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**Statement**

**by**

**Mr. Sven ALKALAJ**

**United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

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

**at**

**the Workshop on Transboundary Water Cooperation “Latin American and pan-European regions: Sharing experiences and learning from each other”**

**Buenos Aires, 11 June 2013**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Damas y caballeros,

I am very pleased to welcome participants to the Workshop on Transboundary Water Cooperation, “Latin American and pan-European regions: sharing experiences and learning from each other”, in Buenos Aires.

The coming two days of dialogue will focus on a key issue for the regions of both the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE): namely cooperation on and sustainable use of water resources.

As most of the waters in our regions are transboundary, effective cooperation is crucial to their social, economic and environmental development, as well as for security and stability. It also means that there is significant potential for both regions to benefit from an exchange of experience on water issues and to learn from each other.

While the UNECE region is in general advanced in terms of cooperation on transboundary waters, the level and effectiveness of that cooperation varies across the region. At the same time, population growth, economic development, climate change and other factors are putting an ever-growing pressure on water resources: demands from agriculture, mining, energy production, industrial development and drinking water supply are constantly increasing. Thus, balancing multiple water uses equitably and reasonably at the national and transboundary levels is already a major challenge and is likely to grow.

Despite these challenges, significant progress has been achieved in the UNECE region over the past two decades. This, in many ways, is due to the flexible framework for cooperation on transboundary waters provided by the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes – the UNECE Water Convention – since 1992.

By its nature, the Water Convention is a flexible tool applicable in different social, economic and political situations. Through its Meeting of the Parties, the Convention provides a unique intergovernmental forum to discuss transboundary water cooperation, assess progress, share experience and identify good practices. Moreover, the activities carried out in the framework of the Convention foster concrete action on the ground to support Parties, as well as other countries, in addressing emerging issues such as adaptation to climate variability and change in the transboundary context.

Drawing on their direct implementation experience, Parties to the UNECE Water Convention have recognized that the Convention can provide a broader framework for improving transboundary cooperation and have therefore amended it to open it to countries beyond the UNECE region. In force since February 2013, the amendment will allow any United Nations Member State to accede to the Water Convention by the end of the year.

The globalization of the Water Convention has set off a process of continuous learning and exchange by providing a platform for cooperation for all United Nations Member States. Since 2010, more than 30 countries outside the UNECE region have actively participated in activities under the Convention and some have expressed a formal interest in acceding to it.

I am happy to learn that many of the Latin American and Caribbean countries that have previously taken part in activities under the UNECE Water Convention, and have expressed interest in learning more about it, are present here today.

The process of globalization of the Water Convention is welcomed and encouraged by the broader United Nations family. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his message on the occasion of World Water Day on 22 March 2013, hailed the imminent globalization of the UNECE Water Convention and urged countries outside the region to join it and further develop it.

I, therefore, very much look forward to working closely with countries of the ECLAC region in the framework of the Water Convention in the near future. I strongly believe that our regions can mutually benefit from sharing knowledge and good practices in the field of transboundary water cooperation. In particular, in the UNECE region we are aware of the remarkable progress achieved in the ECLAC region in developing international legal and institutional frameworks for transboundary surface waters and groundwaters in several transboundary basins.

We expect to learn a lot from the successful examples of transboundary cooperation in the ECLAC region that will be presented at this workshop and also to reflect together on the benefits of transboundary water cooperation in terms of socioeconomic development and growth and environmental protection.

I would also like to take this opportunity to mention the ongoing cooperation between UNECE and ECLAC aimed at advancing the implementation of a regional instrument on the rights of access to information, participation and justice in environmental matters, in other words for the promotion of Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration.

As you may know, this initiative, led by Chile, was one of the main outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference last summer, when several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean committed to promoting Principle 10 in the region. Fifteen years ago, UNECE countries had the same idea; and this was realized through the adoption of the so-called Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, the only international binding instruments rooted in Principle 10.

I am convinced that the UNECE experience will benefit your process in this area and that the universal implementation of the rights enshrined in the Aarhus Convention will benefit transboundary water cooperation and management in the ECLAC region.

Let me conclude by thanking our partners: ECLAC, UNESCO, the Global Environment Facility IW:LEARN programme, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the University of Bologna Campus in Buenos Aires, which have made possible the organization of this workshop.

I also thank them and other partners of the Convention for their current and future efforts to promote the UNECE Water Convention and for their commitment to improving transboundary water cooperation.

Globalization of the UNECE Water Convention will not be possible without strong cooperation with partners, and I therefore look forward to continue working with them on promoting transboundary water cooperation worldwide.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Italian Cultural Institute for hosting this pioneering event.

I hope that this workshop will represent an important step towards closer cooperation between the UNECE and ECLAC regions and I wish you fruitful and open discussions over the coming two days.  
Thank you for your attention.

Thank you.

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