



PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement

by

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at

**6th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water
and Health**

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Excellencies, Ministers, Ambassadors,
Distinguished colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis are a constant reminder that drinking water and sanitation should not be taken for granted.

Safe water and adequate sanitation are prerequisites for human dignity, gender equality, and inclusive development.

Climate change poses one of the most pressing issues of our time. Water and climate change are inseparably linked. We cannot address one without considering the other. And in a region where nearly 16 million people still lack access to basic drinking water and 29 million do not have basic access to sanitation services, climate change constitutes a major additional obstacle to fully realizing the human rights to water and sanitation for all.

Climate change impacts on water resources are visible throughout the entire pan-European region. This summer, France faced the “most severe drought” in its history, as more than 100 municipalities fell short of drinking water. On the other hand, last summer, heavy rainfall led to catastrophic flooding in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, and deadly mudslides and flooding in Central Asia.

According to climate scientists, these patterns will even intensify in the coming years.

Addressing these pressing challenges, also with a view to accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, requires a paradigm shift. Increasing the resilience of water and sanitation infrastructure as a major climate adaptation measure needs to be ensured in COVID-19 recovery strategies. This is because **water is not solely a natural resource to be managed** and used, but access to water is a **fundamental human right** to which all people are entitled without discrimination, to leave no one behind.

The Protocol addresses these challenges by providing an effective pan-European intergovernmental framework and tools to tackle the climate crisis concerning drinking water and sanitation and to anticipate and prevent future pandemics.

Over the last 20 years, the Protocol – in many ways a precursor of SDG6 – has supported significant progress in water, sanitation, and health in the pan-European region and is a powerful tool for the implementation of the water, sanitation, hygiene, and health-related goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The national reports submitted during the fifth reporting cycle are clear evidence of the Protocol's usefulness. Continuous progress has

been made in the region in terms of increasing access to water and sanitation and improving drinking water quality. The reports also show that Parties and other States are effectively using the Protocol to address challenges linked to climate change, COVID-19, and possible future pandemics risks. In particular, countries are setting climate-sensitive targets to strengthen the resilience of their water and sanitation sectors.

I would like to underline **how responsive the Protocol's work has been to the COVID-19 pandemic**. Since the pandemic onset, back in 2020, a series of webinars were held on different aspects related to the interlinkages between the pandemic and WASH, such as environmental surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater.

In general, despite the challenges of the pandemic, the Protocol delivered many tangible results in the past triennium. Capacity-building activities and guidance documents were developed, such as the Affordability Brochure, which identifies and analyzes different policy options to ensure the affordability of safe drinking water and sanitation. A policy brief on sanitation in the pan-European region will be launched at this meeting, along with the Protocol brochure, which highlights the benefits of being a Party to the Protocol and gives insights into its technical areas.

This sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol paves

the way for the future. You are going to adopt an ambitious programme of work that aims to address the most pressing water and health challenges for our region. Its successful implementation, however, is strongly depending on **reliable and adequate funding**. Unfortunately, in the past, contributions received were insufficient to implement all activities and to cover the related staff costs.

I, therefore, **call upon all Parties** and other stakeholders to contribute to the Protocol trust funds and make your pledges at the roundtable on financing this Friday.

Lastly, I wish to recall that in March 2023, the **second United Nations Conference on Water** will be held in New York. We cannot miss this chance to accelerate progress on SDG 6 by using the Protocol and its tools to ensure universal access to water and sanitation. Therefore, this Meeting of the Parties will be a crucial opportunity to inspire and encourage commitments on water, sanitation, hygiene, and health to feed into the global UN Water Conference next year.

To conclude, I wish to thank the Chair, Vice-Chairs, and the entire Bureau of the Protocol for their personal commitment, the political guidance, and continuous support. I would, in particular, like to thank Switzerland for the hospitality it will provide to this meeting.

Finally, I also take the opportunity to thank our colleagues from the WHO Regional Office for Europe for the excellent cooperation between our two organizations, which constitutes an outstanding example of what we can achieve by delivering as one.

I wish all of us a successful meeting and fruitful outcomes. Thank you.
