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**Statement**

**by**

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**United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

**Executive Secretary**

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

**at**

**UNEA6 side event:**

**“Transboundary Ecosystem Restoration: Key to Addressing the Planetary Crises”**

**Tuesday, 27 February 2024, 13:30-14:45**

**Conference Room 11, UN Compound in Gigiri, Nairobi**

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), it is my pleasure to welcome you all to this side event focusing on transboundary ecosystem restoration.

Today, we gather with a shared recognition of the pressing challenges posed by climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. These issues transcend borders, demanding collaborative and innovative solutions. Our event aims to highlight the transformative power of transboundary ecosystem restoration in addressing these global crises.

Over the next 70 minutes, we will explore how Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) serve as tools in fostering cooperation and guiding efforts toward transboundary ecosystem restoration. UNECE services numerous MEAs, among them the UN Water Convention, which is open for accession to all UN Member States.

More than 60% of the Earth's freshwater flows across national borders. If we look at ecosystems more broadly - wetlands, forests and

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mountains - it becomes evident that the majority of them are also transboundary. Cooperating on their protection and restoration holds the key to not only fostering peace but also catalysing sustainable development, championing environmental stewardship, and fostering regional integration.

The United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) concluded in Montreal, Canada, in December 2022 with the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This landmark agreement underscores the critical role of transboundary cooperation in safeguarding and restoring our ecosystems. Among its targets is a commitment to ensure that by 2030, a minimum of 30% of terrestrial and inland water areas, particularly those of significant importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functionality, are effectively conserved and managed.

Transboundary cooperation in ecosystem restoration not only enhances effectiveness but also optimises efficiency. Take, for instance, the Danube and Rhine basins, where basin organizations have played a significant role in revitalizing floodplain areas. Moreover, ecosystem restoration initiatives such as reforestation and floodplain reconnection stand as cornerstone measures in river basin management plans and transboundary adaptation strategies.

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The UN Water Convention plays a pivotal role in transboundary ecosystem restoration by providing a robust framework for integrated water resources management. The Convention facilitates collaborative international efforts to address shared challenges related to water quality, quantity, and ecosystem health. By promoting transboundary cooperation and the sustainable use of water resources, the Water Convention enables effective ecosystem restoration initiatives that transcend national borders. Currently, the Water Convention has 52 Parties spanning across Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America, with numerous countries in the accession process.

The Convention obliges its Parties to protect and, where necessary, restore transboundary ecosystems. Through capacity-building and knowledge exchange, dating back to the early 2000s, the Convention has actively supported its Parties in this endeavour. This is exemplified by pilot projects, like those in the Dniester and Chu Talas, where ecosystem restoration measures were successfully implemented.

Looking ahead, the Water Convention's forthcoming programme of work dedicates a full sub-programme area to the topic, along with the organization of a global workshop. The next programme of work is expected to be adopted at the upcoming Meeting of the Parties in

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October 2024.

As we navigate through today's discussions, our aim is not only to inform but also to inspire action. We hope that you will leave this event equipped with a deeper understanding of the Water Convention and the Ramsar Convention, empowered to leverage their guidelines, tools, and expertise in their respective national contexts. Let me also use this opportunity to encourage all countries to accede to the Water Convention.

If you seek to delve deeper into the scope and impact of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements serviced by UNECE, we extend a warm invitation to join us on Thursday afternoon for our side event, dedicated to exploring the vital role of these powerful agreements.

Before we proceed further, I would like to extend my gratitude to Slovenia for their exemplary leadership and dedication as the lead organizer of this side event. My sincere appreciation also to our partners who have contributed their expertise and support to make this event possible. Thank you to Costa Rica, Uganda, the Ramsar Convention, UNEP, IUCN and Space-SI for your commitment and partnership.

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Together, let us reaffirm our commitment to transboundary ecosystem restoration and jointly tackle the planetary crises we currently face.

Thank you.

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