



WORKSHOP:
LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR COOPERATION ON
TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS
KEY ASPECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ARAB COUNTRIES

Information notice

I. Background

Water is an increasingly scarce resource in the Arab region. Overconsumption for industrial, agricultural and domestic uses has contributed to the severe deterioration of water quality and quantity. Considering demographic growth, impacts of climate variability and economic and social changes, water management poses and will continue to pose a major challenge.

Of the water resources in the Arab region, both surface and groundwater, more than two-thirds are shared by countries within the region or with neighbouring countries from outside the region. Most Arab States therefore depend on rivers and/or aquifers that are shared with neighbouring countries for their supply of freshwater. Considering the growing water challenges in the region, transboundary cooperation becomes increasingly important if conflicts between riparian countries are to be prevented. Transboundary cooperation will therefore contribute to stability, peace and prosperity in the region.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) has provided, since its entry into force in 1992, an important framework for improving the management of transboundary surface and groundwater resources in the pan-European region. The Water Convention is currently the only international legal framework in force governing the management of transboundary water resources. The Water Convention has become a global multilateral legal framework for transboundary water cooperation, open for accession by all United Nations Member States. In that context, the Water Convention could offer a solid cooperation framework for countries in the Arab region and with neighbouring countries, and the experience and the policy and technical guidance developed under the Water Convention could be of interest to the Arab region.

The Arab Ministerial Water Council, which operates within the framework of League of Arab States, adopted a resolution at their fifth Session (June 2013) inviting the Center of Water Studies and Arab Water Security to cooperate with UNECE for the purpose of convening a workshop to discuss the Water Convention of 1992 in order to clarify its legal obligations as well as to study the potential transferability of successful experiences to the Arab region. The Resolution also invited the Arab Countries to participate in this workshop.

II. Aims and objectives

The Workshop will discuss how transboundary cooperation can be fostered in order to improve water resources management between riparian countries, the sustainability of these shared resources and to safeguard water rights. Specifically, the Workshop will aim to increase awareness and understanding of the different legal frameworks for cooperation on shared waters resources. It will provide a platform to discuss the opportunity that the globalization of the Water Convention represents for the Arab region.

In particular, the Workshop will:

- Review legal frameworks for cooperation on shared water resources available at the global, regional and basin levels;
- Detail the guiding principles and general provisions of the Water Convention, its main obligations, as well as their potential relevance to the specific situation of the Arab region;
- Present the concrete outcomes of the work achieved within the framework of the Water Convention, including technical and strategic guidance documents, in particular the *Model Provisions on Transboundary Groundwater*, and the practical experiences of the Water Convention's application on the ground;
- Highlight opportunities and inspire effective practices and solutions for advancing legal and institutional frameworks and tools for transboundary water cooperation in the Arab region;
- Discuss the potential benefits for the Arab countries of acceding to the Water Convention, and demonstrate the benefits for the Convention arising from Arab countries joining.

III. Organization of work

Keynote presentations and a facilitated plenary will allow discussion on issues related to cooperative frameworks for the management of transboundary waters in the Arab region. All participants will be encouraged to contribute actively to the discussions.

The Arab participants will draw up an outcome document including their main recommendations to be presented to the Arab Ministerial Water Council.

The Conference will focus on the following themes:

- Setting the scene: rights and responsibilities of States in transboundary cooperation under the Water Convention and in relation to the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses
- International law and its application to groundwater: 2008 draft Articles on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers of the United Nations International Law Commission and 2012 UNECE Water Convention Model Provisions on Transboundary Groundwaters
- The draft Convention on shared water resources in the Arab region and the possibilities of strengthening water cooperation on shared water resources between Arab countries
- Strengthening legal and institutional aspects of transboundary cooperation on surface and groundwater resources
- Practical implementation of the Water Convention: jointly managing shared resources, balancing different interests for development in transboundary basins and adapting to climate variability
- Moving forward: discussion on opportunities and challenges for improving transboundary cooperation in the region, considering the advantages of becoming a Party to these treaties.

IV. Participation

The Workshop will be attended by high-level representatives and legal advisers to the Ministers of Water and of Foreign Affairs of the 22 countries members of the League of Arab States.

Relevant experts on international water law and water practitioners from the pan-European region and the Arab region will contribute to the Workshop. International organizations and donor representatives will also be invited.

The target number of participants is 40.

V. Venue and partners

The workshop will take place on 11-12 June 2014 in Tunis, Tunisia.

The meeting is jointly organized by UNECE, the Center of Water Studies and Arab Water Security of the League of Arab States and the Global Water Partnership Mediterranean (GWP-Med) in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

Funding for the workshop is provided by France, Switzerland, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN) and the League of Arab States.

VI. Practical information

The workshop will start at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 11 June 2014 and end at 5 p.m. on Thursday, 12 June 2014 in Tunis.

The working languages will be English, French and Arabic, with simultaneous interpretation. Lunches and coffee breaks will be provided. A reception will be organized for the dinner on Wednesday, 11 June 2014.

Registration

In order to register, nominated participants should send their letter of nomination and registration form to the UNECE secretariat <nathalie.halm@unece.org> **and** to the Center of Water Studies and Arab Water Security of the League of Arab States <cofws@yahoo.com> as soon as possible and **no later than 15 May 2014**.

Financial support for countries with economies in transition

The organizers can finance the participation in the workshop of up to one representative from the Ministry in charge of water and one representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Requests for financial support** should be submitted to the UNECE secretariat <nathalie.halm@unece.org> as soon as possible and **no later than 15 May 2014**. A copy of the passport is required for administrative purposes. No application for financial support will be accepted after this deadline. Sponsorship will be provided in accordance with United Nations financial rules and regulations.

Visa

Participants needing a visa should initiate visa procedures at least three weeks before the meeting. Participants requiring an entry visa for Tunisia and unable to secure an entry visa for Tunisia from

their home country should inform the organisers as soon as possible. Upon receipt of a formal nomination letter, on a request basis, a personalized letter of invitation can be provided to participants to facilitate the visa application process.

Webpage of the workshop

Further information and relevant material, such as the programme, practical information on the meeting venue, as well as on transport and accommodation in Tunis, will be available shortly at: www.unece.org/env/water/workshop_Arab_countries_2014.html