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STATEMENT BY Ms. D. HÜBNER, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

at the , Koudum, the Netherlands,

I came very late last night and could not see the beauty of the place. Today I have one more reason for thanking you for bringing me here. I must give credit to all our predecessors who in 1994 had no doubts that it should be the Netherlands whom we should trust and invite to take care of the task force on monitoring and assessment. That was the first step that later on has brought us to this ceremony of today.

I participate with great pleasure in the inauguration ceremony of the International Water Assessment Centre. I am happy indeed that the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes has generated the Centre as an instrument for cooperation. First of all, I would like to thank the Government of the Netherlands which has accepted to host the centre at its Institute for Inland Water Management and Waste Water Treatment (RIZA), the staff of RIZA who for more than six years has provided us with their expertise to monitor and assess transboundary waters. I want to also express my appreciation to all the countries, institutions and individual experts who made every effort to support this initiative.

In Europe we increasingly care for environment and water related issues. Cooperation on water problems has always been extremely important to ECE and will remain a cornerstone of our activities. We have managed to put in place a unique regional environmental framework addressing most important issues of transboundary cooperation. Five environmental conventions and related protocols address the protection of transboundary waters, industrial accidents, air pollution control, environmental impact assessment, and public information and participation in decision making. We all know that to further prevent man-made deterioration of waters, such as the drying-up of wetlands, the adverse effects of floods, and pollution, much remains to be done and it can be done only through cooperation efforts.

The river Rhine is one example of a successful transboundary cooperation. It flows through one of the most densely populated areas in the world. It is the source of drinking water for more than 20 million people. It has the worlds highest ship traffic density. 20% of the world production of chemicals is made along its borders. Some USD 70 billion were invested in the construction and improvement of waste-water treatment plants to cut the pollution by most harmful substances. Investments were also made to optimise production processes have been optimised. Emission permits are well elaborated, facilities were built to store water in case of accidents, emergency warning is well established, and regular surveys are conducted to screen for new potential pollutants. These joint efforts have turned this river from an extremely polluted water body in the 1960's to a good quality river, where in recent years the salmon re-appeared.

Coming from the country which has been linked to this part of Netherlands through the legend on Lady of Stavoren, I can say that much progress has been done in the eastern part of Europe. Even the quality of east European waters is not that discouraging any more as the general opinion makes us believe. However, the real threat is that the water quality of these rivers is still dominated by adverse effects of accidental pollution. Recent examples include accidental spills of toxic substances at Baia Mare in Romania and Mitrovica in Kosovo with their disastrous effects on the environment and human health.

Continued cooperative effort is badly needed. We need tailor-made assessments to set priorities to protect our rivers, to choose the best management practice, and to examine the effectiveness of measures taken under the Convention on Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.

It is not only the pollution that poses a threat to human health and safety and the ecological functioning of transboundary waters. The mitigation of adverse effects of floods on downstream populations and ecosystems is still a problem in many rivers. The Guidelines on Sustainable Flood Prevention, adopted by the Parties at their second meeting this year, call for an information policy that covers risk communication and facilitates public participation in decision-making. IWAC's role to control and reduce the risks originating from floods, dam failures and ice hazards is important. There is a need

for reliable information to take the necessary precautions. IWAC will help countries so that they can inform without delay each downstream country likely to be affected by floods, critical water levels or ice drifts.

We need an intensive care for our rivers in Europe and for that we count very much on the Center. I do believe that one of the most important tasks of IWAC is to establish a dialogue between scientists and policy makers to ensure the necessary link between scientific results and technical know-how and policies and practices. IWAC shall ensure that all its tasks and main activities are properly coordinated and harmonized with pertinent legislation and policies of the European Union.

When implementing its environmental conventions and protocols, ECE is strongly committed to further advance collaboration among Parties in order to turn agreed principles into action. This is based on partnership and synergies among all stakeholders. This also calls for a non-confrontational compliance regime under a treaty, to assist countries achieving the goals and objectives of the treaty regime. This policy can only be implemented if an adequate baseline exists against which progress can be measured. Clear objectives capable of being verified are part of a compliance information system. Monitoring, reporting, review and evaluation are important elements of this system, which have received much attention in the Guidelines on monitoring and assessment to which IWAC's staff already made a solid contribution.

To carry on is work, the Center will need a strong commitment and a cooperative approach on the countries' side, as it will provide services not only to joint bodies on matters relating to monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters, but also to countries that are carrying out pilot projects in 8 river basins in eastern Europe and Central Asia. With regard to that, I am told that the results of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, which met on Thursday and Friday this week in Makkum, are promising.

IWAC will contribute to capacity building through its training courses and workshops to improve monitoring and information systems for decision-making and providing reliable data. IWAC will therefore be crucial in the process of setting cooperation standards and improving it and will become a prominent partner of ECE in cooperation with the other regional commissions, UNEP, UNESCO, WMO and WHO.

Currently, all UN organizations carrying out water programmes are joining efforts to evaluate achievements: "10 years after Rio" and the "World Water Development Report" are the most prominent examples. We will not make it without IWAC for these evaluations. I am particularly happy, that IWAC already offered its assistance, well before its official opening. Another example is the cooperation with the other regional commissions. We are implementing a special programme with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) for the economies of Central Asia, which includes the rational and efficient use of water resources. We have held consultations with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) which will lead to joint activities to manage transboundary groundwaters.

The list of efforts, processes and events for which we count on IWAC is long. IWAC's expertise is crucial for these activities as well as the continued cooperation with UNESCO on the management and protection of groundwater, a joint endeavour under the Water Conventions and UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme. I am confident that the centre will assist in the development and implementation of tailor-made monitoring and assessment systems thus sharing our experience with other regions in the world.

Nothing of what I have just said could have happened if not the host country of the collaborating centre, the Netherlands, one of the most essential contributors to our work. The Dutch experts have always been active and respected members of our working bodies. It is of course partly due to the fact that the Netherlands, being so successful in its water management has a lot of experience on water use and water protection. But what is heart-warming is that it is ready to share this asset with other countries of our region and is strongly committed to further assist in implementing the Water Convention. Implementation and enforcement is the real challenge of today.

I would sincerely like to thank our hosts for arranging this inauguration ceremony.
I certainly look forward to further active work of the collaborating centre and the continued understanding and support of the Netherlands Government for our regional environmental efforts.