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Statement

by

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United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

**Plenary session of the HIGH LEVEL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR ACTION "WATER FOR
LIFE", 2005-2015**

Tuesday, 9 June, 11:00–13:00

Dushanbe

Your Excellency Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of the
Republic of Tajikistan,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished Ministers, Ambassadors and Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to Tajikistan not only for hospitality and for organizing this Conference but also for its active engagement in the topics that we are addressing today.

Water scarcity is already a reality many places in the world, and will become even more severe with climate change. Scarcity can lead to tensions and conflict. However, it can also lead to cooperation, and the good news is that this often is the case. And cooperation on water can lead to strengthened cooperation in many more areas. This is the experience we bring from more than 20 years with the UNECE Water Convention. We are here

to encourage even more countries to join, also when it soon becomes available for global use and accession. We are here to encourage countries to cooperate on water.

More than half of all freshwater flows worldwide cross borders. Cooperation on water resources shared by two or more countries is therefore vital for peace, stability and economic growth, and a precondition for sustainable development. There will be no access to safe water and sanitation for all if transboundary waters are not available in sufficient quantity and of sufficient quality.

The UNECE Water Convention has provided a unique legal and institutional framework for transboundary water cooperation since 1992 and is entirely complementary to the United Nations Watercourses Convention that recently entered into force. The Convention permits the development and use of water resources, within certain rules such as the demand for advance consultation with other riparian countries. It has also helped in

the peaceful settlement of differences and led to the setting up of river basin commissions for joint management in numerous basins in the pan-European region. UNECE is currently working with riparian countries to improve practical cooperation in basins such as the Drin, Dniester, Neman, Kura, Aral Sea, Chu and Talas.

But transboundary cooperation also requires good national water governance: within the European Union National Policy Dialogue on Integrated Water Resources Management we are working on national water policies in 10 countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Through the Water Convention's institutional framework, countries are also supported in monitoring transboundary waters, jointly addressing climate change and disasters, reconciling water usage between different sectors and much more.

Countries from all over the world will soon be able to join the Water Convention. However, already now more than 60

countries from outside the pan-European region have participated in the Convention's activities. In practice this has resulted, for example, in the creation of a global network of transboundary basins working on climate change adaptation that includes the Congo, Danube, Dniester, Mekong, Niger, Rhine and Senegal Rivers, as well as the Northern Sahara aquifer system.

As the Decade has shown, a water-secure world for all can only be achieved through an integrated approach. The Water Convention's Protocol on Water and Health — serviced jointly by UNECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe — is a unique instrument that aims to protect human health and well-being by better water management and by preventing, controlling and reducing water-related diseases. It is the first international agreement of its kind adopted specifically to attain an adequate supply of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation for everyone and to protect drinking water sources effectively.

The work under the Protocol has contributed to progress on the Millennium Development Goals and is an effective tool for meeting future targets on water and sanitation. For example, the work on equitable access to water and sanitation helps countries to assess and address their own situation in this area.

I am pleased to see that the importance of this integrated approach and of transboundary cooperation is reflected in the draft SDG on water and will hopefully also be included in the related indicators. The legal and institutional instruments that I have described will help countries in implementing a water goal. I therefore wish to encourage States to use them in achieving universal access to safe water and sanitation and the protection and sustainable use of water resources.

Let me conclude by inviting you all to the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties of the UNECE Water Convention, to be

held on 17 to 19 November in Budapest, where you too will be able to contribute to its development.
