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**Statement**

**by**

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**Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

**at**

**the Meeting of Senior Officials of Central Asian States  
on Problems of the interpretation and effective application of basic principles  
of international law on the management of transboundary water resources in  
the context of Central Asia**

**Vienna, 6–7 March 2014**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to contribute with an opening statement to this meeting of senior officials on the interpretation and effective application of basic principles of international water legislation in the context of Central Asia, organized by the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia — UNRCCA.

It is a priority to develop constructive transboundary water cooperation with the objective of minimizing the risks of significant transboundary impact and to ensure an equitable distribution of the diverse benefits that follow from using water resources. That is why we need solid legal and institutional frameworks at the international and basin levels to govern the relations of riparian countries and to foster their cooperation.

Lately we have seen a remarkable progress in this respect at the global level. The 1992 UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes — known as the UNECE Water Convention or Helsinki Convention — originally negotiated as a regional instrument, is now open for accession by all Member States of the United Nations. The Water Convention has provided an important legal framework for cooperation since the 1990s and has a lot to offer to countries outside the pan-European region.

The global opening of the ECE Water Convention coincides with the expected entry into force in 2014 of the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. Together, these

global legal frameworks will enhance cooperation on and sustainable management of our precious shared water resources.

These two treaties are perfectly compatible and mutually complementary, and it is very important that they are implemented in a coherent manner. The United Nations Secretary-General and many countries and organizations have already called for the establishment of synergies in the implementation of the two Conventions.

Notably, the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention decided, at its sixth session in November 2012, to promote synergies and coordination with the 1997 Watercourses Convention by sharing the experience collected under the UNECE Water Convention to support the implementation of the 1997 Watercourses Convention.

For over 20 years the UNECE Water Convention has fostered the development of transboundary agreements, the establishment of joint institutions and the strengthening of cooperation at both political and technical levels. This has happened in very diverse circumstances, including in the context of economic transition and political tensions, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. The intergovernmental platform of the UNECE Water Convention has been an effective forum to promote transboundary water cooperation.

However, global framework conventions are not enough. Greater cooperation is needed in most if not all transboundary basins. The current level of cooperation in Central Asia needs to be developed further to cope with the existing and upcoming challenges, in particular the possible effects of climate

change. This seminar is timely and very topical: How to move forward with water cooperation in Central Asia on the basis of a proper interpretation and effective application of basic principles of international water legislation? If the two days here in Vienna could result in an improved and shared understanding of these principles, this would be a great step forward.

UNECE is actively cooperating on transboundary water management with all Central Asian countries and we hope that this seminar will give an impetus and new ideas for further work. Cooperation with UNRCCA has always been important for UNECE, and I hope that these two days could prepare the ground for a deepened cooperation between our respective organizations.

I wish you good work and constructive dialogue over the coming two days.

Thank you.

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