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Statement

by

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at

Regional Forum focused on Central Asia

**within the frame of the Second High-Level International Conference on the
International Decade for Action “Water for sustainable development”, 2018-2028**

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me express my sincere gratitude to the Government of the Tajikistan for the organization of the Second Dushanbe Water Action Decade Conference and to the World Bank and the Executive Committee of IFAS for convening this forum.

Central Asia is a very important region connecting East and West, North and South, featuring amazing biodiversity, cultural heritage and socio-economic potential. However, it is also sadly known for the Aral Sea disaster and excessive pressures on scarce natural resources, exacerbated by climate change.

I am glad to say that UNECE has extensive experience in supporting the governments of the region to manage sustainably their water resources.

- Since 1992, the **Water Convention** serviced by UNECE provides a legal and inter-governmental framework for transboundary cooperation and integrated water resources management. It offers policy guidance built on global best practices, capacity building, exchange of experience and projects on the ground. Following its opening to global membership, the Convention recently acquired 5 new Parties from Africa. More than 15 countries from the Middle East, Africa and Latin America are in the process of accession. When I look at mature water cooperation in the framework of IFAS and its Interstate Commission for Water Coordination, I am convinced that all countries of Central Asia are fully ready to be part of the global family of the Water Convention.
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- **The Protocol on Water and Health**, serviced by UNECE and WHO/Europe, provides a unique legal framework for setting and achieving national objectives on water, sanitation, climate and health in line with the SDGs and the human rights to water and sanitation. Despite progress made, access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services in Central Asia is the lowest in the UNECE region and the burden of water-related diseases is high. Thus, I call on all countries of the region to accede to the Protocol.

Acceding to and implementing these instruments will provide Central Asian countries with effective tools and strong governance to address their water challenges. And this is vital: The sustainable management of transboundary water resources is essential to promote economic development, human and environmental health and peace in the region, enhance resilience, reduce disaster risk and support green recovery.

So how could the governments of Central Asia and their partners best strengthen their joint efforts on regional water cooperation?

- First of all, **we need to foster intersectoral cooperation and integration**. And it's very positive that many initiatives in the region are focusing on this. UNECE, with financing from the European Union, is facilitating intersectoral **National Policy Dialogues** on Integrated Water Resources Management. These Dialogues focus on priorities selected by the national
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governments, such as water security, water quality, prevention of accidental pollution and transboundary cooperation.

Building on the successes of the National Policy Dialogues, and on the platform provided by the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), we also have a new project that will support governments in integrated and sustainable management of energy, water and land resources. It is funded by Germany's International Climate Initiative (IKI), and jointly implemented by OECD, UNECE, the Scientific and Information Center of the ICWC, EBRD and FAO.

- Another critical area where progress is needed, as also underlined in the 4th Aral Sea Basin Program, is the **safe management of dams**. For 15 years, a UNECE project on dam safety assisted the five countries. A regional intergovernmental agreement has been developed. I invite you to take practical steps towards finalizing and concluding this agreement in order to ensure a solid framework for cooperation on dam safety. The cost of inaction could be extremely high. UNECE is ready to continue to support these efforts.

These are some examples of areas where Central Asian countries, with support from their partners, including UNECE, have made important steps in the past years. But the urgency of the water crisis in Central Asia requires these efforts to be multiplied, and the pace of progress accelerated. UNECE stands ready **to continue to work hand-in-hand with Central Asian** governments and partners.

Thank you for your attention.
