



Ministerial Declaration on the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin

We, the Ministers in charge of water of The Republic of the Gambia, Republic of Guinea Bissau, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and Republic of Senegal sharing the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin, gathered in Geneva on the 28th and 29th of September 2021,

Recognising that water is an essential resource for economic, social and environmental development, for the eradication of poverty and hunger, for health, for the structural transformation of our economies, and for the development of human capital in our region, including the empowerment of women,

Recognising also the important links between water, peace and security,

Recognizing that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic demonstrates that it is crucial that safe and affordable drinking water, and adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene are available, accessible and affordable to all,

Stressing the strategic importance of the groundwater resources in the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin for sustainable development and peace in our countries, where 80% of the population depend on its waters,

Aware of the economic, social, environmental and security risks associated with the overexploitation and mismanagement of water resources - risks that are exacerbated by climate variability and change, increasing water stress as well as the degradation of land and water-related ecosystems,

Noting with concern the common challenges facing groundwater management in the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin, including: lack of knowledge; weak monitoring, assessment and data management and exchange systems; weaknesses in governance at national and regional levels, for cooperation, protection and equitable and efficient use of water resources; the need to strengthen the engagement of decision-makers, users, the public and the private sector in groundwater management; as well as the need to mobilise finances to support and develop the sector,

Reaffirming our commitment to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation, and the African Water Vision 2025,

Noting with concern that, the world is not on track to achieve water-related Sustainable Development Goal and targets by 2030 at the current rate of progress, in particular with regard to transboundary aquifer cooperation, as shown in the 2021 progress report on SDG 6 prepared by UN-Water and the 2021 Progress Report on Transboundary Water Cooperation, prepared by UNECE and UNESCO,

Recalling the launch of the ambitious and accelerated response to reach our common vision by 2030, and the pledge to make the decade 2020-2030 one of action and delivery for sustainable development,

Aware of the fact that the destinies of our countries are linked by the water resource crossing our territories and uniting our populations through the various uses of water,

Convinced of the need and the benefits for our countries to act jointly and cooperate at regional level,

Aware that the physical interaction between groundwater and surface water requires a commitment to integrated water resource management to ensure sustainable and equitable use,

Considering the pioneering character, at the global level, of the experience of our region in transboundary cooperation on surface waters, in particular the cooperation in force within the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS) and the Organization for the Development of the Gambia River (OMVG), as well as the need to develop this expertise in order to meet the challenges of groundwater management,

Noting with satisfaction the progress made in developing a common vision for the sustainable and concerted management of the basin within the framework of the Regional Working Group for Transboundary Cooperation on the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin (RWG), with the participation of OMVS and OMVG , and with the support of the Secretariat of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, provided by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Geneva Water Hub, and the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre,

Aware that further efforts, are needed at national and regional level to achieve this common vision,

1. **Commit**, at the national level, to advance national water sector reforms, laws and regulations and to strengthen their implementation, to rationalise and strengthen the competences and capacities of the institutions responsible for water management, and to promote the intersectoral approach and the participation of users and the public in the management of the resources;
2. **Decide** to improve, at the national level, the knowledge of groundwater resources, their present and future uses for their sustainable management in the face of climate change and anthropogenic pressures, and to strengthen capacity for groundwater monitoring and assessment, and for data and information management and exchange;
3. **Commit** to strengthening transboundary cooperation for strategic, integrated and concerted management of the water resources of the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin in order to promote resilience, sustainable development and stability in the region;
4. **Welcome** the vision and the regional project elaborated by the Regional Working Group and **commit** to supporting its implementation by mobilising human, technical and financial resources;
5. **Commit** to establishing a legal and institutional framework for transboundary cooperation for the sustainable management of the waters of the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin, in conjunction with the surface waters of the region and **decide** to launch, in line with the vision and the regional project, a negotiation process to define this legal and institutional framework, taking into account the existing frameworks of the OMVS and OMVG;
6. **Also decide** to strengthen the Regional Working Group with the necessary competences, capacities and powers to guide the next steps in the development of the cooperation, the establishment of a transboundary legal and institutional framework, and the implementation of the regional project; including by facilitating, as needed, the involvement of representatives of other Ministries and competent authorities, in particular the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Environment and Finances;

7. **Adopt**, the annexed revised terms of reference of the Regional Working Group;
8. **Request** the OMVS and the OMVG to support technically the cooperation around the groundwater of the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin and related fundraising efforts;
- 9.. **Thank** UNEP and the Sahel and Sahara Observatory (OSS) for submitting a project proposal to the Global Environment Fund which, if funded, will allow implementing some elements of the vision and the project of the Regional Working Group;
10. **Invite** other technical and financial partners to support the development of transboundary cooperation in the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin, and the implementation of the vision and the regional project, and to consult with the Regional Working Group to coordinate and harmonize the various initiatives;
11. **Invite** the member countries of OMVS and OMVG that do not share the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin - namely Guinea and Mali - to participate as observers in the platform for the cooperation on the SMAB in order to benefit from the exchange of experience and knowledge, and thus strengthen their groundwater management in conjunction with surface water;
12. **Encourage** countries that have not yet done so to accede to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and the 1997 Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses, which are fundamental tools for the promotion of sustainable and non-conflictual management of transboundary waters;
13. **Decide** to contribute actively to the promotion of cooperation on transboundary aquifers, in particular in the framework of the 9th World Water Forum to be held from 21 to 26 March 2022 in Dakar under the theme "Water Security for Peace and Development";
14. **Thank** the Secretariat of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Geneva Water Hub, and the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre for their support, as well as the donors which financed the initiative on the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin, namely the European Union and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, for the support received and for their commitment to continue to back the process of strengthening cooperation in the SMAB;
15. **Decide** to remained seized of the matter and to meet regularly to ensure follow-up. The next meeting should take place by September 2023 at the latest.

ANNEX

Revised Terms of Reference of the Regional Working Group for Transboundary Cooperation on the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin (SMAB)

Context

In February 2019, the States in the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin (SMAB), comprising The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal, embarked on a dialogue to establish transboundary cooperation on this shared water resource.

In April 2020, a Regional Working Group (RWG) was established by the SMAB Member States, in close collaboration with OMVS and OMVG, with the mandate to establish a mechanism for transboundary cooperation on the SMAB.

From May 2020 to September 2021, the RWG embarked on designing a common vision and a joint project aimed at fulfilling the mandate given to it.

The work of the RWG was facilitated and supported by the Secretariat of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Geneva Water Hub, as well as by the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre (IGRAC).

The first ministerial meeting on the Regional Initiative for Transboundary Cooperation on the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin, held in Geneva on 28 and 29 September, took stock of the work produced by the RWG and decided to strengthen the mandate of the RWG, in order to consolidate cooperation on the shared resource, by adopting these revised terms of reference.

I. Mandate of the Regional Working Group

The Regional Working Group (RWG) is an intergovernmental mechanism which mandate is to provide a framework for consultation, coordination and decision making among the States in the basin for concerted transboundary management of the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin (SMAB).

The RWG provides the interface between the competent national authorities in charge of the resource, the basin organizations (OMVS and OMVG), and the technical and financial partners, in relation to the concerted management of the aquifer system.

The RWG performs the following tasks:

1. Ensures cooperation on groundwater through the exchange and sharing of data on the aquifer and its resources;
2. Leads the implementation of initiatives in the SMAB, including the negotiation of a legal and institutional framework;
3. Works for the financing of activities related to SMAB, including promoting the coordination of the different technical and financial partners;
4. Any other function decided by the country representatives.

The RWG mandate begins upon validation of the present terms of reference by the States of the SMAB and continues until such time as the SMAB States determine a permanent mechanism for the cooperative transboundary management of the SMAB or decide to abandon this project.

II. Membership of the Regional Working Group

The Regional Working Group is made up of high-level representatives of the four Basin States, the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS), the Organization for the Development of the Gambia River (OMVG), and the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS), as follows:

- Two (2) representatives from each BASM State
- One (1) representative of the OMVS
- One (1) representative of OMVG
- One (1) representative of OSS

The representatives of the SMAB States, the basin organisations (OMVS and OMVG) and the OSS are permanent members of the RWG. Each State of the SMAB, the basin organisations and the OSS also appoint alternate representatives.

In addition, RWG members may be accompanied, as needed, by national experts, including from other ministries or authorities, according to the items on the agenda.

III. Working methods of the Regional Working Group

The secretariat of the RWG is provided by OMVS and OMVG. The two organizations agree on the rules of operation of the secretariat, in close coordination with the Member States.

The Secretariat of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes provided by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Geneva Water HUB, as well as the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre (IGRAC) support the process, the work and the meetings of the RWG and its secretariat, depending on the resources available.

The RWG reports regularly to Ministers of the SMAB States on its work and the actions taken within the framework of its mandate.

The chairmanship of the RWG meetings shall rotate among the Member States.

The RWG meets regularly and determines the frequency of its meetings according to its workload. The meetings are convened by the State that chairs the RWG at the meeting in question.

Should a Member State not be able to hold the meeting, the next state in the order of rotation may host the meeting.

If the State that is supposed to have the chairmanship cannot host the meeting, as decided by the RWG, the State that follows in the order of rotation may convene the meeting.

Decisions are made by consensus. Each party strives to work towards finding solutions in the event of disagreements.

Information exchanged in the context of the RWG activities is treated with the confidentiality appropriate to multilateral exchanges.

The working languages are English, French and Portuguese. The RWG ensures that working documents are prepared in all languages.

The RWG may also invite technical and financial partners to participate as observers in its meetings.

Signed in Geneva, on the 29th of September 2021

H.E. Mr. James Furmos Peter Gomez

Minister of Fisheries and Water Resources
of the Republic of The Gambia

H.E. Orlando Mendes Viegas

Minister of State for Natural Resources and
Energy of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau

H.E. Mr. Mohamed El Hassen Boukhreiss

Minister of Hydraulics and Sanitation
of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania

H.E. Mr. Serigne Mbaye Thiam

Minister of Water and Sanitation
of the Republic of Senegal