www.unece.org/index.php?id=33692

A workshop about river basin commissions and other joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation, focusing on legal and institutional issues, opened today in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention).

The two-day workshop aims to identify good practices in the legal and institutional arrangements, procedures and working methods of joint bodies.

The workshop brings together over 120 participants representing governments, river basin organizations, experts and academia with hands-on experience of participation in joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation, as well as those working on the establishment of new agreements and institutions.

Discussions today and tomorrow will aim to identify good practices in the procedures and working methods of joint institutions. For example, the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine, a winner of the European Riverprize 2013, is expected to present the evolution and gradual expansion of cooperation in the Rhine Basin. The International Commission for the Congo-Oubangui-Sangha Basin will describe its path from a navigation-dominated body towards an integrated water resources management commission. The binational Authority of Lake Titicaca will share its experience of implementing the Master Plan to address the use of resources in the Lake Titicaca, Desaguadero River, Lake Poopo and Coipasa Salt Lake. The Mekong River Commission will share its experience with organizational reforms.

The debate also aims to highlight recent successes and ongoing efforts to establish new agreements and joint bodies, such as the emerging Afghan-Tajik cooperation on hydrology and environment in the upper Amu Darya Basin, with a view to identifying challenges and guiding such efforts in the basins and aquifers not covered by agreements and joint institutions.

Over 90 per cent of the world's population lives in countries that share transboundary river and lake basins. Yet, many of these transboundary waters are not covered by agreements of the riparian States and do not have joint institutional structures in charge of their management and cooperation. Notably, two thirds of the world's 277 international river basins, plus transboundary aquifer systems, lack any type of cooperative management framework.

The discussions at the workshop, organized in the International Year of Water Cooperation, support the ongoing debate on the importance of proper legal and institutional arrangements for water resources management in all transboundary basins and the need for the inclusion of good governance of water resources in the future sustainable development goals under the post-2015 development agenda.

A second workshop tentatively planned for April 2014 will focus on specific areas and technical aspects of cooperation in the framework of joint bodies, such as cooperation on preservation and restoration of ecosystems, water infrastructure, contingency planning, navigation, fisheries, etc.

For more information see http://www.unece.org/env/water/workshop_joint_bodies_2013.html or contact:

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Note to Editors:

The first workshop in this series is being organized under the leadership of the governments of Finland and Germany, in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization (UNESCO) International Hydrological Programme (IHP), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN), the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), the Global Water Partnership (GWP), the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The meeting is funded by the Governments of Estonia, Finland, Germany and Luxembourg.

The UNECE Water Convention recognizes that effective joint bodies are key to ensuring sustainable management of transboundary water resources. The conclusion of agreements between countries sharing transboundary waters and the establishment of joint bodies such as river, lake or aquifer commissions is a main obligation under the Convention, which supports their creation and reinforcement. Since 1992, the Convention has played a crucial role in the pan-European region in facilitating the establishment of joint institutions. Building on the successes achieved, the Parties to the Convention amended it in 2003 to open it up to accession by non-UNECE countries. Having received the necessary number of ratifications, the amendments to the UNECE Water Convention to open it globally entered into force on 6 February 2013. It is expected that non-UNECE countries will be able to accede to the Convention at the end of 2013.