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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Expert Group Meeting on Improving Shared Water Resources Cooperation within the Framework of Global and Regional Agreements
Beirut, 6-7 December 2018

INFORMATION NOTE

I. BACKGROUND

Shared water resources in the Arab region are of great importance as two-thirds of all fresh water resources in the region cross one country border or more. Most Arab States depend for their water supply on rivers and/or aquifers that are shared with neighbouring countries, within the region and with countries from outside the region. The management of these shared surface water resources and the alteration of their natural river flows have allowed for the development of large irrigation projects, hydropower generation and the storage of reserves that can be drawn from to support domestic and agricultural demands. As the management of these shared water resources in one country may significantly affect water resources in another country, it is essential for riparian States to cooperate at the bilateral and basin levels as well as the regional and global levels to support shared water resources management, reaping the benefits of cooperation and avoiding potential conflicts.

The situation is further complicated in water basins that are shared between Arab and non-Arab countries; in transboundary river systems whose headwaters are situated outside the Arab region or are subject to armed conflict; or in shared water basins that are partially under occupation. Climate change and climate variability threatens to further complicate shared water resources management stressing the importance of dialogue and cooperation between riparian States.

In a water scarce region such as the Arab region, the shared character of the water resources represents an additional water security challenge. Cooperation thus becomes imperative. The United Nations designated the year 2013 as the International Year of Water Cooperation recognizing that cooperation is essential to assess and define a balance between the different needs and priorities of the riparian countries and share the resource equitably. Furthermore, transboundary cooperation has been identified as an instrument for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2015. Specifically, Goal 6, which aims to ensure the “availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all,” includes a target on integrated water resources management (IWRM), which aims to advance the implementation of IWRM at all levels, “including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate” (target 6.5). This reflects the acknowledgement of the global community of the importance of transboundary water cooperation for the achievement of sustainable development. Two indicators are proposed for monitoring progress on SDG 6.5, indicator 6.5.1 aims to reflect the degree to which IWRM is implemented at the country-level and includes reporting on IWRM implementation at the transboundary level. A dedicated indicator has in turn been formulated to specifically measure the proportion of a transboundary basin area that is covered by an ‘operational arrangement for water cooperation’ (indicator 6.5.2). In the first round of reporting on indicator 6.5.2 only 10 Arab countries responded to the survey.

At the global level, several legal frameworks are available to support shared water resources cooperation. These include the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses (United Nations Watercourse Convention), the Draft Articles on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (UNECE Water Convention).

At the regional level, the Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC) of the League of Arab States issued a resolution in 2016 calling for the development of a common set of guidance principles for shared water cooperation based on the previous work undertaken on the draft legal framework on shared water resources in the Arab Region that was initiated in 2010. These principles could serve as guidance for supporting cooperation on shared water resources in the Arab region.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

The objective of the meeting is to strengthen the capacity of ESCWA Member Countries to improve cooperation on shared water resources to contribute to sustainable development in the Arab Region.

The meeting aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Discuss the benefits, opportunities and challenges of transboundary cooperation for achieving sustainable development within the context of water scarcity and security and political frameworks existing in the Arab region;
- Present and inform on the SDG process, indicator 6.5.2, for promoting shared water cooperation;
- Exchange information on international and regional initiatives, projects and partnerships supporting cooperation on shared water resources.
- Inform the deliberations on the proposed Arab Ministerial Water Council principles for shared water cooperation.

The deliberations will help at assisting member States to pursue transboundary cooperation for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

III. PARTICIPANTS

The meeting will gather senior officials from ministries responsible for shared water management in Arab States and associated stakeholders. Representatives from the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as custodians of indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation and related SDGs will inform the discussions.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

The meeting is organized by ESCWA in collaboration with the Technical Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council of the League of Arab States and will be held from 6 to 7 December 2018 at the United Nations House in Beirut, Lebanon. The second day of the meeting is a closed meeting by invitation only from the League of Arab States dedicated for discussions on the draft guidance principles for shared water cooperation. The meeting is expected to begin at 9:00 am and conclude by 4:30 pm each day. The registration desk will be open as of 8:30 am on Thursday, 6 December 2018. Arabic-English simultaneous interpretation will be available during the first day of the expert group meeting.

Participants are kindly asked to bring photographic identification on the first day of the meeting and to allow sufficient time to pass through security to collect their identification badge. Access to the United Nations House is provided through the Gibran Khalil Gibran Garden pedestrian entrance.

V. DOCUMENTATION

Registered participants will receive the meeting agenda and a logistical information note detailing the meeting arrangements, suggested accommodations and other related matters.

VI. REGISTRATION

Invited participants and those who are nominated by their ministries to attend this meeting are kindly requested to complete and return their registration form to ESCWA by 14 November 2018. A colour, scanned passport-like photograph should be submitted with the registration form to allow for issuance of an identification badge to access the United Nations House.

A limited budget is available for the sponsorship of one nominated official or representative from each Arab state. Participants requesting financial support to participate in the meeting must return their completed registration form with a copy of their passport identification page to ESCWA no later than 7 November 2018 to be eligible for financial coverage. Financial support covers the cost of roundtrip travel to Beirut, a daily subsistence allowance for each night of participation in the meetings, and a terminal allowance to cover airport transfers, as appropriate. Roundtrip airfare would be arranged by ESCWA in economy-class on the most direct, least cost itinerary. Financial support is provided in accordance with United Nations Financial Rules and Regulations.

VII. ENTRY VISA

Participants are requested to secure their own visas for travel to Lebanon, as may be necessary. ESCWA can coordinate with the Government of Lebanon to assist in obtaining entry visas for participants who are unable to secure visas in their home countries. Those who need assistance in this matter should send a colour, scanned copy of their national passport containing all the required information to the ESCWA secretariat no later than Wednesday, 7 November 2018.

ESCWA can provide nominated participants with a personalized letter of invitation to facilitate the visa request process. Reimbursement of the visa cost can be provided upon submission of the original payment receipt to ESCWA in Beirut.

VIII. ACCOMMODATION AND TRANSPORTATION

The Markazia Suites hotel is located two blocks (five-minute walk) from the United Nations House and offers preferential room rates to meeting participants. The single room rate is US\$ 106/night and the double room rate is US\$ 128/night, inclusive of breakfast, internet access and all taxes. Airport pick-up can be arranged with the hotel management for US\$ 24. Additional information, as well as the names of other hotels offering preferential room rates in Beirut, will be provided to registered participants.

IX. CORRESPONDENCE

Inquiries and completed registration forms should be submitted to the following officials:

for Substantive issues:

Mr. Ziad Khayat
First Economic affairs Officer
Water Resources Section
Sustainable Development Policies Division
ESCWA
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: +961 1 978 517 (direct)
Cell.: +961 3 387 771
Fax: +961 1 981 510
E-mail: khayat@un.org

for Logistical issues:

Mr. Adnan Kaddoura
Staff Assistant
Water Resources Section
Sustainable Development Policies Division
ESCWA
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: +961 1 978 504 (direct)
Cell.: +961 70 732 116
Fax: +961 1 981 510
E-mail: kaddouraa@un.org