HIGH-LEVEL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON WATER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
Dushanbe, 20-22 June 2018

STATEMENT OF
H.E Dr. Mohamed Abdel Aty
Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation of Egypt

Y.E. MR. Kokhir Rasulzoda, PRIME-MINISTER of THE REPUBLIC of TAJIKISTAN and CHAIRMAN of THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE
Honorable Prime-Ministers and Ministers, Distinguished Ambassadors,
Heads of Delegations and Diplomatic Corps; Representatives of the UN
Agencies and Development Partners Institutions, Guests participants; Friends
and Colleagues

I would like to thank the Government and People of the sister country of Tajikistan
for inviting Egypt to participate in this important high-level international
conference on Water for Sustainable Development.

First allow me to express my immense pleasure and gratitude to be amongst this
excellent gathering in this beautiful city “Dushanbe”, the capital of Tajikistan.

On behalf of the people of Egypt, I wish to convey to you a message of friendship,
peace, and hope for prosperous future for our peoples worldwide. It is true; we
should cooperate toward achieving sustainable development, welfare, building
communal bridges, and achieving greater economic integration for generations and
generations to come.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman

On 25 September 2015, Government leaders, UN High Level Representatives and
civil society from 193 countries adopted, at the 70th Session of the United Nations
General Assembly, the 2030 Development Agenda titled “Transforming our world:
this 2030 Agenda with its 17 SDGs provide clear guidelines and targets for all
countries to adopt in accordance with their own priorities and the environmental
challenges of the world at large. The SDGs are an inclusive agenda as they tackle
the root causes of poverty and unite us together to make a positive change for both
people and planet offers a unique opportunity to put the whole world on a more
prosperous and sustainable development path.

Knowing that Water is at the core of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and
being critical to nearly every aspect of sustainable development creating social,
economic, financial, and other benefits, Egypt has prepared its National Water
Resources Plan for the period 2017 to 2037 putting the year 2030 as key milestone (SDGs and Egypt Vision 2030). This plan gathers all related sectors and stakeholders with anticipated roles and commitments. The four main pillars of the NWPP are Rationalization, development, WQ treatment, and Knowledge and awareness.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman

Egypt adopts cooperation, coordination and integration in its clear policy framework towards achieving sustainable development goals. In this context, The Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation - on behalf of the government of Egypt-in cooperation with international partners is organizing the first Water Week in Cairo 2018 with the aim to promote awareness related to water conservation and sustainable development, foster new thinking to face water-related challenges & support actions towards integrated water resources management.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman

I am not revealing a secret when I tell you about the critical and very unique water situation in Egypt as it is a very dry country located in a semi-arid zone. Egypt has reached a state where the quantity of water available is imposing limits on its national economic development. It will be evident with population predictions for 2025 that per capita water share might go down to less than 500 m$^3$/ca/yr with indicators of rapid deterioration of surface and groundwater quality.

Being the most downstream country in the Nile Basin and yet depending almost totally on the Nile River originating outside its borders, Egypt is the world’s driest country and has a total renewable water resources dependency ratio of 97% according to FAO. The gap between the needs and availability of water is about 21 BCM/yr fulfilled by drainage and waste water reuse helping the Nile system in Egypt to reach an overall efficiency exceeding 80%. In addition, Egypt imports virtually an amount of water equal to 34 BCM annually to balance its food gap.

On the other hand, Egypt is a typical example of a developing country which is highly vulnerable to climate change and which faces numerous threats to its economic, social and environmental sustainability. It is fuelled by a growing population and growing demand coupled with the constraints of a finite resource base and could develop into genuine crisis situations if not quickly and decisively addressed.

These pressures posed by water insecurity resulted from sea-level rise, salt water intrusion into Ground Water reservoirs and particularly the areas susceptible to
inundation due to its low-altitude such as Nile Delta, the millions of people in the Nile Delta are vulnerable to be resettled and billions of dollars investments are at high risk. Sea level rise due to climate change and in combined with local Nile Delta subsidence present serious impacts on low land Delta regions and adjacent highly populated cities like Alexandria, Baltim, Damietta and Port Said. Impacts of climate change in the Northern coast of Egypt are expected to lead to the immigration of at least five million people from the Nile Delta to the South if adaptation measures are not take place.

The main sector affected by Climate Change impacts in Egypt is the agriculture sector as climate change studies predict a reduction in the productivity of two major crops in Egypt (wheat and maize) by 15% and 19%; respectively by 2050. Losses in crop productivity are mainly attributed to the projected temperature increase (estimated at 2-3°C in 100 yrs) as a result increasing crop-water stress, as well as the inundation, salt water intrusion, and salinization of about 15% of the most fertile arable land in the Nile Delta.

The other sectors affected by climate change impacts include tourism, employment and human settlements as well which reflects its implications on illegal migration. This is without neglecting the uncertainty resulting from the significant differences in the Global Circulation Models regarding the forecast of rainfall patterns in the Nile basin, and their impact on its flow.

Moreover, more challenges are expected considering the expected impact of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam currently under construction neglecting the absence of sufficient downstream impact studies. Bearing all previous in mind, we can easily confirm that Egypt’s actual available water resources are already overused and cannot fulfil today’s requirements. So how about tomorrow?

Currently, Egypt is dealing successfully with its water scarcity through the implementation of various efficient irrigation water improvement programs, multiple water recycling mechanisms & higher agriculture productivity techniques that contribute to some extent to Egypt’s food security.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman

With such a complex situation, it is not possible to accept a diminution of Egypt’s historical rights and current uses in the Nile waters. And I believe that no one on earth would accept the death of his people due to thirst and famine. Nevertheless, the difficult environmental and economic situation in our sister countries in the Nile basin cannot be neglected as well. But there is always a chance to reach a compromise. The Nile basin does not suffer from lack of water, since the annual rainfall on the basin countries as a whole reaches up to 7,375 Billion m³, with
1,661 Billion m³ falling inside the basin. This means that only 5% of the Nile water resources are used. So we have to confirm here that good management is the key.

On a regional note, cooperation under the umbrella of the Nile Basin Initiative was a promising success since its establishment in 1999 until the escalating conflict on the Cooperative Framework Agreement has been initiated by the unilateral signatures and ratification of some of the Nile Basin Countries starting 2010.

Nevertheless, we truly believe that confidence and trust are still the main pillars for our cooperation. This was translated by the Declaration of Principles between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan on GERD. The declaration is an evidence of good will and trust from Egypt’s side. Now it is time for the Nile Basin Countries to present confidence, trust and understanding as well.

In the same context, President Abdel Fattah El Sisi participated in the first Nile Basin States Summit in Uganda on 21st and 22nd June 2017 to discuss inter-cooperation in many development fields and to promote cooperation, in the hope of bridging the current gap and to discuss the mechanisms of consensus to resolve disputes over the controversial points of the CFA, ensuring the water security of all the basin States and preserving the unity of the basin countries.

Egypt participated in the Nile Basin Countries Presidential Summit with a new proposal for Nile basin heads of state to solve the Entebbe Agreement bones of contention.

The proposal includes a number of principles governing Nile water management, mechanisms of joint cooperation and defining its main lines for water security for all and establishing the principle of no harm in consistence with the principles of international law. Unfortunately, this new approach was rejected by some of the Nile Basin Countries.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman

The only way out of the current dilemma is regional cooperation and benefit sharing among riparians under win-win and no harm principles in a spirit of good political will. Benefits beyond the River represented in new projects such as the Establishment of a Navigation Line between Lake Victoria and the Mediterranean Sea (VICMED) may pave the way to overcome our differences by achieving socio-economic integration and cohesion among Nile river basin footprint countries; achieving a sustainable integrated multimodal transport system among Nile river basin footprint countries; and enhance trade and tourism among river basin footprint countries.
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman

We need to be unified by Water, the source of life and prosperity. Egypt has always been and will continue to be laying a hand of cooperation, peace, and fraternity to our brothers in the Nile Basin, and the whole world.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman

Before I conclude; I would like to thank the Government and People of Tajikistan for their kind hospitality and warm reception accorded to us from the moment of our arrival to Dushanbe Airport.

Wishing you a very successful conference...

Thank you