



Statement

By

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Executive Secretary

of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

On the occasion of

**the establishment of the UNECE International PPP Specialist
Centre of Excellence on Water and Sanitation**

Lisbon, 17 May 2017



Mr. Carlos Martins, State Secretary for the Environment
Mr Carlos Pina, Presidente of the Laboratoria Nacional the Engenharia Civil
Mr. Diogo Faria de Oliveira, Head of the International PPP Specialist Centre for Water and Sanitation,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Water, sanitation and health are at the very core of sustainable development – foundations upon which we build lives, livelihoods and economies. Water is a human right and water and sanitation are essential for human dignity. These are challenges for every citizen, for all cities, for all countries – and they are both challenges and opportunities for companies around the world.

There has been a drought for 50 years in Nigeria. There are 2,3 billion people without proper sanitation in the world. In 2015, world leaders pledged, by adopting the Sustainable Development Goals, to ensure that everyone has access to clean water and improved sanitation.

Even in our UNECE region, we have 100 million without piped water. 69 million people without improved sanitation, and 14 deaths every day due to water related diseases.

These problems will only become more important in the future. Climate change hit us through water – it will lead to either too much water, or too little water, and polluted water. This is threatening our access to clean and affordable water.

A recently published report of the Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme (TWAP) shows that 218 out of 286 river basins in the world are at high risk of overuse or pollution, due to lack of waste water treatment, poor agriculture practices or industrial accidents. In addition, the construction of dams and water diversions is often planned and undertaken without adequate consultation, and without reference to international water cooperation instruments. Nearly 900 million people or 30% of the population living in transboundary basins are highly exposed to floods and droughts.

More than 90% of all submitted Intended Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement refer to water. I hope this number will increase in the future as countries struggle to address the water challenges of the future.

UNECE WATER CONVENTION

Water can become a source of conflict in the world – but it can also be an important source of cooperation.

UNECE has significant experience in promoting cooperation on solving issues related to water within our Water Convention that focuses its work on key aspects of transboundary cooperation: for example it promotes climate change adaptation in transboundary basins, it supports inter-sectoral cooperation by addressing the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus, and it fosters buy-in to cooperation processes by assessing the benefits.

The work under the Water Convention shows that we can create a global coalition to address water resources management problems and promote Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). Only by uniting forces between countries, international organizations, financing institutions, non-governmental organizations, academia and the private sector will we be able to broaden the exchange of experience and mobilize the needed political support and funding for transboundary water cooperation. This is the very spirit of this International PPP Specialist Centre of Excellence on Water and Sanitation.

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PROTOCOL ON WATER AND HEALTH

Even more important for the International PPP Specialist Center of Excellence on Water and Sanitation - is the protocol.

UNECE has a longstanding history of addressing water, sanitation and health challenges in our region and beyond through our Protocol on Water and Health, jointly serviced by UNECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe. Portugal has been a party since 2006 – and is part of the Bureau with the participation by Ana Barreto Albuquerque. We thank you for this strong support and commitment.

The Protocol has been a forerunner of the Sustainable Development Goals 6 and other water, sanitation and health related targets. It puts the region on the right track by promoting integration of policies. This is a holistic and preventive approach to water and sanitation, focusing on quality and equity issues. The Protocol has proven to be a unique factor in progress in our region with its targets and its reporting mechanism. It also serves as a regional platform for exchange of experience, which helps to address the challenges such as weak governance, intersectoral cooperation, capacity and -increasingly – insufficient financial resources.

The Protocol has also done ground-breaking work in the field of the human right to water and sanitation. It has helped numerous governments, including Portugal, to apply an equity lens to ensure that these rights are guaranteed to all – including people living in poverty, rural residents and vulnerable or marginalized groups. Using the language of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the Protocol on Water and Health helps to make sure that we leave no one behind.

These dimensions – equity, safety, prevention, intersectoral collaboration, and focus on the entire water cycle - should be given due consideration in the work of the International PPP Specialist Centre of Excellence, including during the development of international PPP standards.

It is encouraging to see already here today the strong potential synergies between the work under the Protocol on Water and Health, and the International PPP Specialist Centre of Excellence in Water and Sanitation in Portugal.

CHALLENGES

To address the challenges identified under both the Water Convention and especially on Protocol on Water and Health, we need to ensure long term political commitment to cooperation.

We need to strengthen capacity for cooperation, at the legal, diplomatic and technical levels.

We need to ensure adequate financing and significant investments in water management and sanitation. This is where the International PPP Specialist Centre of Excellence is an important step.

PPP WORK

No country can do it on its own. No city can do it on their own. We need the private sector to become strongly involved – and this is exactly where the new Centre can play a critical role.



However, many PPP attempts do not succeed. This leaves countries and cities with projects that do not deliver, and with citizens and civil society that protest. This has been most critical exactly in the water sector, where – from some quarters – there is strong resistance against private sector involvement in water supply.

This is why we need to strengthen our efforts for “people first” PPPs.

The UNECE work on PPPs focuses on the development of standards and best practices. PPPs are identified in SDG 17 as one of the preferred options to achieve the SDGs. PPPs have been traditionally used in infrastructure as a “value for money” tool. However, in order to become fit for purpose for the UN 2030 Agenda, a new social and developmental model will be needed that engages with all stakeholders, and which involves projects that are transformative, replicable and scalable. Projects which increase access to essential services also to the underserved and socially and economically vulnerable members of society. The UNECE is in the process of rebranding the PPP mechanism to also include these social and environmental aspects, besides the economical. This new PPP model is referred to as “people first”, where, among all stakeholders, people are the main beneficiaries.

The UNECE is inviting all stakeholders to develop and showcase projects that are consistent with the people first criteria. It launched in 2016 a programme to achieve 500 people first PPP projects by the end of 2017. I am very happy to see that one of the main functions of the Centre of Excellence in Portugal is to identify projects in the water and sanitation sector, which we will include in this list of 500.

In its standard-setting work, the UNECE covers many sectors, including water and sanitation, where a standard is being developed by an international project team. The role of the Centre of Excellence on Water and Sanitation in Portugal is crucial in collecting the material that will serve as empirical evidence for this standard. I therefore encourage you to give priority in your work to this important task, so that we could finalise the standard on water and sanitation in the coming months.

Please rest assured that you will not be working on your own and in isolation. The UNECE has a number of affiliated Centres of Excellence in many countries around the world (China, France, Spain, Lebanon) all working in their respective sectors and in a network to identify international PPP best practices and people first case studies. We will shortly organise a meeting of all the Centres to make sure that all the agreed outputs are on track.

The best practices and standards are only a first step to assist our member States in improving their project delivery. Implementation in countries, through project training and capacity-building activities is a core part of the UNECE PPP mandate. This is done with the assistance of the PPP Business Advisory Board, made up of senior representatives from the private sector with project experience. We are pleased here also to have a dedicated member from Portugal, Mr. Pedro Neves, who is also with us today.

The Board helps governments to implement projects through consultative visits and technical assistance. I look forward to the Centre’s contribution to our capacity building and training efforts, both in Portugal and in activities organised by UNECE in other countries.

The establishment today of this International PPP Specialist Centre is an important step. I congratulate you all on this achievement.



Let us work together to ensure universal and equitable access to affordable drinking water, and adequate sanitation and hygiene in the pan-European region.

The UN now has a unique new Secretary-General in Mr. Guterres, from your country Portugal, who has launched a series of very needed and important reforms.

However, the former UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon often advised us that men, women – and Under-Secretary-Generals – should be like water. “If you meet a small stone, pass by it. If you meet a large stone you must have the force to push it away.” We are facing great challenges, great stones in the future management of water and supply of water and sanitation. We must work together to push away the stones, the obstacles.

This is exactly the spirit of this new International PPP Specialist Centre of Excellence for Water and Sanitation.

Thank you for the partnership. A warm congratulation on the MoU, on the Center and on the achievement.

Thank you.