



INDIA भारत

Statement by

Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin
Permanent Representative

Open debate

On

Water, Peace and Security

(in connection with the agenda item Maintenance of International Peace
and Security)

22 November, 2016

Mr. President,

Thank you for convening this debate. We thank your delegation for preparing the useful concept paper and the briefers who have provided various perspectives on the subject.

Mr. President,

2. While the topic of today's discussion is Water, Peace and Security, the import that water has for humans far exceeds this perspective. Water sustains life on earth. India's philosophical tradition, like many others, is replete with references to the centrality of water to human existence. The Rig Veda, an ancient Indian scripture, has an invocation:

"Gracious be divine waters
for our protection,
be there for our drink,
and stream on us bliss and happiness.
Sovereigns over precious things,
and rulers over men, waters.
We seek healing balm of you".

3. Throughout human history there are myriad ways in which societies have successfully harnessed water resources. This has varied and evolved and continues to do so. Today, water has multiple uses, from drinking to sanitation, from growing food to industrial applications. Rivers and oceans are also pathways for navigation and trade, within countries and across continents.

4. Access to freshwater and its longer-term availability have acquired importance in view of the rapid population growth and unsustainable practices of water use. Climate change and warming patterns alter water availability, highlighting the need to better manage our water resources. The growing realization of the close water-food-energy linkages is also focusing attention on the impact of these inter-linkages on sustainable development.

Mr. President,

5. Across the planet, nearly a billion people do not have access to adequate safe water. Nearly 2.5 billion people lack access to basic sanitation. Water-borne diseases remain a concern. The MDGs and now the SDGs seek to prioritize ways to address these concerns. Increasing attention is being paid to the Blue economy and its sustainable uses.

6. There are several issues of policy that we are grappling with, in the management of water as a resource. They range from issues relating to private vs community 'ownership' of water, relative pricing of water for personal use, agriculture vs industrial use, allocation for survival vs luxury uses, treating water as a commodity vs a right, developing mandatory standards for efficiency of water use and so on.

Mr. President,

7. Recognizing the multiple facets of water in our lives and the need for wider cooperation, several UN agencies have been active on various aspects of issues relating to water. For instance, UNESCO initiated an International Hydrological Programme in 1995. Since 2003 UN-Water is the inter-agency coordination mechanism for all freshwater and sanitation related matters. 2005-2015 was declared as the International Decade on 'Water for Life'.

8. The trans-boundary aspects of significant water bodies and the imperative for international cooperation in this regard are also long well-acknowledged. Many of the multilateral environment agreements such as the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the 1992 Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and the 1994 UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) facilitate such international cooperation. The 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is of relevance in the context of offshore freshwater aquifers.

9. While there has so far been limited movement on a wider acceptance of the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention, there have been a range of bilateral or regional treaties and arrangements to promote water cooperation across upper and lower riparian states.

The Concept Paper notes that has been prepared notes that 200 treaties have been signed on 60 international watercourses in the last seven decades.

10. Experience shows that while international cooperation is essential in cases of the trans-boundary nature of water bodies, each specific instance has their own unique characteristics. Countries concerned have found ways to cooperate in specific contexts in their collective interest.

Mr. President,

11. India is both an upper riparian and lower riparian state for a number of different rivers, and is familiar with the issues involved in the cooperative management of trans-boundary river waters. The partition of India in 1947 also partitioned rivers to the west and east. We have engaged with our neighbours in managing these shared waters. The landmark 1960 Indus Water Treaty was finalized, several years before the 1966 Helsinki Principles on transboundary water sharing. There are also a series of other ongoing collaborative efforts with our neighbours on sharing of waters.

Mr. President,

12. Water impinges on every aspect of human survival including on human security. While the possibility of water-related conflicts cannot be ruled out, it is encouraging to note that the overall experience of the international community has been positive in evolving specific innovative cooperative approaches to trans-boundary issues.

13. In today's world and with our current understanding of the inter connectivity and mutuality of our environmental challenges we should aim to make 'water as a driver of cooperation' as the key term of international discourse rather than pursuing an approach that tends to securitize water issues. Going down the former path will engender genuine international collaboration. Going down the latter path on an issue as complex and cardinal to life as water will only be doing injustice to humanity as a whole.

Thank you.