

The United Nations  
global water  
conventions:  
**Fostering  
sustainable  
development  
and peace**



United  
Nations



UN WATER

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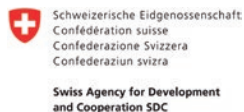
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# Key messages

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Water is one of the most pressing challenges facing the world. For several years, water-related risks have been considered among the top five risks by business leaders in the annual global risk report of the World Economic Forum. Eighty per cent of global freshwater flow is in transboundary basins and 40 per cent of the world's population live in these basins.<sup>1</sup> Governing these waters in a cooperative, equitable and sustainable manner is critical for sustainable development, conflict prevention, peace and climate change resilience.

In many parts of the world, cooperative arrangements for transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers are lacking or too weak to deal with growing water-related challenges. The establishment or strengthening of governance arrangements for these waters may offer an enabling environment for integrated water resources management (IWRM) and investment, and allow riparian countries to reap the numerous shared benefits that transboundary cooperation has to offer.

The need to further transboundary water cooperation has led to high-level calls in recent years. Repeated statements from the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, heads of agencies and other high-level persons have urged countries to develop river, lake and aquifer arrangements and to support that endeavour

by becoming a Party to the two United Nations global water conventions: the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), and the Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (Watercourses Convention).

Ultimately, becoming a Party to the United Nations global water conventions is a sovereign decision of a State, which will require a country-led legal and political evaluation of the national benefits of accession. However, experiences in the implementation of the United Nations global water conventions suggest that a number of benefits come from accession, including the following:

## 1. Reinforcing transboundary cooperative arrangements

Experience from Parties to the conventions demonstrates that the two instruments support the design, development and implementation of basin agreements. **They are not intended to replace basin-specific arrangements.** Rather, their role as a coherent package of norms based on customary international law is to provide countries with a legally binding framework by which to conduct their activities in a predictable and transparent manner.

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<sup>1</sup> See FAO, Land and Water: <http://www.fao.org/land-water/water/water-management/transboundary-water-management/en/>.

The conventions therefore supplement and fill gaps in existing basin-specific arrangements, such as providing detailed procedures relating to dispute avoidance and settlement, and offer guidance to countries where basin-level agreements are lacking.

## **2. Realising the benefits of transboundary water cooperation**

Transboundary water cooperation unpacks multiple benefits, which are not available via unilateral action. The key rules and principles contained within the conventions, as well as any institutional arrangements in support of their implementation and their activities, help countries maximize the benefits of transboundary cooperation, including addressing climate change and extreme events, safeguarding sustainable water management and ecosystem protection, fostering the energy-food-water-ecosystem nexus and providing for equitable benefit sharing.

## **3. A common platform to share experiences, enhance capacity and advance water diplomacy**

Being a Party to the conventions sends a clear signal of the type of legal commitments that a country is willing to enter into – commitments that are based on widely accepted rules and principles of international law and supported by a broad community of Parties. The institutional framework of the Water Convention enhances this community by offering a platform for sharing experiences and further developing policies and best practices. Parties to the Water Convention also benefit from its trust fund, which supports effective implementation, and a transparent and systematic reporting mechanism by which to target areas where

– through technical and financial assistance  
– implementation can be enhanced. These benefits can be enjoyed irrespective of whether all countries that share a particular river, lake or aquifer are party to the conventions.

## **4. Strengthening water governance at both national and transboundary levels**

Through their focus on adopting national level measures to protect and utilize transboundary waters in an equitable and sustainable manner, the conventions help strengthen water management at the lowest appropriate level, including local and regional, as well as national authorities. In addition, becoming party to the conventions can help to improve national awareness of transboundary water issues, and enhance the capacity of national experts to negotiate and implement transboundary water arrangements.

## **5. Increasing finance for transboundary basin development**

Accession is seen favourably by financial institutions and donors as it signals political will for cooperation and sustainability. Implementing the conventions' provisions, particularly by developing and implementing basin agreements and establishing joint institutional mechanisms, enhances predictability on water availability and quality thus fostering stable conditions for investments and increasing their security. At the national level, the process of accession can help develop arguments and strategies addressed to public and private donors, including the ministry of finance, to invest in transboundary water cooperation, basin development and even national water management.

## 6. Increasing political support for transboundary cooperation at the global level

As for other global conventions, widespread membership of two United Nations global water conventions would offer a stronger political platform for advancing transboundary cooperation at the global level; a stronger mandate and basis for the work of UN-Water Members and Partners and development cooperation actors; and strengthened customary international law. In addition, as a complement to global environmental conventions (Climate Change Convention, Biodiversity Convention, Desertification Convention, Ramsar Convention) and the United Nations Human Rights Framework, the two United Nations global water conventions can assist in the implementation of transboundary water-related elements of these other global instruments.

### Now is the time to act

The high-level support for the conventions, including from the United Nations Secretary-General, together with the commitment of countries to realising the SDGs, makes this an important time to highlight the benefits that the global conventions have to offer; support States that are considering acceding to the conventions by assessing those benefits; and encourage other countries sharing transboundary waters to consider doing so. It is also time to make the best use of the two United Nations global water conventions to advance transboundary water cooperation in support of sustainable development, climate resilience, conflict prevention and stability. The increasing number of States recognising the benefits of both conventions, and looking to accede to them simultaneously, is a promising development for millions of people living in transboundary basins.

#### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

“Water Convention” – Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. Adopted in 1992 in Helsinki. Entered into force 1996 and opened to global accession in 2016.

“Watercourses Convention” – Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. Adopted in 1997 in New York. Entered into force 2014.

“United Nations global water conventions” – both the Water Convention and the Watercourses Convention.

“Accession” – For the purposes of this brief, ‘accession’ is used as a short form to also mean approval, acceptance and ratification. These terms all relate to the process by which a country becomes a Party to a convention.

“Party/non” – States which have/have not acceded to a convention and are bound/not bound by its obligations.

# Background and objective

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**“The global opening of the Water Convention, the accession of the first countries from outside the UNECE region – namely Chad and Senegal – and the momentum in support of the Convention are promising developments. Along with the Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, the world has the ability to strengthen the rule of law in transboundary cooperation worldwide. I call on Member States to join both conventions and to strive for their full implementation.”**

**United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, message to the 8th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.**

**Nur-Sultan, 10th October 2018**

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Recognizing the importance of transboundary water cooperation for sustainable development and peace, the United Nations Secretary-General has, in recent years, repeatedly called upon all countries to accede to the two United Nations global water conventions – the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and the Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. In 2019, he also requested the whole United Nations system join forces to support countries in acceding to and implementing them.

Similar calls to strengthen transboundary water cooperation on the basis of international water law are found in the reports of the High-Level Panel on Water (2018), and of the High-Level Panel on Water and Peace (2017).

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**“Water cooperation can be an important factor in strengthening political stability and peace.”**

**A Matter of Survival, report of the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace.**

**Geneva, 14th September 2017**

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Victoria Falls straddles the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

These high-level calls to accede to and implement both United Nations global water conventions reflect a growing support for the two instruments, which in turn has resulted in experts from government, international organizations, NGOs and academia raising an increasing number of questions concerning the role and relevance of the two conventions.

With this policy brief, UN-Water seeks to respond to this growing interest in the conventions by clearly setting out the contribution that the United Nations global water conventions offer in supporting transboundary water cooperation at multiple levels. In so doing, the brief explains the content and compatibility of both instruments; as well as the possible benefits that might accrue from a country acceding to the

conventions. Additional resources are referenced in order to allow experts to examine in greater detail the role and relevance of the conventions within a particular national or transboundary context. The policy brief complements the earlier brief on Sharing waters, sharing responsibilities, published by UN-Water in 2009, which covers transboundary water cooperation more broadly.

This policy brief is thus intended for national experts involved in transboundary water management and for international organizations, development cooperation actors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academia supporting transboundary water cooperation processes at all scales of governance.

# Why is transboundary water cooperation a global issue in need of accelerated action?

**Water is critical to progressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is considered to be one of the most pressing challenges facing the world** (World Economic Forum 2019). Due to growing populations and unsustainable practices, by 2050 it is estimated that 25 per cent of the world's population will live in countries where the lack of freshwater is chronic and recurrent. Climate change will exacerbate water-related challenges, including increasing the magnitude and frequency of floods and droughts. Water quality is also deteriorating due to increasing pollution. These pressures threaten the livelihoods and wellbeing of populations, in particular the most vulnerable ones, and the long-term viability of freshwater ecosystems.

## TRANSBOUNDARY WATER COOPERATION AND THE SDGS

**SDG target 6.5** calls upon all States to **implement integrated water resources management (IWRM) at all levels, including through transboundary water cooperation as appropriate, by 2030**. While other SDGs recognize the importance of cooperation at multiple levels, SDG target 6.5 is the only SDG target that explicitly refers to transboundary

cooperation, and as such serves as an important driver to advance cooperation in support of numerous SDG goals and targets that require transboundary water cooperation to be achieved, such as goals related to food, health, energy, climate, land and marine ecosystems, as well as peace, justice and strong institutions.

SDG target 6.5 is monitored through two indicators: **SDG indicator 6.5.1** tracks the degree of IWRM implementation at all levels, while **SDG indicator 6.5.2** measures the proportion of transboundary basins (rivers, lakes and aquifers) covered by an operational arrangement.

While emphasizing that IWRM helps coordinated sustainable development and water management, the baseline assessment for indicator 6.5.1 signals that IWRM implementation needs to be accelerated in order to realize the 2030 Agenda (UN Environment, *Progress on integrated water resources management. Global baseline for SDG 6 Indicator 6.5.1: degree of IWRM implementation* (2018)). Similarly, the baseline assessment for indicator 6.5.2 shows that under a business as usual scenario, target 6.5 in relation to transboundary cooperation will not be achieved by 2030, and calls upon countries to accelerate progress in ensuring that all transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers are covered by operational arrangements (UNECE and UNESCO, *Progress on Transboundary Water*



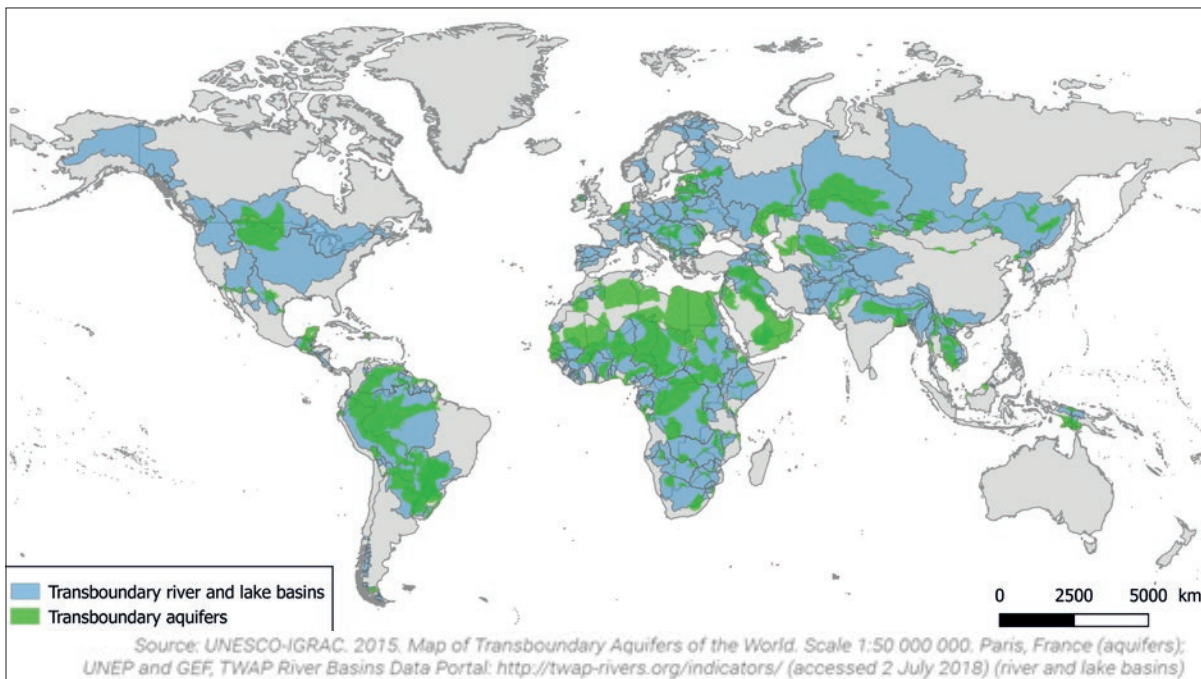
Cooperation. Global Baseline for SDG 6 indicator 6.5.2 (2018)).

The United Nations global water conventions support the implementation of IWRM at a transboundary level by fostering the importance of negotiated agreements and joint institutions that are founded upon the principles of equity and sustainability (GWP, *Integrated Water Resources Management*, 2000).

Thus, **managing transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers in an equitable and sustainable manner is key to addressing the global water crisis and advancing the 2030 Agenda**. Approximately 40 per cent of the world's population live in more than 276 transboundary river and lake basins shared between two or more countries. These basins cover the territory of 153 States; 30 countries lie entirely within them. In addition, at least 600 transboundary aquifer systems worldwide support the drinking water supply and food production needs of millions of people (UNESCO IHP and IGRAC, 2015).

**Even where populations are not directly situated within transboundary river and lake basins, or aquifer systems, they are often reliant upon the goods and services produced therein or have an interest in ensuring their equitable, sustainable and peaceful management.** For instance, major transboundary rivers, such as the Mekong, often provide food (through trade; the Mekong Delta is often described as the “rice bowl” of Asia) and energy (via hydropower energy transfer) beyond the basin. Similarly, as a significant proportion of pollution of the marine environment is transmitted from activities on land to the sea by transboundary rivers, the health of the world's marine and coastal ecosystems partly depends on the sustainable management of transboundary waters (see for example the Source-to-Sea initiative, SIWI 2018).

**Through initiatives such as the Global High-level Panel on Water and Peace and debates within the Security Council,<sup>2</sup> transboundary water cooperation is increasingly being recognized as a driver of peace and conflict**



<sup>2</sup> See United Nations Security Council, High-Level Briefing, ‘Water, Peace and Security’, 14th November 2016; United Nations Security Council 7959th meeting, ‘Preventative diplomacy and transboundary waters’, 6th June 2017; United Nations Security Council, Aria-formula Meeting, 26th October 2018.

**prevention, and as a valuable tool of preventive diplomacy.** Cooperation on transboundary water management can serve as a model or entry point for promoting peace in post-conflict situations. The Sava River Basin Commission, for example, shows how joint cooperative arrangements over water among the countries of the former Yugoslavia supported wider peace-building efforts within the region. Through its agreed three-yearly programme of work, and by bringing together the expertise of countries and partners, the Water Convention has supported concrete transboundary water cooperation initiatives in the Sava River Basin, including the preparation of the first Sava River Basin Management Plan in accordance with the EU Water Framework Directive; facilitating inter-sectoral coordination, through water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus assessment; and facilitating integration of a climate change assessment into flood risk management planning.

**As water and climate change know no borders, transboundary cooperation concerning climate change adaptation is necessary to prevent the possible negative effects of unilateral adaptation measures and enable the sharing of the costs and benefits of such measures.** Many transboundary basins that will be most severely affected by water scarcity-related climate change impacts are also, in parallel, impacted by political tensions, armed violence and internal water mismanagement, thus necessitating urgent efforts to build trust and strengthen cooperation on shared water issues.

**The management of groundwater poses a particular dilemma for transboundary water cooperation, linked to the unique characteristics of this hidden resource.** Transboundary aquifers represent a vital resource to sustain livelihoods and ecosystems. But without obvious, visual signs of development impacts, such as the drying up of lakes and reservoirs, groundwater

use may go unmeasured and unmanaged. This makes cooperation even more challenging and prevents countries from using surface and groundwater resources in a conjunctive, rational and efficient manner (Lautze et al 2018).

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**“...if the world continues its current path, projections suggest that we may face a 40% shortfall in water availability by 2030. The consequences of such stress are local, national, transboundary, regional, and global in today’s interconnected and rapidly changing world, with consequences that will be disproportionately felt by the poorest and most vulnerable. Addressing these issues poses one of the greatest challenges facing the world.”**

**Making Every Drop Count – An Agenda for Water Action, High-level Panel on Water Outcome Document.**

**14th March 2018**

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**Cooperative arrangements concerning transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers are often lacking or too weak to deal with growing water-related challenges, to offer an enabling environment for IWRM and to reap the shared benefits that transboundary cooperation can provide.** The first SDG indicator 6.5.2 monitoring exercise has demonstrated that for the 62 countries for which data is available, only 59 per cent of their transboundary basin area is

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3 UNECE and UNESCO, *Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation. Global Baseline for SDG 6 indicator 6.5.2 (2018)*.

covered by operational arrangements, and only 17 countries have all their transboundary basins covered by operational arrangements.<sup>3</sup> Experience shows that legal and institutional frameworks generally tend to prevent and reduce the potential for conflict (Wolf, et al. 2003), while also providing tools for addressing rapid physical changes and pressures within transboundary water systems caused by climate change or other factors. However, it should also be recognized that not all agreements lead to equitable outcomes, and some may even be a source of conflict. Additionally, positive steps towards long-term cooperation on IWRM, e.g. initiating dialogue and communicating, exchanging information, organizing meetings, etc., may take place without, and/or be a precursor to, the development of legal and institutional agreements that ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes for all riparian or aquifer States.

**The United Nations global water conventions represent powerful tools to promote and advance transboundary water cooperation.** They provide guiding principles for transboundary water management in the absence of basin-level

agreements and can support countries in the negotiation of new or revised cooperative arrangements. Through institutional frameworks such as that offered by the Water Convention (described below), they also assist countries in the implementation of basin agreements to address growing water challenges and thereby promote sustainable development and peace. As the first report on the implementation of the Water Convention illustrated (UNECE, 2018), in about 25 years, the Water Convention has significantly driven cooperation among its Parties which have developed agreements and established institutions on their shared waters. For example, in the Dniester River basin, which is shared by Moldova and Ukraine, the Water Convention directly supported the negotiation and ratification of a bilateral treaty in 2012 which is based on the two global United Nations water conventions. The Commission on Sustainable Use and Protection of the Dniester River Basin (the Dniester Commission) established by the two countries to jointly manage the Dniester River basin is an important outcome of this treaty. The Dniester Commission held its first meeting in September 2018.



Transboundary Chu River between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Photo UNECE/Alexander Belokurov

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“The Vietnamese Government has cleared internal procedures to join the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. This is part of our efforts to strengthen regional and international legal frameworks on the management, utilization and development of water resources at international rivers in a sustainable, equitable and reasonable manner.”

**Remarks by H.E. Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung of Viet Nam at the Plenary Session of the Second Mekong River Commission Summit, just prior to Vietnam’s accession to the Watercourses Convention.**

**Ho Chi Minh, 5th April 2014**

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“The main objective of the Water Convention is to strengthen local, national, regional and now global actions to protect and ensure the quality, quantity and sustainable use of transboundary water resources. To this end, the Convention is a promising framework that interests the DRC in more than one way. It aims to, inter alia, fill serious legal gaps in the transboundary water governance system due to the inadequacy of agreements on international watercourses, the lack of agreements for many of them, and the difficulties of application to which the national laws of these States are confronted.”

**Remarks by Mr Benjamin Bakadisula Kangoma, delegate from the Democratic Republic of Congo, at the 11th meeting of the Water Convention’s Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Water Convention’s entry into force.**

**Geneva, 18th October 2016**

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# What you need to know about the United Nations global water conventions

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Two United Nations global water conventions – the Water Convention and Watercourses Convention – consolidate the principles and rules that underpin contemporary international water law. These principles and rules form the basis for countries to work together to ensure transboundary waters are governed in an equitable and sustainable manner.

As United Nations framework instruments, the United Nations global water conventions do not replace specific bilateral and multilateral agreements on transboundary basins and aquifers, but rather support the establishment and implementation of agreements, and assist in their further development, interpretation and implementation.

## Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention)

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“Aware of the impact of water issues on the different development sectors of the country and considering the

international nature of most of its water resources, Senegal very early on recognized the crucial importance of cooperation on transboundary water resources. Thus, the Senegal and Gambia river basins, which hold most of our surface water reserves, have been the subject of institutional arrangements since the 1970s. Considering the increasing pressure on water resources, the 1992 Water Convention provides a relevant intergovernmental framework to strengthen these cooperation frameworks.”

H.E Mr. Mansour Faye, Minister of Water and Sanitation of Senegal, explains the relevance of accession for Senegal in the official press release.

Dakar, 10th September 2018

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<sup>4</sup> The up to date status of ratification of the Water Convention can be found at [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=XXVII-5&chapter=27&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVII-5&chapter=27&clang=_en)

The Water Convention was adopted on 17th March 1992 and entered into force on 6th October 1996. Originally negotiated and adopted by Member States of the UNECE for the pan-European region, a landmark amendment in 2003 allowed all United Nations Member States to become party to it. This global opening up became operational on the 1st March 2016. As of 1 December 2020, there are **44 Parties to the Water Convention** (43 States and the European Union). <sup>4</sup> Chad, on 22nd February 2018, and Senegal, on 31st August 2018, became the first countries from outside the pan-European region to accede to the Convention. At the 8th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (Nur-Sultan, 10th-12th October 2018), 20 countries announced their intention to accede to it. Ghana acceded to both United Nations global water conventions on 22nd June 2020.

## The Water Convention is founded upon three central pillars

Firstly, the Water Convention requires that Parties sharing transboundary waters take all appropriate measures **to prevent, control and reduce any transboundary impact** on the environment, human health and safety, and socio-economic conditions of other Parties. Such measures include undertaking environmental impact assessments

and other means of assessment, preventing and reducing pollution at its source, licensing and monitoring wastewater discharges and developing and applying best environmental practices to reduce inputs of nutrients and hazardous substances from agriculture or other diffuse sources. Parties are obligated to use water resource sustainably, while taking into account the ecosystem approach.

Secondly, pursuant to Art. 2(2)(c) of the Water Convention, Parties must take appropriate measures to ensure that transboundary waters are used in a **reasonable and equitable way**. Whether the use of a transboundary river, lake or aquifer can be considered reasonable and equitable will depend on the particular factors and circumstances of the waters in question. These factors and circumstances are outlined in the Watercourses Convention (Art. 6), which thus shows the complementarity between the two instruments.

Thirdly, in order to put the aforementioned obligations into practice, the Convention requires Parties **to conclude transboundary agreements and set up joint bodies**, such as river or lake basin or aquifer commissions, to cooperate on the management and protection of their transboundary waters. Procedures for settling disputes in a peaceful manner are also provided for in the Water Convention.



An aerial view of the Mereb Bridge on the day of the reopening ceremonies, which recreated a physical link between Ethiopia and Eritrea. UN Photo/Jorge Aramburu

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“The Convention has been an important guidance for several treaties and river basin commissions to which Germany is a Party. The Water Convention’s working structure offers a unique platform for Germany to exchange knowledge and experience with other UNECE countries, but already also beyond the UNECE region as well as with numerous organizations and NGOs.”

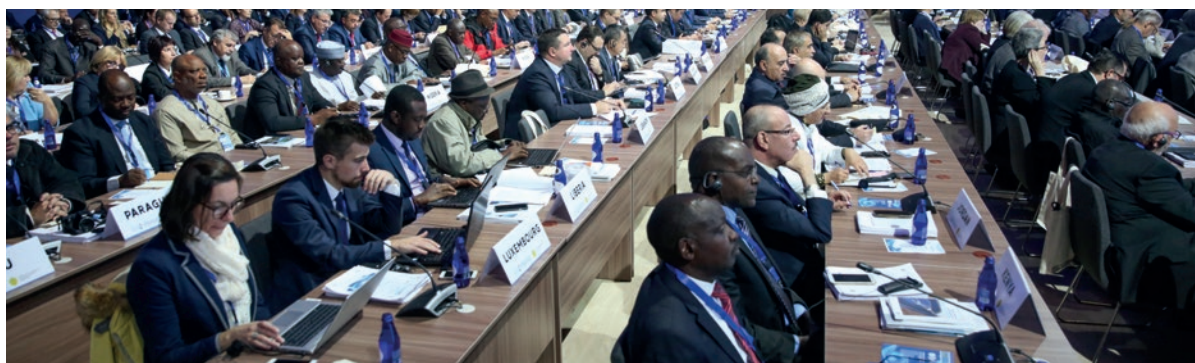
**Testimonial of Ms. Heide Jekel, delegate from Germany at the 11th meeting of the Water Convention’s Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Water Convention’s entry into force.**

**Geneva, 18th October 2016**

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Finally, an important asset of the Water Convention is **its institutional framework. This framework allows the Water Convention to operate as a dynamic instrument** which is constantly evolving to meet the collective needs and interests of both its Parties and the many non-Parties that are closely involved in its activities. Through being involved in pilot projects or documenting and sharing their practice, more than 80 non-Party countries have actively participated in the Convention’s intergovernmental meetings and activities related to, for example, climate change adaptation, financing, benefits assessments and water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus. Participation of non-Parties in the activities of the Convention demonstrates the global character of the Convention. Participation in the meetings and other activities of the Convention also offers non-Parties a deeper insight into the Convention, and what acceding to the Convention might entail.

Central features of the institutional framework include the triennial sessions of the Meeting of the Parties, the Secretariat which is provided by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, working groups and task forces, and the Implementation Committee. Each of these bodies support the implementation and development of the Convention. For example, every three years the Meeting of the Parties agrees on a programme of work, which provides the means



8th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (Nur-Sultan, 10th-12th October 2018)

by which Parties set out priorities and actions and monitor their implementation and effectiveness. The Meeting of the Parties, open to all countries and partners, has also proved to be an important venue in which to discuss transboundary water issues at the global level. For instance, the eighth Meeting of the Parties in 2018 was attended by representatives from 88 countries including Parties, non-party states, and hundreds of representatives of United Nations and other governmental organizations, NGOs and academia.

### **Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses (Watercourses Convention):**

The Watercourses Convention was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 21st May 1997 following an extensive drafting period by the International Law Commission (1970-1994), and negotiation by countries in the 6th Committee of the General Assembly (1996-1997). At the time of its adoption, a vote was taken that recorded 103 votes in favour of the Convention, three votes against and 27 abstentions. The Watercourses Convention entered into force on the 17th August 2014 following the 35th instrument of accession from Vietnam, and as of 1 December 2020, **37 States are Parties to the Watercourses Convention**.<sup>5</sup> Even prior to its entry into force, the Watercourses Convention proved to be influential as an authoritative statement of customary international law (see for example the International Court of Justice decision in 1997 concerning the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Project (Hungary/Slovakia)), and as a frame of reference for the negotiation of watercourse agreements (see for example the 2000 Revised Protocol on Shared Watercourses in the Southern African Development Community).

Along similar lines to the Water Convention, **there are three pillars to the Watercourses Convention**.

Firstly, in terms of substantive norms, the Watercourses Convention obliges Parties to utilize their international watercourses in an **equitable and reasonable manner** (Art. 5) and take all appropriate measures to **prevent the causing of significant harm** to any other State that shares a particular watercourse (watercourse State) (Art. 7). As a reflection of the obligation to utilize international watercourses in an equitable and reasonable manner, Parties are also obliged to protect and preserve the ecosystems of international watercourses (Art. 20).

Secondly, to support the implementation of its substantive norms, Parties are obliged to **cooperate on the basis of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, mutual benefit and good faith**. Detailed procedures for the notification of planned measures, together with a requirement for watercourse States to consult on management and contingency plans and water quality standards, are included as an important means by which to foster cooperation between watercourse States. Procedures for dispute settlement, including third party fact-finding, are also provided for in the Watercourses Convention.

Thirdly, where appropriate, watercourse States are **encouraged to adopt watercourse agreements**, or adapt existing ones, and establish joint mechanisms or commissions.

Unlike the Water Convention, there is no institutional framework for the Watercourses Convention, i.e., Meeting of the Parties, secretariat and working groups, to support its implementation (see generally Rieu-Clarke and Kinna, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> The up to date status of ratification to the Watercourses Convention can be found at [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=XXVII-12&chapter=27&clang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVII-12&chapter=27&clang=en)



# Are the United Nations global water conventions compatible with each other?

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**While the two conventions articulate their obligations in a different manner, their objectives and principles are the same. The global water conventions are therefore consistent, coherent and compatible.** As of 1 December 2020, **17 countries are Parties to both instruments** and use them together to support transboundary cooperation and management of shared waters with their fellow riparians.

**At the same time, there are several differences between the two instruments which make them mutually reinforcing.** For instance, one convention may only include a general principle on a certain topic, whereas the other convention may provide further guidance on

the interpretation and/or implementation of that principle. This complementarity between the two conventions means that they offer a fuller package of norms in support of transboundary water cooperation. Such a complementary approach to the interpretation of the two conventions is consistent with the overarching principle of international law that when two or more norms relate to the same issue, they are to be interpreted so that they are compatible to the extent possible (International Law Commission, 2006). An overview of the key similarities and differences between the two conventions is provided below

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## THE UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL WATER CONVENTIONS AS A COMPLEMENTARY PACKAGE – SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

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**Presentation of substantive norms (equitable and reasonable utilization, and no significant harm):** While both conventions use different wording, they offer the same package of substantive norms that reflect customary international law, namely the principle of equitable and reasonable utilization, and the duty to take all appropriate measures to prevent significant harm. The Water Convention offers more detailed guidance on the type of measures that might be deemed appropriate in preventing significant harm; whereas the Watercourses Convention includes a list of factors and circumstances that should be taken into account when determining what constitutes an equitable and reasonable use of an international watercourse.

**Procedural requirements:** Collectively, both conventions provide detailed procedural requirements related to pollution prevention, control and reduction, environmental impact assessment, contingency planning, monitoring, research and development, data and information exchange, early warning and alarm systems, and mutual assistance. While the Water Convention generally provides more detail, the Watercourses Convention provides more detailed procedures related to the notification and consultation of planned measures.

**Connected/unconnected groundwater:** While the Watercourses Convention covers groundwaters insofar as they are connected to an international watercourse (Art. 2(a)), the Water Convention goes further by covering all transboundary groundwaters, both connected and unconnected (Art. 1(1)).

**Both conventions place particular emphasis on the need to protect the ecosystems of transboundary waters:** The Watercourses Convention obliges its Parties to, 'individually and, where

appropriate, jointly, protect and preserve the ecosystems of international watercourses' (Art. 20); while the Water Convention calls upon its Parties to use transboundary waters, 'with the aim of ecologically sound and rational water management, conservation of water resources and environmental protection' (Art. 2(2)(a)).

**Obligation to enter into agreements and establish joint bodies:** The Water Convention obliges its riparian Parties to enter into cooperative arrangements and establish joint bodies, such as river, lake or aquifer commissions, for all transboundary waters that they share (Art. 9), whereas the Watercourses Convention encourages Parties to enter into such agreements or joint bodies. Both instruments are heavily reliant upon agreements and joint bodies for their successful implementation.

**Existing agreements:** While the Watercourses Convention *encourages* States to harmonize existing agreements, 'with the basic principles of the present Convention', (Art. 3), the Water Convention requires States to adapt existing agreements, 'where necessary to eliminate the contradictions with the basic principles of this Convention' (Art. 9(1)). Neither convention therefore requires existing agreements to be updated in their entirety.

**Dispute settlement:** Both conventions provide similar requirements related to dispute settlement, with the main requirement, as reflected in the Charter of the UN, being that States must settle their disputes in a peaceful manner. An additional feature of the Watercourses Convention is compulsory third-party fact-finding. Along similar lines, the Parties to the Water Convention have established a nine-member Implementation Committee comprised of independent experts (legal and technical) with the purpose to support any difficulties Parties might have in the implementation of the Convention.

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## ADDRESSING MISCONCEPTIONS CONCERNING THE UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL WATER CONVENTIONS

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• *'The two conventions are biased in favor of upstream/downstream States'*. Both United Nations global water conventions are the product of extensive and widespread negotiations. The text contained in both conventions reflects a compromise between diverse interests, and by enshrining the principles of equality and reciprocity neither favours upstream nor downstream countries. Both upstream and downstream countries are Parties to the two conventions. Both upstream and downstream countries benefit from the implementation of the conventions' provisions.

• *'Accession to one or both conventions would require a wholesale revision of existing agreements'*. States that already have agreements in place may be concerned that the Watercourses Convention does not fully recognize existing agreements because it suggests that the Parties may consider harmonizing such agreements with the principles of the Convention. In reality, the Convention does not supersede any provisions of existing agreements, but its provisions can support and supplement them if gaps are identified. The Water Convention requires States to align their existing agreements with its basic principles, which also reflect customary international law. It does not call for a complete re-write of existing agreements in order to align with all the provisions of the Convention. As of the date of writing no existing agreement entered into by a Party was found to contradict the basic principles of the Water Convention.

• *'The Water Convention is a pan-European regional instrument'*. While initially negotiated as a regional instrument, as a result of its 2003 amendment allowing global accession the Convention is now open to all United Nations Member States. The opening of the Convention, driven by the Parties'

desire to promote transboundary water cooperation worldwide based on the best practices and experiences at the global level, is also testament to its 'tried and tested' approach. Additionally, as a framework instrument that requires States to take all 'appropriate' measures to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact, the Convention is flexible in terms of what might be appropriate within different contexts.

• *'One convention is more effective or somehow better than the other'*. As stated by former United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki Moon at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (2012), both instruments are 'based on the same principles', and 'should be implemented in a coherent manner', as a fuller and complementary package of norms in support of transboundary water cooperation. Additionally, favouring one over the other may risk fragmentation in international water law.

• *'The conventions only apply to surface waters'*. Both conventions deal with groundwater. The Watercourses Convention in so far as groundwater is connected to surface water bodies, while the Water Convention (complemented by its Model Provisions on Transboundary Groundwaters) is applicable to all transboundary groundwaters, and includes both groundwaters and surface waters under its definition of 'transboundary waters'.

# What do the two United Nations global water conventions offer?

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The United Nations global water conventions offer a **coherent package of norms and therefore a common language for facilitating cooperation and common understanding among countries sharing transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers.**

The conventions **support countries in the negotiation, adoption, interpretation, implementation and development of their cooperative arrangements related to transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers.**

As noted above, this in turn supports implementation of SDG target 6.5 by supporting the development of an enabling environment, i.e. operational arrangements capable of implementing IWRM at the transboundary level. **Also, the conventions offer States a reference for their actions related to transboundary waters in the absence of arrangements at the basin or aquifer level.**

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**“The Danube River Protection Convention was signed in June 1994, two years after the Water Convention has been adopted. The Water Convention has been the inspiring basis, the blueprint for the Danube Convention, has influenced substantially the outcome of the negotiations of the Danube River Protection Convention and is now an integral part of it. This Danube River Protection Convention and its International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River have proven to be a real success story for nearly 20 years. We from the Austrian side consider the Danube River Protection Convention with its 15 contracting parties to be the perfect testimonial of the viability and also the flexibility of the Water Convention. Therefore, we are strongly convinced that the Water**

Convention is an excellent basis for transboundary cooperation around the globe.”

**Testimonial of Mr. Christian Schilling, delegate from Austria at the 11th meeting of the Water Convention’s Working Group on IWRM, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Water Convention’s entry into force.**

**Geneva, 18th October 2016**

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Additionally, **the Water Convention, through its institutional framework, offers a well-proven political and technical intergovernmental platform for exchanging experiences; as well as for further developing global policies and soft law related to transboundary water management and development.**

Moreover, through the introduction of a reporting mechanism, **the Water Convention provides a means by which to monitor implementation of the Convention and track progress on transboundary water cooperation in a transparent and systematic manner.**

Both United Nations global water conventions **complement and support the implementation of other global conventions related to water, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention) and the United Nations Human Rights Framework, in particular**

**the human rights to water and sanitation.**

For instance, while the UNFCCC does not specifically address transboundary climate change adaptation, both United Nations global water conventions include specific measures to mitigate the impacts of extreme events such as floods and droughts. Similarly, cooperation between riparian States, as provided for in the United Nations global water conventions, is essential to conserve and sustainably use wider transboundary ecosystems – a core commitment under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention. In relation to human rights, the Watercourses Convention recognizes the need to pay ‘special regard’ to ‘vital human needs’; and the Water Convention’s Protocol on Water and Health offers a framework to translate into practice the human right to water (UNECE and WHO, 2019).

# What are the benefits for countries of acceding to the United Nations global water conventions?

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“Political will to achieve sustainability and transboundary cooperation is often lacking, which in some cases, is due to the misperception that finding cooperative solutions hinders national interests rather than bringing benefits.”

**Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention at its eighth session (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2).**

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There are many advantages to having the two United Nations global water conventions in place, irrespective of whether or not countries are party to one or both instruments. For instance, non-Parties can use both conventions when negotiating, interpreting, implementing and strengthening transboundary water agreements with their neighbours, and, where arrangements are lacking, the conventions can guide the conduct of countries. In addition, non-Parties

to the Water Convention can still participate in the activities of the Convention, including intergovernmental meetings and the various areas under the triennial programme of work.

**Specific benefits that derive from accession to both conventions, include:**

➤ **Having a legal binding framework by which a country can conduct its activities related to transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers in a predictable and transparent manner.**

While non-Parties can always use the principles enshrined within the conventions and tailor them to their specific situations, those countries would not be legally obliged to follow the conventions. As a Party to the conventions, a country can be assured that if their practice is consistent with the rights and obligations of the conventions, it will be respected by other Parties to the conventions, and clear and non-adversarial procedures are in place for addressing any disagreements concerning the interpretation or application of their transboundary water arrangements.

➤ **Legal frameworks such as the United Nations global water conventions help create an enabling environment for investments.** They can increase the sustainability of cooperation

projects by requiring and supporting basin-level agreements and institutions that reduce investment risks, owing to the legally binding long-term commitments made by Parties and to the continuous support for cooperation offered by the Water Convention's framework. Basin-level cooperation agreements enable riparian countries to reduce risks, share risks, leverage additional resources, and locate measures and investments where they have the optimum effect. <sup>6</sup>

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**“The two key global conventions on water (1992 Water Convention and 1997 Watercourses Convention), which are open to all United Nations Member States, now serve as the mechanism that Member States of the Volta Basin Authority are being called upon to accede to in order to strengthen our international cooperation and national measures for the sound utilization, management and development of transboundary surface waters and groundwater resources.”**

**Remarks by H.E. Cecilia Abena Dapaah, Minister for Sanitation and Water Resources of Ghana at the 7th Council of Ministers meeting of the Volta Basin Authority.**

**Accra, 10th May 2019**

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**A country enjoys several additional benefits from accession, irrespective of whether its neighbours are also party, such as:**

- > Being a Party sends a clear signal to non-Parties of the type of legal commitments that a country is willing enter into** – based on contemporary international water law and supported by a diverse community of countries, i.e., Parties to the conventions. Where not all riparian or aquifer countries are party to one or both conventions, accession might also offer an opportunity to ‘lead by example’ and support other countries in their accession to the conventions.
- > Recognition by countries and the international community of a long-term commitment to transboundary water cooperation.** By becoming a Party to the United Nations global water conventions, a State signifies to other countries, international organizations, financial institutions and other actors that it is willing to cooperate on the basis of contemporary norms of international law, as reflected in the conventions. The legally binding commitment made by countries when acceding to the conventions therefore provides a guarantee to development partners of a long-term allegiance to cooperation and enhances the sustainability of development cooperation interventions.
- > Stronger water management at the local and national levels.** The translation of the conventions into national legislation strengthens the application of IWRM – including the conjunctive use of groundwater and surface water – and promotes the integration and reconciliation of sectoral policies. This is evident in the case of the Water Convention, which has, through the EU Water Initiative National Water Policy

Dialogues, established platforms where key national stakeholders meet regularly to discuss and advance policy reforms related to IWRM. In order to prevent, reduce and control transboundary pollution, both conventions call for the coordination of national water quality objectives and criteria, as well as techniques and practices for addressing both point and non-point sources at multiple levels, including national, sub-national (regional) and local.

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**“Chad began to reap benefits already before its effective accession to the Water Convention. The accession process has contributed, in particular through the various meetings and workshops, to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry’s experts in international water law, to strengthen coordination and collaboration between the different ministries on transboundary cooperation issues and to support national advocacy for sustainable water resources management.”**

**H.E. Ms. Lydie Beassemda, Minister of Production, Irrigation and Agricultural Equipment, representing Chad’s Minister of Environment, Water and Fisheries, at the official celebration ceremony for Chad’s accession to the Water Convention.**

**N’Djamena, 21st November 2018**

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- While each national accession process differs, it inevitably involves a range of stakeholders (both water and non-water experts) including civil servants from different ministries (water, environment, agriculture, energy, foreign affairs, etc.) parliamentarians, and in some instances, academia, NGO communities and technical and financial development partners. Although resources will be needed in order to conduct the requisite studies into the conventions and arrange cross-government consultations, in turn the **accession process offers a means by which to strengthen national awareness and capacity on transboundary water issues amongst key stakeholders**, and provides a clear frame of reference by which stakeholders can monitor treaty implementation. Moreover, as flexible framework instruments, any costs associated with complying with the conventions is dependent on the ambition of the countries; and support may be available from international partners, such as the Global Environment Facility, the World Bank and other regional development banks, Parties to the conventions, and other partners that provide support to transboundary basins development.

In addition, through the **institutional framework of the Water Convention**, countries acceding to it can:

- **Benefit from the Water Convention’s trust fund which supports the effective implementation of the Convention through the development of projects aligned to the Convention’s programme of work.** While non-Parties can also benefit from the Convention’s trust fund, priority is given to Parties. Accession may also help leverage additional resources from donors to support activities related to the implementation.



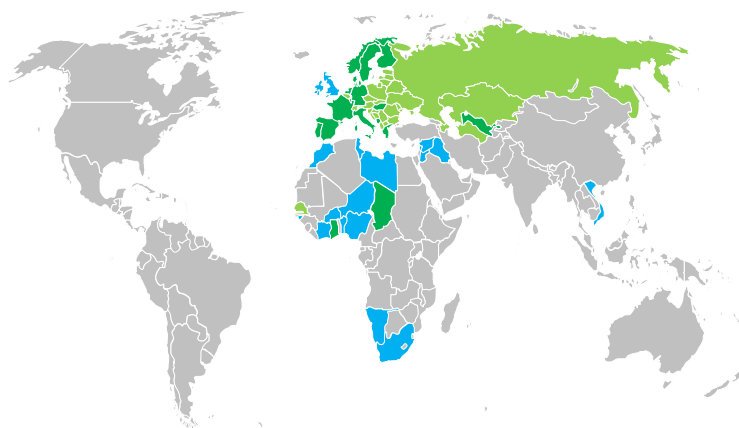
- Take advantage of the reporting mechanism of the Water Convention, which offers a useful tool to measure progress in implementation, assess the status of transboundary water management at a national level, and raise attention to any country-specific, basin or generic implementation challenges.

**Accession to the Water Convention therefore offers a State the opportunity to commit to a baseline of legal and institutional standards that are systematically monitored and progressively strengthened in a transparent and collaborative manner.**

- **Contribute to the development of an institutional platform for transboundary water cooperation.** While most of the meetings under the Convention’s framework are open to non-Parties, it is the Parties that decide on issues related to the development of the Convention, sit in the Convention’s governing bodies and lead activities under the Convention.

Parties can also initiate the negotiation of new legally-binding instruments, such as protocols or amendments to the Convention, as well as soft law instruments (such as guidelines, recommendations, model provisions, checklists and other tools).

### Parties to the UN global water conventions (November 2020)



Party to Watercourses Convention (1997)  
Total: 37

Party to the Water Convention (1992)  
Total: 44

Party to both UN global water conventions  
Total: 17

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## TRANSBOUNDARY AQUIFERS, INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL WATER CONVENTIONS

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Under increasing demand, groundwater constitutes a vital reserve of freshwater for 2.5 billion people worldwide. While the 600 transboundary aquifers presently identified by UNESCO-IHP underlie almost every nation, research, practice, and legislation has traditionally focused much more strongly on surface waters. The international legal regime of transboundary groundwater resources, including binding and non-binding instruments of international law, presents significant gaps and shortcomings. Bilateral and multilateral agreements have, for instance, quite exceptionally been concluded solely for transboundary aquifers.

In 2008, the United Nations International Law Commission (ILC), with scientific and technical support from UNESCO-IHP, adopted 19 **Draft Articles on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers** as a contribution to the development of guiding international groundwater law (International Law Commission, 2008). As a testament to the continued interest in the topic of transboundary aquifers by Member States, the General Assembly adopted in 2011, 2013, and 2016, three subsequent Resolutions on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers. The articles, relevant to all aquifers and the groundwaters they contain, attempt to fill a 'gap' left by the Watercourses Convention, which deals with groundwater only insofar as it is connected to shared surface water bodies, and also aims to adjust general international water law to the special case of groundwater – for instance, a resource characterized by long 'reaction' time periods in response to external pressures, and by (often) large volumes of stored water, which are dependent on recharge processes.

Building on the Draft Articles, the Parties to the Water Convention, also adopted in 2012 a set of

non-binding **Model Provisions on Transboundary Groundwaters**, which much like the ILC Draft Articles, provide guidance to Parties in applying the Water Convention to transboundary aquifers, and offer commentaries to the provisions that give practical guidance and examples of their potential application.

Both the ILC Draft Articles and the Model Provisions provide a basis on which specific groundwater agreements could be developed by States, either in the form of an additional protocol to an existing water agreement, or in the form of a transboundary water agreement focusing on groundwater or addressing groundwater along with surface waters. Additionally, in both the Draft Articles and the Model Provisions, the principles of 'equitable and reasonable utilization' and 'no significant harm' are both tailored to the unique characteristics of groundwater resources. As with the Water Convention's Model Provisions, the Draft Articles pay more attention to factors for assessing what constitutes 'equitable and reasonable utilization' and includes 'the natural characteristics of the aquifer or the aquifer system' and 'the role of the aquifer or aquifer system in the related ecosystem' (Arts. 5(1) (c),(d), and (i)); whereas the Water Convention's Model Provisions sets out several aquifer-specific 'appropriate measures to prevent significant harm', such as the establishment of protection zones in the most vulnerable or critical parts of the recharge area of groundwaters (Provision 5(2)).

The international legal regime for the management and use of transboundary groundwaters is still evolving, and there are significant opportunities for progress. New or more recent international agreements and growing international interest in groundwater also shed light on the evolution of trends in customary international law. In this context, there is a need to further test and develop existing legal frameworks for transboundary groundwater and linked surface water-groundwater systems, as well as to strengthen and develop more specific cooperation focusing on transboundary aquifers.

The United Nations global water conventions, supplemented by the Draft Articles and Model Provisions, can help develop these legal frameworks for transboundary groundwater. Additionally, by joining the Water Convention, countries gain access to a valuable forum or 'community of Parties', and an institutionalized platform for cooperation, providing fertile ground to: improve the groundwater-specific, science-based policy dialogue; dedicate enhanced attention to the needs of transboundary aquifers (legal and otherwise); and observe and constructively discuss the evolution of accepted State practice regarding the shared use and management of transboundary aquifers.

# What would happen if there was widespread membership of the United Nations global water conventions?

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Many of the benefits offered by the United Nations global water conventions noted above will be enhanced if a great number of countries from across the world join them. In turn, greater membership of both conventions will offer:

- **A stronger political platform for advancing transboundary water cooperation at the global level.** Widespread accession to both United Nations global water conventions would offer a more effective and persuasive voice by which countries sharing transboundary waters, as well as actors supporting water cooperation, could come together and collectively articulate their concerns, needs and interests at the global level, through for example, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development or the work of related multilateral environmental agreements.
- **A stronger mandate and basis for the work of UN-Water Members and Partners and of development cooperation actors.** Widespread accession to both United

Nations global water conventions would help support the mandates and activities of UN-Water Members and Partners and of development/cooperation actors which are involved in programmes, projects and initiatives that concern transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers.

- **Strengthening customary international law.** Widespread accession to both United Nations global water conventions would leave no doubt that the content of customary international law relating to transboundary waters can be found within the text of both conventions. A stronger basis for customary international law would in turn foster cooperation and help avoid disputes over the interpretation of the key legal principles.

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**BENEFITS OF JOINING BOTH UNITED  
NATIONS GLOBAL WATER CONVENTIONS  
– A COUNTRY PERSPECTIVE**

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Many countries are already party to both the Water Convention and the Watercourses Convention (see for instance Chad, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Uzbekistan). By becoming Parties to both instruments these countries have signalled that they see benefits in both. This is evident in, for example, the Netherlands' reasoning on the occasion of joining

the Watercourses Convention in 2001, having been a member of the Water Convention since 1993. In joining the Watercourses Convention, the Netherlands noted that the water conventions combined offered a fuller package of complementary norms (see Letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs (in Dutch), 1st November 2000,

[http://assets.panda.org/downloads/ratification\\_justification\\_netherlands\\_1.pdf](http://assets.panda.org/downloads/ratification_justification_netherlands_1.pdf))



Transboundary Chu River between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Photo UNECE/Alexander Belokurov

# Building upon the momentum in support of both United Nations global water conventions

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“The two conventions reflect the state of general customary international law today. They offer any of the two riparian States (or any number of riparian States) the basic norms of fair and equitable sharing of the watercourse, and, at the same time, underline their duty to do no significant harm, as well as the duty to cooperate, including through the exchange of information, protection of ecosystems, and through peaceful settlement of disputes. This provides a sound basis for broader cooperation among the riparian States and for their joint management of water resources. States should adhere to the principles of International Water Law and promote their full implementation. (...) The Panel calls for wide

accession by States to the 1997 United Nations Watercourses Convention and the 1992 UNECE Water Convention, now open for accession to all United Nations Member States.”

**A Matter of Survival, report of the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace.**

**Geneva, 14th September 2017**

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**In recent years, momentum has been building in support of the United Nations global water conventions.** Notably, the Watercourses Convention entered into force, the Water Convention was opened up globally, and support to both instruments has been expressed at high political levels and forums. In February 2018, Chad became the first country from outside the pan-European region to accede to the Water Convention, closely followed by

Senegal in September 2018 and subsequently by Ghana which joined both conventions in June 2020. In taking these steps, these countries have not only confirmed their strong commitment to the equitable and sustainable management of transboundary waters through the principles and rules of international law, but also demonstrated their support to the universal approach of the United Nations global water conventions to cooperation, which has been gaining increasing support worldwide.

In this context, **experiences of regional and basin-wide approaches to accession** have been particularly beneficial. Chad, for example, has been an important advocate for the Water Convention amongst the States of the Chad Lake Basin and the Niger River Basin; and in so doing, is able to tailor the benefits of acceding to the conventions within its specific basins context, as well as share its experience of the national accession process by participating in events organized for other countries considering accession. Similarly, a number of river basin organizations, such as the Niger Basin Authority, the Volta Basin Authority and the Senegal River Basin Development Organization, are promoting accession by all their riparian members as a way to support and strengthen cooperation in their basin. In addition, regional organizations, such as the African Development Bank, can play an important role in encouraging countries to accede to the conventions.<sup>6</sup>

## **Many UN-Water Members and Partners are also mobilized to support accession and implementation.**

By supporting the United Nations global water conventions, countries, international organizations, river basins commissions, international financial institutions, NGOs and academia can **collectively help advance a common vision of equitable and sustainable management of shared resources and foster regional development and stability.**

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5 African Development Bank, 'UN, African Development Bank, Encourage African countries to join UN international water management body', 9th May 2019, <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/un-african-development-bank-encourage-african-countries-to-join-un-international-water-management-body-19262>

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- Transboundary Freshwater Dispute Database, <https://transboundarywaters.science.oregonstate.edu/content/transboundary-freshwater-dispute-database>
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**United  
Nations**



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