



PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Online statement (via Zoom)

by

Ms. Tatiana Molcean

**United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary
of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

Official celebration of World Water Day 2024

22 March 2024, 13:00

UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Water is the bedrock of our collective prosperity and well-being. It interconnects all vital elements necessary for the survival of people, countries and ecosystems. Water flows through and binds together every aspect of our lives.

World Water Days aim to recall this often-forgotten fact to the broader public and experts outside the water sector.

The theme of "Water and Peace" for this year's World Water Day compels us to reflect on the complex relationship between water, conflict, and cooperation. Water has the power to create peace or spark conflict.

Water-stressed regions can become fertile grounds for various forms of conflict, from social instability to ethnic clashes and border disputes. As climate change impacts increase, there is an urgent need, within and between countries, to unite around water.

With 60% of the world's freshwater flowing across political boundaries, transboundary water cooperation emerges as a linchpin for regional stability and conflict prevention. Effective collaboration in managing shared water resources not only serves as a powerful tool for

preventing conflicts, but also fosters trust and mutual understanding among nations, communities, and water users. This trust can also facilitate cooperation on issues other than water, as well.

Benefits of water cooperation extend far beyond conflict prevention. It accelerates progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, bolsters food security, preserves ecosystems, enhances resilience to climate change, and fosters regional integration.

Yet, progress is too slow. UNECE and UNESCO together coordinate reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation. As the third reporting exercise on this indicator shows, very few additional countries have all their transboundary waters covered by operational arrangements for water cooperation, compared to the last reporting in 2020. Only around 10 new transboundary agreements have been signed. In some basins, cooperation has actually regressed.

The importance of water agreements to promote peace and development cannot be overstated. From ancient times, exemplified by the Sumerian water treaty in 2500 BC, to modern-day global conventions such as the Water Convention serviced by UNECE, agreements have played a pivotal role in fostering cooperation.

A shining example is the Sava River Basin, where the landmark Sava Agreement and the establishment of the Sava Commission following a

period of conflict served as catalysts for cooperation and trust-building among riparian countries.

The Sava agreement and many other transboundary agreements were facilitated by the Water Convention. That Convention, which UNECE has the honour to service, is a unique global legal framework for transboundary water cooperation. With 52 Parties, more than 20 countries in the accession process and 130 countries participating in its activities, the Convention provides the much-needed intergovernmental platform to accelerate transboundary cooperation, increase political willingness and capacity.

The role of the Water Convention in conflict prevention is underscored by mechanisms such as the Implementation Committee, which assists Parties in preventing and resolving disputes. Advisory procedures, such as the one between Albania and Montenegro, demonstrate the effectiveness of the Convention in addressing conflicts.

Allow me to echo the words expressed by the UN Secretary-General in his message for World Water Day: “I urge all countries to join and implement the United Nations Water Convention – which promotes managing shared water resources sustainably.” I urge countries considering accession to accelerate their efforts, so that they may become parties by the next Meeting of the Parties in Slovenia this October. I also invite you all to participate in this crucial meeting.

Finally, I would like to honour the thousands of “water peacemakers” on the ground, in basin organizations, communities and others. I also want to recognise the countless other events taking place today around the globe , including football games, water walks and panels, and thank UNESCO for hosting the official celebration.

Let World Water Day serve as a catalyst for action. I call upon each of you to prioritize transboundary cooperation for peace at the highest level and to commit to concrete actions. The UN has just taken an important step by approving the first UN system-wide strategy on water and sanitation. But action on the ground is the most important. We stand ready to support you.

Alone you can go fast. Together we can go far.

Thank you.
