



NATIONS UNIES

COMMISSION ÉCONOMIQUE
POUR L'EUROPE

ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫЕ НАЦИИ

ЕВРОПЕЙСКАЯ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКАЯ
КОМИССИЯ

UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR EUROPE

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement

by

Mr. Sven ALKALAJ

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

the opening plenary of the Budapest Water Summit

Tuesday, 8 October, 13:00–17:00

Millenáris Park, Budapest

Mr. President, Secretary-General, Royal Highnesses,
Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to Hungary not only for organizing the Budapest Water Summit but also for its active engagement in the topics that I will address today.

Hungary lies at the heart of the Danube River basin, the most international basin in the world. With 90% of its waters coming from transboundary rivers, your country is very well aware of the importance of cooperation over shared waters.

Globally, 60 per cent of freshwater flow is in the basins of transboundary rivers and lakes, where 40 per cent of the world's population live. **Cooperation on water resources** shared by two or more countries is therefore vital for peace, stability and economic growth and a precondition for sustainable development. There will be no access to safe water

and sanitation for all if transboundary waters are not available in sufficient quantity and of sufficient quality.

Managing shared waters sustainably requires trust, a shared vision, political will, a set of common rules and an institutional structure to support implementation. These elements form the basis of the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, a unique legal and intergovernmental framework for transboundary water cooperation that has been in force for 17 years.

The implementation of the UNECE Water Convention, also called the Helsinki Convention, has made a great difference on the ground and has led to a significant improvement in transboundary water management in the UNECE region. The Convention has facilitated numerous agreements and joint bodies as well as softer forms of cooperation.

The Danube River basin is perhaps the best example for such successful cooperation, despite the numerous challenges, such as the high number of countries in the basin – 18 in all – and the immense differences in history and socio-economic conditions. Supported by UNECE and other partners, these countries, including Hungary, negotiated the Danube River Protection Convention in the 1990s and established the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River Basin. The Danube agreement is largely based on the UNECE Water Convention.

The strength of the Water Convention resides in the fact that it is not only a sound legal framework reflecting the most modern approaches of international water law. It is also coupled with an institutional framework and a programme of work that are conducive to continuous progress, the exchange of experience and knowledge, and mutual assistance. The institutional framework provides a forum for discussion on long-standing challenges, as well as emerging issues such as adaptation to

climate change in transboundary basins, or the water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus.

If I may, I would like to give you a recent concrete example of such work, in a project implemented by UNECE and UNDP for the Neman River Basin in Belarus, Lithuania and the Kaliningrad Region of the Russian Federation. The project has led to a common understanding on future water availability and water use, taking into account possible climate change impacts, and has shown the need for a transboundary approach to river basin management and climate change adaptation. The project and its outcomes are also expected to support the negotiation of a basin agreement.

Countries from outside the UNECE region are realizing the relevance of the experience and intergovernmental framework under the Convention: more than 40 countries from outside the pan-European region have already participated in the Convention's activities. In practice this has included

participation, for example, in a global network of transboundary basins working on climate change adaptation, which includes the Congo, Danube, Dniester, Mekong, Niger, Rhine and Senegal Rivers, as well as the Northern Sahara aquifer system.

Because of its global relevance, Parties to the Convention decided to turn the Water Convention into a global legal framework for transboundary cooperation. The entry into force in February 2013 of amendments opened it to accession by all United Nations Member States. It is expected that countries outside the UNECE region will be able to join the Convention by early 2014.

A milestone is being reached in 2013, the International Year of Water Cooperation, with the opening up of the UNECE Convention, as well as the expected entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses – also known as the New York Watercourses Convention.

We will then be fortunate to have two complementary, compatible and mutually-reinforcing treaties in place that will offer countries a comprehensive framework for transboundary water cooperation and avoidance of conflict. The new treaty regime will strengthen transboundary water cooperation if the two legal frameworks are implemented in a synergistic way, as called for by the Secretary-General.

I look forward to countries joining the two Conventions and benefiting from a regime that provides for institutional development, assistance on substance and an open governance structure, as well as a comprehensive legal framework.

The global opening of the UNECE Convention cannot and should not be the work of UNECE alone: the regional commissions, UNESCO and the Global Environment Facility are vital partners. It is equally important that non-governmental actors, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the

World Wide Fund for Nature, play a significant role. I look forward to strengthening this cooperation.

Cooperation is also needed at the national and international level to achieve **access to safe water and sanitation for all**. In spite of tremendous efforts undertaken by the global community in pursuit of water- and sanitation-related Millennium Development Goals, as of 2011 we still had 768 million people without access to safe water and 2.5 billion people lacking access to adequate sanitation. The sanitation target was missed by a large margin.

Though not so dramatic as on the global scale, the situation in the pan-European region still needs the utmost attention, with 19 million people not having access to safe drinking water and 67 million without adequate sanitation. Overall progress in increasing access also masks significant disparities within and between the countries, between urban and rural areas, as well as between high- and low-income groups. Such disparities affect

mostly the poor, those belonging to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups and rural populations, regardless of the countries' socio-economic status.

The Protocol on Water and Health is a unique instrument, which aims to protect human health and well-being by better water management, including the protection of water ecosystems, and by preventing, controlling and reducing water-related diseases.

It is the first international agreement of its kind adopted specifically to attain an adequate supply of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation for everyone, and to protect effectively drinking water sources. The Protocol is jointly serviced by UNECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe

The Protocol has proven effective in contributing to progress on the Millennium Development Goals and would certainly provide an effective tool for meeting future targets on water and sanitation. I would therefore like to present it to you as a regional example of good practice.

The Protocol is based upon a long list of principles—such as the precautionary and polluter-pays principles—but I would like to emphasize in particular the principle of equitable access to water, adequate in terms both of quantity and of quality, that should be provided for all members of the population, especially those who suffer a disadvantage or social exclusion. There is a clear link here to the right to water and sanitation explicitly recognized by both the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council in 2010. To assist national and local authorities, a scorecard system has been developed under the Protocol—and tested in Portugal and Ukraine, as well as in the City of Paris—to determine the level of equitable access and, for example, to point out vulnerable population groups that are still left aside.

At the centre of the Protocol is the requirement that Parties set national targets and target dates in 20 areas, such as the quality of the drinking water supplied and the application of recognized

good practice to the management of water supply and sanitation. These targets reflect national priorities and national capacities. Many Parties have developed targets alone, others have desired assistance in doing so but still lead the work and define their own targets.

These efforts have contributed greatly to improving institutional and policy frameworks and to establishing effective coordination mechanisms at the national level between environment, water and health authorities, which in turn have helped countries to attract donors for infrastructure projects. UNECE and WHO also work closely with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and its Water Fund to provide member States with more options for financing national actions.

The Protocol thus provides a practical and tailored approach to water management in support of universal access to safe water and sanitation and could support implementation of post-2015 development agenda targets in these fields. The Protocol is for

now a regional instrument but that might well change and I hope that its success will encourage others to follow and to join it when the time comes.

Finally, let me call upon you to reflect the importance of water for all areas of life by establishing a dedicated SDG on water encompassing all the above-mentioned aspects: water supply and sanitation, as well as sustainable water resources management at the basin level. The legal instruments that I have described might help in eventually implementing such an SDG on water and for furthering the post-2015 development agenda. I therefore wish to encourage States to use them in achieving universal access to safe water and sanitation and the protection and sustainable use of water resources.

Thank you.
