

**Mr. Zaayman** (South Africa):

My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to Senegal for convening this important and timely debate on the important role played by water in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Conflict has cascading effects and far-reaching implications for water security, which lead to negative impacts on political situations and on the social, economic, and environmental aspects of sustainable development. The impact of water on conflict can be seen in Africa, particularly in those countries along the River Nile, as well as in the water-scarce parts of the Middle East. We therefore believe that water security must be one of the primary concerns that should be addressed in the aftermath of conflicts in order to restore livelihoods and revive economic and social development.

In global terms, indications suggest that, at the current rate, the overuse of fresh water relative to its supply will severely slow economic development. The lack of clean water will be the cause of massive food shortages and compromise energy output within the next 15 to 20 years.

Potential conflicts over water resources can pose an imminent threat to security, both globally and on the African continent, especially as people continue to seek better standards of living in the face of increasingly limited resources. That in turn will result in consequences such as greater flows of economic migrants seeking sustenance elsewhere.

That scenario is confirmed in the World Bank's recent report entitled *High and Dry: Climate Change, Water and the Economy*, which concludes that

“in the next 35 years, water insecurity — made worse by climate change — could force migration, spark conflict and be a significant financial drag on regional governments”.

Coming from a continent where water security remains such a high priority, I wish to stress the strong relevance of this issue to Africa. There is no doubt that the international community must strengthen its focus on the preservation of water, including by combating climate change. President Jacob Zuma is a member of the United Nations and World Bank High- Level Panel on Water in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, on clean water and sanitation.

The Panel, convened at the initiative of the Secretary-General and the President of the World Bank, recently called for a fundamental shift in the way the world looks at water and issued an action plan for a new approach to water management that will help the world to achieve the SDGs. Furthermore, the World Economic Forum, in its *Global Risks*

*Report* in January, has identified the scarcity of water as the number-one long-term risk globally.

We should also work towards making the increase in competition for water become a catalyst for more intense cooperation and innovation rather than a source of conflict. Indeed, the challenges surrounding water can also be a path for dialogue, mediation and confidence-building between States. The work of the Department of Political Affairs in that regard is commended.

South Africa shares transboundary river basins with three other African countries. In that regard, achieving transboundary water security has assisted us and our neighbours in stimulating regional cooperation. Shared waters provide opportunities for cooperation and support political development on wider issues such as sustainable development and economic integration.

The Southern African Development Community remains a prime example of such an approach, whereby the organization coordinates transboundary water cooperation on 15 basins across Southern Africa. We should also mention our strong belief that a country's water security is intrinsically linked to that of its neighbouring countries, and is the very cornerstone of regional integration and development.

For South Africa, as a constitutional, democratic State, inclusiveness and gender sensitivity have always been core principles of our national policy. Accelerating the empowerment of women in regional water management should therefore be viewed as critical, because women play an important part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water. The pivotal role of women as providers and users of water and as guardians of the living environment is seldom reflected in institutional arrangements for the development and management of water resources.

Water scarcity is a major threat to economic growth and stability around the world. Water is and will remain at the heart of international peace and security, the defence of human rights and the imperative for sustainable development paths. The African Union's Agenda 2063 development goals best articulate the demand that Africa has for water, as it states that,

“Africa shall have equitable and sustainable use and management of water resources for socioeconomic development, regional cooperation and the environment.”