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Statement

by

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at

**the Post-2015 Development Agenda Consultation on Water:
Water Resources Management, and Wastewater Management and Water Quality**

27 February 2013, Geneva

Honourable Chair, Secretary-General, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my pleasure to welcome you here to the Palais des Nations. I thank you for travelling from all over the world to participate in this important meeting.

You are all here today because your Governments and organizations recognize the importance of water in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. You recognize that water is not only critical in itself, it also underpins most of the other themes under discussion in the “World We Want” consultations.

Producing food is impossible without water. Achieving sustainable energy for all will not happen without taking water into consideration. And, for healthy people and healthy ecosystems, water is crucial. In fact, water is a key factor in discussions on development, economic prosperity, the fight against poverty, and environmental integrity, without which those discussions cannot hope to find concrete solutions.

One of the major challenges that water faces is that, even though central to other development and environment issues, it is not seen as such by the professionals working in those areas. I see this on a day-to-day basis here at UNECE. We have many programmes at UNECE that have relevance to water, such as trade, transport and energy, but they do not take water into consideration in their activities.

For example, UNECE has a Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards, which works with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization to develop internationally agreed commercial quality standards for agricultural products; yet water is not part of their discussions. UNECE also works on the standardization of vehicle regulations and promoting the use of sustainable energy; yet water does not enter the equation there either.

Given that excluding water from these conversations is the norm rather than the exception, we are living with a veritable blind spot when it comes to how serious water issues could become in the future. There will not only be a water crisis, but several other crises in other sectors that are caused by the lack of quality and quantity of water necessary to meet their demands.

While there are many reasons for concern in looking towards the future with regard to water, there are also glimmers of hope.

The success of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal on water shows that with strong political will and adequate resources

remarkable progress is achievable. Also, the implementation of integrated water resources management has progressed throughout the world.

In UNECE, we have a special reason to be proud and hopeful for the future of water: just three weeks ago an amendment to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes — also known as the Water Convention or Helsinki Convention — entered into force, opening the Convention to accession by countries outside the UNECE region. The Water Convention is now global and we are expecting countries outside the region to be able to accede to it by the end of this year.

The Convention has provided an important legal framework for cooperation since the 1990s and has made a great difference on the ground. It has fostered the development of transboundary agreements, the establishment of joint bodies and the strengthening of cooperation at both the political and technical levels. Its globalization offers a great opportunity for the promotion of water cooperation worldwide.

Why is cooperation on transboundary waters important and what does it have to do with the Post-2015 Development Agenda?

Sixty per cent of the global freshwater flow comes from the 276 transboundary river basins and lakes worldwide, where 40 per cent of the world's population lives. Over 90 per cent of countries have some of their territory in transboundary basins. Shared groundwater has also come to the forefront of water issues, as there are over 300 transboundary aquifers.

The management of waters in the transboundary context adds several levels of complexity, especially in basins that do not have some type of cooperative management framework. Upstream-downstream relations are often complicated over the sharing of water — and this is compounded when these basins experience a scarcity or an abundance of water. Regional economic development depends on the development and use of these shared waters, which during these tough economic times is not always straightforward.

For these reasons, transboundary water cooperation should be taken up in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. There cannot be water security — which also equates to food security, energy security and healthy citizens and ecosystems — unless countries cooperate over their shared water.

UNECE has played its role by coordinating the Water Resources Stream of the Post-2015 Development Agenda Thematic Consultation on Water. You will see how seriously this is taken from the agenda that you have before you for the next two days. We are depending on you, as voices for water, to be active in your participation both during the meeting and, especially afterwards to ensure that water has a secure place in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. If water is left off the agenda, we risk jeopardizing the livelihoods of everyone on the planet.

This being the United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation, I would like to encourage everyone to look beyond their own boundaries, whether political, institutional or sectoral. Let us work together for a brighter future for water.

In this spirit, let me conclude by praising and thanking all those involved - both UN-Water members and partners - such as UNECLAC, UNESCAP, FAO, UNEP, UNESCO, UNDP, WMO, GWP, IUCN, SIWI and WWF who have actively cooperated in the design and running of the Water Resources Management stream of the water consultation, including our meeting today. My gratitude also goes to the countries co-hosting the consultation for their political and financial support, as well as to our colleagues from UN-Habitat and AquaFed.

Thank you very much.