

REPORT

In a world first, water Ministers secure pioneering Cooperation over the Senegal-Mauritania Aquifer Basin in Ljubljana

October 22, 2024 – Grand Plaza Hotel, Ljubljana, Slovenia. On the back of the 10th Meeting of Parties of the UNECE Water Convention

Ministers and senior officials from The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, and Senegal reaffirmed their commitment to advancing cooperation on the sustainable management of the Senegal-Mauritania Aquifer Basin (SMAB) during the second high-level session of the Regional Transboundary Cooperation Initiative for the SMAB. The high-level meeting follows up a Ministerial Declaration on SMAB signed in 2021 in which commits to take steps toward a concerted management of this groundwater reserve covering an area of approximately 350,000 km². This groundwater is strategic to secure water for cities and rural productivity. Organized by the SMAB Regional Working Group (RWG) with the support of the Senegal River Basin Organisation (OMVS), Gambia River Basin Organisation (OMVG), the UNECE Water Convention Secretariat, the World Bank, the Observatoire du Sahara et du Sahel, the EU and the Geneva Water Hub (GWH), the session highlighted the collective determination of the four nations to address the common water challenges they face.

Geneva Water Hub Remarks

“The Geneva Water Hub is proud to have facilitated a trusting environment for this pioneering work.” stated GWH Director General, Mark Zeitoun. The environment has been crucial in advancing cross-border discussions on water management, especially through politically tumultuous times. The political commitment of the SMAB states continues to inspire regional and global cooperation efforts. "The joint and coordinated support of two transboundary river basin organizations—OMVS and OMVG—for enhanced and concerted conjunctive groundwater and surface management is a world-first that should be recognized at the global level," the Director General emphasized.

"We stand ready to assist the SMAB countries as they formalize the governance of this vital source of water," the GWH Director added. The invitation extended to Guinea and Mali to join the Regional Working Group as observers underscores the expanding nature of this cooperation, which strengthens water security across the region. This collaboration demonstrates how water cooperation and solidarity can transcend borders, enhancing regional stability.

Progress and Key Objectives

- The inter-ministerial session built on the momentum of the 2021 Declaration [link to our website], with key objectives centered on: **Presenting the achievements** of the RWG, including the creation of a Secretariat, **Securing funding commitments** for the sustainable management of SMAB; and **initiating formal negotiations** for a legal and institutional framework to govern SMAB.

The GWH praised the commitment of international donors, regional partners, and member states for their continued investment in the institutionalization of the SMAB initiative. This financial support is essential as the Regional Working Group prepares for the next phase of formal negotiations and governance development.

Next Steps

Looking forward, the GWH highlighted the upcoming submission of a draft agreement to member states, marking a critical step toward formal negotiations. This agreement will serve as the foundation for a robust governance framework, ensuring the sustainable management of the SMAB. The final adoption of the agreement is anticipated at the 2026 UN Water Conference—a key milestone in securing the water resources for over 15 million people across the region.

Notable Speakers and Attendees:

- H.E. Ms. Amal Maouloud, Minister of Hydraulics and Sanitation, Mauritania
- Mr. Buba Sangyang, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources, The Gambia
- H.E. Mr. Malam Sambu, Minister of Natural Resources, Guinea-Bissau
- Mr. Baboucar Mboundor Ngom, Secretary General, Ministry of Hydraulics and Sanitation, Senegal
- H.E. Mr. Mohamed Abdel Vetah, High-Commissioner, Organisation pour la mise en valeur du fleuve Senegal

Conclusion

The event concluded with a reflection on the consensus reached during the discussions and the next steps. Participants celebrated the progress made and outlined future steps for regional cooperation. For more information, contact the RWG Secretariat or visit the online meeting platform.