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# **The Water Convention:**

## **30 Years of Impact and Achievements on the Ground**



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# FOREWORD

## THE SPIRIT OF HELSINKI CONTINUES TO INSPIRE WATER COOPERATION



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

In March 1992, governments gathered in Helsinki, Finland, with a vision in mind: to manage shared waters in the pan-European region collaboratively and sustainably. By the end of the meeting, the Water Convention was born. It is both a holistic legal framework and an intergovernmental platform on how to better manage shared watercourses. Looking back, it was a crucial moment. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the text adopted and signed in Helsinki remains more relevant than ever and the spirit ignited in Helsinki continues to live on as the Water Convention celebrates its 30th anniversary. Today, the Water Convention is an effective framework for advancing transboundary water cooperation at the global level.

This publication showcases the many success stories that are owed to the Water Convention over the past three decades. The impact of the agreement that was put on paper in Helsinki continues to resonate around the world. Indeed, the Convention's ability to bring together riparian States to manage their common water resources in a spirit of collaboration has attracted States beyond the pan-European region, which led to the opening of the Convention for accession to all UN Member States in 2016. Chad, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and Togo were the first countries to accede, joining the 41 Parties to the Convention in Europe and Central Asia, with many other countries currently undergoing the accession process.

These stories vibrantly illustrate how the Water Convention has been successful in fostering cooperation among riparian States at both political and technical levels, with many proven results from these cooperative efforts: improved water quality, better human health, the mitigation of impacts from floods and

droughts, the prevention of conflicts, regional integration, and the conservation and restoration of riverine ecosystems.

This publication not only showcases examples of cooperation; it also reflects the spirit of collaboration with many people around the globe contributing their success stories and agreeing to be interviewed, shining a light on the power of the Water Convention to positively change lives. Behind every success story are important actors, both government and non-government stakeholders, who are dedicated to sustainably managing shared water resources through cooperation.

I invite you to explore these stories and to learn about the many tools and agreements that have the potential to prevent conflict, sustain peace and ensure a sustainable basis for human life in harmony with nature. The 30th anniversary of the Water Convention is also a stark reminder that many of the world's transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers do not yet benefit from an operational arrangement for transboundary water cooperation. A significant increase in transboundary water cooperation is urgently needed and would constitute a crucial contribution to the global Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

This publication is not only a rich collection of success stories, it is also a source for guidance and inspiration, and a call to step up our action for transboundary water cooperation. Water is a powerful medium for international cooperation, so let us find inspiration in the following stories to champion transboundary water cooperation everywhere.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The impact and achievements described in this publication would not have been possible without the commitment of numerous country representatives, such as ministers, delegates, focal points, chairs and Bureau members, but also partners, donors and many more who have worked hard over three decades to achieve practical results and to make the Water Convention what it is today.

This publication is based on success stories submitted by governments and stakeholders in early 2022 in response to an open call issued by the Convention secretariat for success stories on the impact of the Water Convention on the ground. It also incorporates information provided additionally through interviews conducted between March and April 2022.

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1. Danube Sturgeon Task Force (by Miklós Marton, Hungary)
2. Transboundary water cooperation as a means to advance protection and sustainable development of the Dniester River Basin shared by the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (by Dana Bogdan and André Thomas Confiado, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe)
3. 25 years of the ICPDR: From Convention to Action (by Hélène Masliah-Gilkarov, International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River)
4. Hungarian water expertise serving Ghana's benefit (by Patrícia Marity, Hungary)
5. Danube River Basin Enhanced Flood Forecasting Cooperation (by Viktor Oroszi, Hungary)
6. Enabling transboundary cooperation and integrated water resources management in the extended Drin River Basin (by Gerta Lubonja, Albania)
7. Niger Basin Authority: a tool for development and harmonious integration for nine countries (by Kone Soungalo, Niger Basin Authority)
8. Romania in bilateral negotiations under the Water Convention (Helsinki 1992) (by Carmen Neagu, Romania)
9. Women, water and climate change (by Ruth A. Richardson, International Network of Liberal Women)
10. Volta Basin Water Charter: a tool for a concerted, equitable and sustainable use of the shared water resources of the Volta Basin (by Robert Yaovi Dessouassi, Volta Basin Authority)
11. Mutually beneficial cooperation in the Chu and Talas transboundary river basins (by Indira Akbozova, Secretariat of the Chu Talas Water Management Commission)
12. Development and approval of the Dnieper River Basin Management Plan (by Viktoria Voronova and Vladimir Korneev, Belarus)
13. Blue and green. Sustainable, integrated and climate change adapted water management (by György Rátfai, Hungary)
14. Water Convention – legal and inspirational backbone (by Heide Jekel, Germany)
15. Transboundary cooperation in the Sava River Basin (by Dragan Zeljko, International Sava River Basin Commission)
16. EU Water Framework Directive (by Hans Stielstra, European Commission)
17. Supporting transition to healthy waters, as part of the European Union Water Initiative Plus (by Michaela Hauf, European Commission)
18. Advancing peace and security through water diplomacy – a success story from the Stockholm International Water Institute and the International Centre for Water Cooperation (by Martina Klimes, SIWI/ICWC)
19. Capacity-building for improved governance on transboundary water (by Yumiko Yasuda, Global Water Partnership)
20. Rhine 2040 – an international success story to be continued (by Marc Daniel Heintz, International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine)
21. Signed agreements and successful cooperation on transboundary waters around Polish borders (by Katarzyna Delis-Szeląg, Poland)
22. Tisza River Basin cooperation: strengthening cooperation towards the implementation of the updated Integrated River Basin Management Plan for the Tisza River Basin supporting the sustainable development of the region (by Péter Kovács and György Rátfai, Hungary)
23. Transboundary cooperation is key to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (by Nelao Haimbodi, Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission)
24. Drin Coordinated Action: from sharing waters to the sharing of benefits (by Katharina Davis, United Nations Development Programme)
25. Project on cooperation in the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin (by Hilario Sanha, Guinea-Bissau)
26. Ecuador and Peru consolidate binational cooperation for transboundary watercourses management (by Sebastián Izquierdo, United Nations Development Programme)
27. Implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes in the Republic of Uzbekistan (by Askar Mirsaidov, Uzbekistan)
28. Albufeira Convention: A necessary cooperation tool to address the management of Iberia's transboundary basins (by Concepción Marcuello Olona, Spain)

All quotes used in this publication were extracted from the statements made at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (Geneva, 29 September – 1 October 2021), except for the quote from the statement of Serik Kozhaniyazov (Kazakhstan) made at the Pan-European Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference (Geneva, 12–13 April 2022).

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# Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Foreword .....   | III |
| Acknowledgements.....  | IV  |
| Key facts .....  | 1   |
| ■ The Water Convention in brief .....  | 1   |
| ■ The Water Convention in numbers .....  | 4   |
| ■ 30 years of the Water Convention: key milestones.....  | 8   |
| Chapter 1: The Water Convention cares about the protection of our environment and ecosystems .....               | 10  |
| Chapter 2: The Water Convention helps countries adapt to climate change and decrease the risk of disasters ..... | 14  |
| Chapter 3: The Water Convention contributes to the welfare of societies in transboundary basins and beyond ..... | 18  |
| Chapter 4: The Water Convention supports economic development .....  | 20  |
| Chapter 5: The Water Convention promotes regional economic integration.....                                      | 26  |
| Chapter 6: The Water Convention supports addressing intersectoral trade-offs and tensions .....                  | 30  |
| Chapter 7: The Water Convention improves water governance at national and transboundary levels .....             | 34  |
| Chapter 8: The Water Convention contributes to peace and stability .....   | 38  |
| Chapter 9: Challenges for the future .....   | 40  |

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