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Elements for a statement

by

Mr. Christian Friis Bach

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at the

**Fifth Workshop on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change
in Transboundary Basins**

Geneva, 14 October 2014

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Welcome to the fifth Workshop on Adaptation to Climate Change in Transboundary Basins under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.
- Recently I attended the UN Climate Summit in New York. Numerous world leaders highlighted the negative impacts of climate change, many of which are transmitted through water. Several leaders warned that climate change may result in increased conflict over dwindling natural resources, such as water.
- The only way to overcome and prevent such potential conflicts is through cooperation, in particular water cooperation. Cooperation on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins enables the sharing of the costs and benefits of adaptation measures, better management of uncertainty through the exchange of data and information, and enlargement of the range and location of measures available, thereby providing better and more cost-effective solutions.
- Many of the basins represented in today's meeting have demonstrated how cooperation can lead to progress: several basins even in tense political situations have developed joint adaptation strategies. Significant progress has been made, for example, in the Neman and Dniester basins, as well as the Danube and Mekong basins. In the Western Sahara Aquifer basin, pilot projects have improved irrigation efficiency thereby saving energy and water. Once the Dniester adaptation strategy has been implemented, for example, it will help to protect almost 8 million people.
- These cases show that water is not necessarily a cause of conflict, but can be rather a source of cooperation, especially in situations of climate change. In some basins, climate change and climate variability have even triggered

transboundary cooperation. For example, the Rhine and Danube Conventions and also the Meuse agreement have flood risk reduction as one of their aims. The Mekong agreement has a similar origin and goal. All these basins are now also working on climate change adaptation.

- In order to replicate these experiences elsewhere, information needs to be shared, such as through the global network of basins working on climate change adaptation that is supported jointly by UNECE and the International Network of Basin Organizations. I am particularly happy to welcome here the many representatives of that global network from the Mekong, Niger, Congo, Senegal, Dniester, Neman, Chu Talas, Rhine and Meuse Rivers, Lake Victoria and the Western Sahara Aquifer System. I invite other basins represented here today to join the network. I am also pleased to hear that you are preparing a collection of lessons learned and good practices on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins in order to share your accumulated knowledge with other basins and countries worldwide.
- The UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (also known as the Water Convention) is a powerful framework for supporting such transboundary water cooperation, and is particularly relevant in the face of climate change. The Convention requires its Parties to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impacts and to use transboundary waters in a reasonable, equitable and sustainable way. But the bodies under the Convention also offer support to implementation through capacity-development activities, projects on the ground, legal advice and the exchange of experience, as in the field of climate change adaptation.
- The Water Convention became a global legal framework for transboundary cooperation in February 2013, with the entry into force of amendments opening it to all United Nations Member States. The opening of the Convention will allow countries outside the region to learn from the experiences gained under the Convention but also to share their experiences with the existing Parties. It is expected that these countries will be able to join the Convention as of the end of

2014. The Convention's activities on water and climate, with their global participation as illustrated in this workshop, show the advantages and potential of a global intergovernmental framework for learning from each other.

- In addition, a few weeks ago we celebrated the entry into force of the United Nations Watercourses Convention. The world has now two legal frameworks for transboundary water management. The two Conventions are clearly compatible and complementary and many countries have ratified both of them. This 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 will not be the work of UNECE alone: the United Nations regional commissions, UNESCO, the Global Environment Facility and many others are vital partners. In the area of climate change, the Water Convention cooperates with many partners such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. I would like to sincerely thank all partners of this workshop: the World Meteorological Organization, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Global Environment Facility's IW:LEARN programme, the German International Cooperation Agency GIZ, the International Network of Basin Organizations and the Alliance for Global Water Cooperation. I look forward to strengthening this excellent cooperation.
- I would also like to thank the lead countries and donors without which the work on climate change under the Water Convention would not be possible, namely the Netherlands and Switzerland.

- 2015 will be a crucial year for sustainable development and for the Water Convention: the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction and the post-2015 development agenda will be adopted, a set of sustainable development goals will be agreed upon and hopefully the year will conclude with the successful negotiation of a new climate agreement in Paris. Water, climate change and transboundary cooperation play a crucial role in all these processes. It is of utmost importance that countries when negotiating these three frameworks ensure their coherence, synergies and mutual support in implementation. UNECE will aim to strengthen cooperation with the Climate Change Convention and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.
- As for the SDGs, I am particularly pleased to see a dedicated goal on water and sanitation with a target on transboundary cooperation included in the report on SDGs submitted by the Open Working Group to the General Assembly. I therefore hope that you will defend the water goal in the negotiations to be held at the General Assembly. I also encourage you to consider the Water Convention, and other legal frameworks and platforms which UNECE is offering, as tools that can support the implementation of the global commitments as they emerge.
- The Water Convention will have its seventh Meeting of the Parties in November 2015 in Budapest, Hungary. It will be an important intergovernmental meeting, the first Meeting of the Parties since the global opening of the Convention and the entry into force of the United Nations Watercourses Convention. I hope to see many of you there.

Let us all work together to achieve water and climate cooperation for a safer, more sustainable and prosperous world.

I wish you all a stimulating and productive workshop.

Thank you for your attention.
