

**High-Level International Conference on the International Decade For Action
“Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2019
“Promoting Action and Policy Dialogue on Water For Sustainable Development”**

Statement by Austria

delivered by

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Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations**

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Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, let me assure you that Austria is fully committed to achieving our internationally agreed water related goals and targets.

Naturally, this implies **strong action** on a domestic as well as on the regional and global level.

I. Starting with the **domestic level**: in Austria, we are proud to provide all citizens with access to water and sanitation in excellent quality and appropriate quantity. Waste water is collected and treated according to the highest standards. This is the result of many years of dedicated efforts in establishing integrated water management systems and improving water governance at all levels of public administration. At the same time, we are fortunate to be able to rely on the innovative expertise of the **Austrian water industry** to provide us with state-of-the-art solutions to achieve our goals.

Looking ahead, the Austrian government will focus on three policy areas:

1. maintaining our high national standards,
2. keeping an aging water infrastructure in good shape, and
3. enhancing our efforts to reduce pollution from diffuse sources, pharmaceuticals and micro-plastics.

II. Turning to the regional level, we believe the issue of **sharing water** is of critical importance.

A total of 276 of the world's river basins, containing almost 60% of the global freshwater resource, are **shared water bodies**. Almost 3 billion people in 145 countries live in **transboundary basins**.

Austria is no exception, as we are located in the most international river basin worldwide - the **Danube basin**, which is **shared by 19 countries**.

Based on our experiences Austria is deeply convinced that sharing waters is intrinsically linked with sharing responsibilities.

1. This is why Austria has **transboundary water commissions** in place with all our neighboring countries since decades.
2. From its inception, Austria has been a contracting party to the **International Convention for the Protection of the Danube River**. We believe that the joint work within the **Danube basin countries is a model for international cooperation**. We are ready to share these experiences and invite others to draw inspiration from the work of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River and its Secretariat in Vienna.
3. Austria has also joined the **UN ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Rivers and Lakes**, a Convention which is open for global participation.

III. Regarding Austria's international development cooperation our activities in the water and sanitation sector focus on the collaboration with regional bodies, international organisations and country governments, mainly in Albania, Burkina Faso, Moldova, Mozambique, Uganda and the Palestine Territories.

Let me highlight three concrete examples:

1. In the framework of the **EU neighborhood policy** Austria is the lead country of a major EU project which prepares **river basin plans** - in line with the methodology of the EU Water Framework Directive - to help **improve the management of water resources** and specifically of transboundary rivers, in the six Eastern Partnership countries Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.
2. The successful water and sanitation program initiated by the Austrian Development Cooperation in small towns and rural growth centers in Southwestern Uganda has over the years being scaled up to a very successful country wide support program for the water and environment sector, including an integrated water resource management component to promote sustainable water catchment management planning. Additionally, the Austrian Development Agency, the operational arm of Austrian development cooperation, implements EU-funded investments in water supply and sanitation for refugees from South Sudan in Northern Uganda.

3. Austria collaborates with the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) on the so called "Water Future and Solutions" initiative. Under this initiative models are developed and scenarios built that combine parameters like land use, demographic and climate change related data and serve to predict and address water scarcity challenges on global and regional scales.

Finally, let me assure you that Austria will continue its engagement on all levels to attain SDG 6, standing ready to share her long tradition in water governance and integrated water management as well as offering the expertise of Austria's professional water industry as a reliable partner for the implementation of tailor-made solutions to challenges worldwide.

As the Secretary General underlined, water is a matter of life and death. And I would add a question of dignity and a human right. Let's join our forces to make it a reality so that everyone can enjoy safe drinking water and sanitation!

Thank you!