–2024.

51. The representative of North Macedonia reported on the new Global Environment Facility project in the Drin River basin, which would focus on implementation of priority actions identified in the strategic action programme adopted by Drin River basin riparians in 2020. Among other things, the project provided for designing a multipurpose transboundary monitoring programme, focused on surface waters, groundwater, sediment load and living aquatic resources, and an update of the Drin River basin hydrological and hydrogeological maps. Strategic guidance on monitoring and assessment developed under the Water Convention would be applied in implementing those activities.

52. The representative of Kazakhstan, also speaking on behalf of Uzbekistan, described the development of monitoring in the Pre-Tashkent Transboundary Aquifer with the support of the project “Governance of Groundwater Resources in Transboundary Aquifers” implemented by UNESCO-International Hydrological Programme in partnership with IGRAC and national partners and with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and

Cooperation. In 2022, IWAC under the Water Convention had assisted the two countries in developing measures for further cooperation in the form of a joint road map, which had been endorsed by the Geology Committee of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan and the State Committee for Geology and Mineral Resources of Uzbekistan in November 2022.

53. The representative of Georgia reported on efforts to establish Armenian-Georgian joint transboundary monitoring on water quality in the Ktsia/Khrami-Debeda River basin, including the development of a joint river monitoring procedures document and the organization of a pilot monitoring exercise. She stated that a draft bilateral monitoring agreement between Armenia and Georgia was close to being signed and thanked the European Union Water Initiative Plus project and the EU4Environment: Water Resources and Environmental Data project for the support provided. She has also highlighted the recent transboundary groundwater survey organized by the two countries with support from the EU4Environment project.

54. The representative of Namibia reported on the monitoring and assessment component of the Finland-Namibia Twinning Initiative under the Convention.

B. Regional events on monitoring and assessment

55. The representative of IWAC presented the outcomes of the Regional workshop on monitoring, assessment and information-sharing in transboundary basins in Central Asia (Astana, 1–2 February 2023), organized for five Central Asian countries and regional organizations with the support of the German Agency for International Cooperation. The workshop had enabled sharing of experience on monitoring, information and data exchange in Central Asia and raising of awareness about the approaches to monitoring, information and data exchange under the Water Convention. The speaker also described the work of IWAC to support the Joint Kazak-Uzbek Working Group on Environmental Protection and Water Quality in the Syrdarya River Basin in developing joint mechanisms for prevention of pollution of the Syrdarya River in emergency situations.

56. The representative of ESCWA presented the highlights of a workshop entitled Legal and institutional arrangements for transboundary water cooperation and data exchange (Beirut, 30–31 May 2023), co-organized by ESCWA, UNESCO and ECE, at which participants from the Arab region had been informed of the guidance materials on monitoring and assessment available under the Water Convention. The speaker also presented the Arab Groundwater Knowledge Platform,¹² which brought together available remote sensing, geospatial and climate data related to groundwater resources.

57. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the work relevant for monitoring and information exchange carried out as a part of projects on the ground;

(b) Thanked IWAC and the German Agency for International Cooperation for co-organizing the regional workshop in Central Asia and ESCWA and UNESCO for co-organizing the regional workshop in the Arab region to support the use and development of guidance materials on monitoring and assessment under the Water Convention in the respective regions;

(c) Invited interested countries and partners to organize similar regional workshops, subject to availability of resources.

VII. Cooperation with partners

58. A representative of INBO highlighted data-sharing as one of the focus areas of the organization. He recalled an existing publication *The Handbook on Water Information*

¹² See www.agwkp.unescwa.org/.

Systems (2018), prepared by INBO in cooperation with UNESCO. He highlighted the collaboration with the Water Convention secretariat on climate change adaptation activities and in implementation of the EU4Environment project. He noted that INBO could support the secretariat to transform the publication *Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Transboundary Data-sharing* into an online toolbox.

59. The representative of UNEP introduced the World Water Quality Alliance, convened by UNEP as a global multi-stakeholder community of practice that advocated for the central role of freshwater quality in achieving prosperity and sustainability. The Alliance focused on assessment, innovation and demonstrating data uptake and solution co-creation based on cross-societal consensus. She highlighted possible synergies with the Water Convention programme of work, in particular under programme areas 2–3 and 7.

60. The representative of UNESCO highlighted three possible points of collaboration with the Water Convention and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, in addition to the work on reporting on indicator 6.5.2, for which UNECE and UNESCO were co-custodian agencies. Those points were: (a) collection and sharing of data and information on groundwater resources and transboundary aquifers; (b) making the best use of international water law, including the draft articles on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers; and (c) activities on conjunctive water management as a follow-up to the Global workshop on conjunctive management of surface water and groundwater: National to transboundary level.

61. The Working Group welcomed the work by partners in the area of monitoring and assessment and encouraged the partners to coordinate with the Water Convention secretariat for synergies in developing activities, to refer to the Convention in their work and, where possible, to implement joint activities.

VIII. Strategic discussion on future work on monitoring and assessment

62. The secretariat informed the Working Group of the process of developing the new programme of work for 2025–2027. Participants discussed in small groups possible future activities in the area of monitoring and assessment and exchange of data and information to be included in the new programme of work.

63. Participants in group 1 proposed: studying opportunities for the use of artificial intelligence in monitoring; the development of publications on conjunctive water management; and improving dissemination of publications on monitoring and assessment.

64. Participants in group 2 noted the challenges in implementing conjunctive water management and highlighted the need for support in implementing conjunctive water management and in quantitative and qualitative monitoring of groundwater.

65. Participants in group 3 highlighted three areas: strengthening knowledge on water resources; broadening discussions between stakeholders in the same transboundary basins; and implementing conjunctive water management.

66. Participants in group 4 noted the fact that the role of innovations in water storage was high on the agenda for transboundary water management in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa and Southeast Asia, especially during floods and droughts. They indicated interest in the topic of legal and regulatory mechanisms to conserve accessible groundwater and the need for research on inter-basin water transfers.

67. Participants in group 5 suggested: activities to develop harmonized approaches in monitoring and assessment; developing an online toolbox on the basis of the publication *Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Transboundary Data-sharing*; and the study of novel, low-cost technologies such as remote sensing and artificial intelligence for the purposes of monitoring and data exchange.

68. Participants in group 6 recognized the important work implemented under the auspices of the Water Convention to develop guidance documents on monitoring, assessment and data exchange, but noted continuing challenges in collecting and sharing data in transboundary basins. They stressed the importance for Parties to develop implementation strategies.

69. Participants in group 7 noted the need to develop guidelines on the source-to-sea approach for decision-makers to be able to operationalize the concept. They also called for broad dissemination of the conclusions of the Global workshop on conjunctive management of surface water and groundwater: National to transboundary level, so that stakeholders could take ownership and operationalize the concept of conjunctive water management.

70. Participants in group 8 noted the need to support countries in developing monitoring programmes.

71. Participants in group 9 expressed appreciation for the guidance material developed but noted the need to utilize it fully. Regional workshops and other capacity-building activities to disseminate existing guidance materials could therefore be an important element in the future programme of work. The group also highlighted the need to include activities on water quality monitoring, water diplomacy and nature-based solutions.

72. The Working Group requested the secretariat together with the co-lead Parties (Finland and Senegal) to ensure that the results of the strategic discussion were considered in the development of the programme of work for 2025–2027.

IX. Date and venue of the next meeting of the Working Group

73. The Co-Chair (Senegal) indicated that the next meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment would be held jointly with that of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management on 6–8 May 2024 in Geneva.

IX. Closure of the meeting

74. The Co-Chairs thanked the participants for the fruitful discussions and closed the meeting at 5.45 p.m. on Wednesday, 18 October 2023.
