

**International conference on “Europe-Asia transboundary water cooperation”  
Geneva, 15 December, 10 a.m., room V**

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**Promoting transboundary cooperation at the global level by using the experience of the  
Water Convention**

- I would like to welcome all of you here today on behalf of UNECE and its Executive Secretary, Jan Kubis, who regrets not being able to be here with you. In particular, I would like to welcome participants from so many non-UNECE countries — Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Thailand and Viet Nam. I am also delighted to see many high-level representatives. This clearly shows the importance of the topic of the Conference.
- As expressed by Ms. Warrakulle on behalf of the Director-General, sustainable and cooperative management of transboundary water resources between Europe and Asia is key for the economic and social development, as well as for the security and stability, of the region.
- UNECE has supported Central Asian countries in enhancing cooperation and management of their transboundary waters over the past decade. We recognize the importance of involving all Aral Sea riparian countries and to strengthening cooperation with Afghanistan. To this end, we are starting a new project on cooperation between Tajikistan and Afghanistan on their shared resources. We are also planning to gradually offer Afghanistan the opportunity to get involved in our existing activities in Central Asia when the conditions are ripe.
- The UNECE region is one of the most advanced with regard to transboundary water cooperation. Much of this success is based on the UNECE Water Convention, which has inspired transboundary water agreements and the work of many joint bodies, such as river commissions. There are plentiful examples of agreements in the region based on the Convention, both in its western and eastern part: including the agreements between Spain and Portugal; agreements on the Meuse, Rhine, Scheldt, Danube and Sava Rivers, as well as on Lake Peipsi; and the many bilateral agreements between countries in Eastern Europe or between the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan.

- Also in Central Asia, the Water Convention can play an important role as it is based on equality and reciprocity and protects the rights of both downstream and upstream countries.
- The strength of the Water Convention resides in the fact that it is not only a sound legal framework reflecting the most modern approaches of international water law; it is also coupled with an institutional framework (the different governing and subsidiary bodies) and a programme of work. These are conducive to continuous progress, exchange of experience and mutual assistance and are a forum for discussion on emerging issues and traditional challenges.
- The importance of the UNECE Water Convention is increasingly recognized beyond the UNECE region. In recent years, more and more activities under the Convention have seen the participation of representatives from Asia, Africa and the Middle East.
- Some of the countries represented here today have not only participated, but have also actively contributed to the activities under the Convention over the past three years, on the same level as UNECE countries. For example Afghanistan, Mongolia and the Islamic Republic of Iran have contributed to the Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters.
- Such an interest for the Convention is easy to understand: there is no other international legal framework in force under whose umbrella countries can discuss issues related to transboundary water cooperation.
- That was one of the main reasons that made Parties decide in 2003 to open the Convention to all United Nations Members. However, Parties did not do that simply as an act of generosity to help other regions, but also for their own interests. They recognize that even if transboundary water cooperation is in many cases carried out at the local and regional levels, it has global implications. Water is a common good and the way it is managed has economic, social and environmental repercussions at the global level, as well as obvious implications for security. Thus the sharing of experience is key and much can be learned from other regions of the world, as the programme of our Conference shows very well.

- All this demonstrates that the entry into force of the amendment opening the Convention to countries outside the UNECE region is demanded and urgent. The last Meeting of the Parties set the goal of bringing the amendment into force by its next session, scheduled for November 2012. I would therefore like to call on all Parties that have not yet done so to ratify the amendment opening the Convention as soon as possible. I also thank all those Parties which have already ratified the amendment such as, most recently, Uzbekistan.
- But there is no time to lose, and we should not wait for the formal entry into force of the amendment to begin cooperation and exchange within the framework of the Convention. This was clearly stressed by the Parties when adopting the amendment. I therefore invite non-UNECE countries present here today to already join in cooperation within the framework of the Water Convention. I would like to stress that this does not necessarily mean accession to the Convention: participation and involvement in activities of non-Parties is not only possible, but very much welcome.
- 2012 will be a pivotal year for the Water Convention: it will mark the twentieth anniversary of its signature and the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties scheduled at the end of the year will adopt new directions for the work under the Convention that will guide future priorities and activities. All this provides an opportunity to take stock of achievements and discuss how to address the remaining challenges. The programme of work for 2013–2015, which will be collectively elaborated in the course of next year, will certainly include as a major element related to the opening of the Convention beyond the UNECE region. It is our expectation that this conference will provide an important input into this process. I encourage you to actively participate and make proposals in the coming days, so as to ensure that future work address your priorities and concerns.
- All the progress and successes achieved would not have been possible without the support and cooperation of numerous partners. The opening of the Convention will require strengthening partnerships with international, non-governmental and regional organizations. Only through joining forces will we be able to face and solve complex problems which require action at the economic, social, environmental and political levels. I would like to thank the many partners present today such as ESCAP, UNESCO, UNDP, UNEP, UNRCCA, GEF, the World Bank, EC-IFAS, SIC-ICWC, the European Union,

OSCE, the Ramsar Convention, CAREC, and the many non-governmental organizations — and forgive me if I am forgetting any. UNECE is committed to continue and expand joint work and I hope that we will be able to count on your cooperation and support when the Convention becomes global.

- Finally, I would like to thank the Government of Switzerland and in particular Sibylle Vermont, the Chair of the Water Convention, for co-hosting this conference and for the financial support to its organization. I would also like to thank the German Government for their support to this conference and to the programme “Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Water Resources Management in Central Asia” within the Berlin Water Process.
- I wish you a fruitful and successful meeting and hope to see many of you also in future meetings and events in the framework of the UNECE Water Convention, in particular the next Meeting of the Parties.

Thank you