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Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan Should Negotiate Mutually Beneficial Agreement over Management of Nile Waters, Top Official Tells Security Council

Cairo, Addis Ababa, Khartoum Ministers Make Their Respective Cases to Members

While Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan all have legitimate claims to, and concerns about, use of the Nile River Basin's waters, the three neighbours should negotiate in good faith towards a mutually beneficial agreement on the historic waterway's sustainable management, the senior United Nations official for the Horn of Africa told the Security Council today.

Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, emphasized: "Each of the countries sharing the Nile waters has both rights and responsibilities, and the use and management of this natural resource requires the continued engagement of all nations involved, in good faith, with a view to reaching common ground." He added: "There is room to move forward" in the spirit of cooperation, compromise and good neighbourliness.

Recounting the history of negotiations over the river's use, which have been ongoing for a decade, he noted that tensions have escalated in recent years as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam – whose construction began in 2011 – nears completion. With little forward movement emerging, he said, President Félix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has stepped up his engagement on the issue in his capacity as Chair of the African Union.

He recalled that the League of Arab States issued a communiqué on the dispute in June, which called upon Ethiopia to refrain from filling the dam's reservoir without first reaching an agreement, and asked the Security Council to discuss the matter. Ethiopia objected to that request, describing it as an attempt to politicize and internationalize the dispute, he said. To assist the African Union's leadership of the negotiations, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been asked to provide technical advice with a view to helping the three countries reach a mutual understanding, he added.

Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP, noted that the Nile has delivered freshwater, fed agriculture and supported livelihoods in Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan for thousands of years. Whereas a number of dams exist on the river in all three countries, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will be a major source of hydropower and greatly enhance Ethiopia's energy supply, she said, adding that surplus power can be exported across the region, helping to accelerate industrialization. "Well-planned hydraulic infrastructure on a shared river course can be a source of enhanced collaboration, and need not be a zero-sum game," she emphasized.

Noting that the three States have undertaken sustained efforts to enhance cooperation on transboundary water resources, she recalled that, in 2015, they signed the Agreement on Declaration of Principles, in

which they committed to “cooperation, equitable and reasonable” water-resource use. They also agreed to settle any disputes peacefully and pledged to work under the auspices of the African Union on outstanding issues of the negotiations, she said. However, agreement on a dispute-resolution mechanism and arrangements for the dam during times of protracted drought, among other issues, remains outstanding today.

As all three Governments have recognized, demand on water resources, both for agriculture and energy, is rising, she said. Cooperative water management is becoming even more important in the context of climate change, as models indicate that the Nile’s flow will exhibit increasing variability in the coming years. “It is, therefore, imperative that the parties work together to manage these interconnected challenges,” she stressed.

Briefing on behalf of the African Union Chairperson was the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who said tensions around the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam have been rising for years. Despite several diplomatic initiatives, negotiations have ultimately reverted to the African Union under the principle of “African solutions to African problems”, he added. Under the bloc’s auspices, a draft agreement now exists, and 90 per cent of technical problems have been resolved, he asserted, while cautioning that, pending a final accord on all elements, the African Union has requested that all sides abstain from taking positions that could further complicate the negotiations.

As Council members took the floor, some delegates noted that, despite the dam’s significant potential to benefit the region, its construction has become a source of both misunderstanding and tension. Several speakers underlined the importance of constructive engagement and compromise, citing their own experiences of managing tensions with other States over transboundary water sources. Many also underscored the importance of holding negotiations over an African project that affects three African neighbours under the auspices of the African Union.

Niger’s representative echoed others in calling upon Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to demonstrate the continued political will to engage in negotiations, while urging the three States to exercise restraint and refrain from any actions that could put a final agreement at risk. “Peaceful coexistence is priceless,” he emphasized, noting his own country’s membership of a successful nine-State water management framework – the Niger Basin Authority. Welcoming the African Union Assembly’s pledges to push forward with negotiations, he spotlighted the important principle of subsidiarity, saying it should lead the three relevant countries to resolve their own challenges.

Kenya’s representative emphasized that the goal of all the peoples of the Horn of Africa is to throw off the shackles of poverty and the ills of war. Describing the concerns of Egypt and Sudan as legitimate – and Ethiopia’s use of the Nile’s waters as equally so – he declared: “Kenya stands with the three States, recognizing their equality and that all their people equally deserve development and prosperity.” Against that backdrop, the three Governments are to be commended for placing their faith and confidence in the African Union’s mediation mechanism while agreeing that the principle of subsidiarity remains critical, he said.

India’s representative shared his own country’s experience as a riparian State – one situated on a riverbank – that has engaged in difficult negotiations on transboundary water issues. India’s experience further underscores the importance of bilateral or plurilateral mechanisms agreed by the primary stakeholders, taking into account technical details, historical usage and socioeconomic aspects, he said. Going forward, Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan should pursue bilateral engagements and cooperate fully with the African Union to reach a long-term solution that will serve the development needs of all communities, he advised.

Mexico's delegate also shared his country's experience, noting that it has a long history of sharing water resources, both on its northern border with the United States and its southern border with Belize and Guatemala. Suggesting that the International Boundary Water Commission – established between the United States and Mexico in 1989 – could serve as a good template for similar arrangements between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan, he called upon them to reach agreement on filling the dam and urged them to abstain from actions that could undermine the goodwill needed to reach such a compromise.

Sudan's Minister for Foreign Affairs reaffirmed the need for the process to continue under African Union auspices and urged the Council to play a positive role in resolving the dispute. She said her country has supported the dam's construction from the outset, understanding that its advantages would not be restricted to Ethiopia, and that it would operate according to a legally binding agreement that considers the equitable, reasonable use of cross-border resources without inflicting harm on downstream States. However, she warned that the 74 billion cubic metre dam, located near Sudan's border, could present a threat to half of the country and to all of Egypt in the absence of coordination with downstream communities. "It is crucial for us to be kept abreast on the filling and functioning methods of the Renaissance Dam," she emphasized, pointing out that Ethiopia has rejected all recent proposals.

Egypt's Minister for Foreign Affairs, echoing some of those points, stressed that more than 100 million Egyptians face an existential threat from a dam of mammoth proportions being built along the artery that gives them life. Noting that Ethiopia has unilaterally begun filling the dam – essentially declaring ownership of the Nile – he said Egypt's response has been one of restraint in the interest of all sides. He went on to denounce Ethiopia's actions as a violation of international law and an attempt to transform a boundary river into an instrument of political control. The failure of negotiations and the absence of a viable settlement compelled Cairo to request that the Council to intervene in a situation that could endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, he said, urging members to call for the adoption of Tunisia's draft resolution seeking an equitable agreement within a defined timeline.

Ethiopia's Minister for Water, Irrigation and Energy said it is unfitting of the Council's time and resources to hold discussions on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. The project is not the first of its kind in Africa nor in the world, he said, adding: "Perhaps what puts [the dam] in distinction from other projects is the extent of hope and aspiration in generates for 65 million Ethiopians that have no access to electricity." Ethiopia has the best wishes for its neighbours, Egypt and Sudan, and believes in their ability to cooperate for their mutual benefit, he said. Pointing out that both countries have dams and canals, large and small, that they constructed without regard for the rights of other riparian countries, he pledged that Ethiopia will continue to negotiate in good faith, while emphasizing: "None of us ought to stand thirsty while watching the others drink."

The Russian Federation's representative suggested that negotiations among all countries of the Nile Basin would be the best outcome. He cautioned that statements about the possible use of force should be avoided, emphasizing: "We are concerned about escalation of confrontational rhetoric."

[The Nile Basin comprises Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.]

Also speaking were representatives of Tunisia, United Kingdom, Norway, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, United States, Estonia, Ireland, Viet Nam, China and France.

The meeting began at 3:03 p.m. and ended at 5:51 p.m.

Briefings

PARFAIT ONANGA-ANYANGA, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa, said the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam encapsulates the conflicting narratives, hopes and fears, challenges and opportunities related to water usage, security and energy in Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan and the wider Horn. Recalling his last briefing on the matter in June 2020, he said that, since then, the three countries have been unable to agree on a framework of engagement to settle several remaining contentious issues. Those include a dispute-resolution mechanism and an agreement on drought mitigation, particularly the filling and operation of the dam during drought years.

Outlining the recent negotiations and their scope, he said the three sides failed to agree on the exact role of the experts and observers supporting the African Union-led negotiations process, first at a virtual ministerial-level meeting in October 2020, and then at a subsequent meeting in January 2021. In February, Sudan put forward a new proposal contemplating a quadripartite joint mediation by the African Union, the United Nations, the European Union and the United States, he recalled. In March, Sudan with Egypt's support formally requested that those entities mediate. Ethiopia, however, preferred fewer changes to the ongoing African Union-led process, he said. During subsequent talks in Kinshasa in April, the three States were once again unable to agree on a mediation framework.

Owing to the lack of progress, he continued, President Félix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in his capacity as Chair of the African Union, stepped up his engagement on the issue. In May, he undertook a tour of the region, meeting with all three sides on the basis of a two-step approach — first addressing the most pressing issue of filling the dam during the rainy season, and second, seeking guarantees for a more comprehensive agreement on its subsequent filling and operation, he recounted. In June, the League of Arab States passed a communiqué on the dam dispute, calling upon Ethiopia to refrain from filling its reservoir without first reaching an agreement, and upon the Security Council to meet on the issue.

However, Ethiopia objected to that communiqué, which it saw as an attempt to politicize and internationalize the dispute, he said, adding that Addis Ababa also underlined its commitment to African Union mediation while reiterating its plan to move forward with the second filling of the dam in July. Highlighting bilateral meetings between Ethiopia and Sudan, and the latter's recently announced intention to accept an interim agreement on the dam's filling, he said the Government of Ethiopia sent letters to those of Egypt and Sudan last week, informing them of the start of the second filling. Both Egypt and Sudan have objected to that notification, reiterating their position that any further filling should take place in the context of an agreed framework.

He stressed: "Each of the countries sharing the Nile waters has both rights and responsibilities, and the use and management of this natural resource requires the continued engagement of all nations involved, in good faith, with a view to reaching common ground." To assist in that process, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) will provide technical advice based on the best available scientific data and knowledge, with a view to helping the three countries reach a mutual understanding. Calling upon all sides to engage in a constructive manner and to avoid any pronouncements that could increase tensions, he said that, together, alongside other interested partners, "there is room to move forward" in the spirit of cooperation, compromise and good neighbourliness.

INGER ANDERSEN, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said water sources can be the basis for cooperation, as well as the cause of disputes between countries or communities. "Well-planned hydraulic infrastructure on a shared river course can be a source of enhanced collaboration, and need not be a zero-sum game," she emphasized, pointing out that integrated planning can help prevent damaging seasonal floods and generate development benefits. Drawing particular attention to the Blue Nile — a critical water resource for Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan — she said its headwaters are situated in a region where highly seasonal rains produce 69 per cent of the annual river flow between July and September.

Outlining the river's trajectory, she said the Blue Nile merges with the White Nile in Khartoum, Sudan, and then flows downstream into Egypt. Noting that the Nile has delivered freshwater, fed agriculture and supported livelihoods in the three countries for thousands of years, she said that, since 2011, Ethiopia has been constructing the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, a major hydropower source, on the Blue Nile. The generation of hydroelectricity will enhance Ethiopia's energy supply and help accelerate industrialization, she said, adding that surplus electricity can be exported across the region. Construction of the dam is now nearing completion, and the reservoir began to fill for the first time in 2020, she pointed out.

A number of dams exist in the Nile Basin, including smaller dams on the Blue Nile, she said, citing the Merowe Dam and Roseires Dam in Sudan, and the High Aswan Dam in upper Egypt. When completed, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will generate more than twice as much electricity as the latter. "Where water is scarce and drought frequent, such as is the case in the Blue Nile Basin, cooperation on a shared river is the only long-term sustainable option," she stressed, noting that, in the coming years, both the High Aswan and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance dams — two of the world's largest — will largely control and regulate the flow of the Nile. Careful and cooperative basin-wide management will be crucial in maximizing the benefits of such infrastructure and minimize any negative consequences, she said.

The Governments of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan have made sustained efforts to enhance their cooperation on transboundary water resources, she continued. In 2015, they signed the Agreement on Declaration of Principles, in which they committed to "cooperation, equitable and reasonable" water-resource use, agreeing to settle any disputes peacefully. They are also working under the auspices of the African Union Chairperson on other parts of the negotiation, but consensus has not yet been reached regarding some critical aspects. Those include arrangements for the management of protracted drought; the development of upstream and downstream waters; and a dispute-resolution mechanism. Some differences also remain regarding the scope and nature of the proposed agreement, she added.

"With other sources of regional tension increasing," she said, "We must recognize that overcoming the remaining differences among the parties will require careful, meticulous work [...] with a determination by the three States to arrive at a cooperative solution." As all three Governments have recognized, demand on water resources, both for agriculture and energy, is rising. Underlining that effective, cooperative water management is becoming even more important in the context of climate change, she said models indicated that the flow of the Nile will exhibit increasing variability during the period leading up to 2040, resulting in more floods and more intense droughts. "It is, therefore, imperative that the parties work together to manage these interconnected challenges," she concluded.

PAUL LOSOKO EFAMBE EMPOLE (Democratic Republic of the Congo), speaking on behalf of the Chair of the African Union, said the dam, which is situated 15 kilometres from Sudan's border, aims to increase Ethiopia's energy supply and meet the needs of other countries. It will be the largest dam in Africa, but the enormous project is posing problems for Sudan and Egypt, whose people depend on the White Nile, he noted. Tensions have been observed for years and several initiatives been taken to address the situation, including negotiations under the auspices of the United States and the World Bank, as well as discussions in the Security Council on 29 June 2020.

The matter then reverted to the African Union, under the principle of "African solutions to African problems", he said, pointing to the draft agreement and resolution of 90 per cent of the technical problems as being among the gains made. The creation of a dispute-resolution mechanism and the management of water during drought periods are among the pending issues, he said. Outlining the African Union's diplomatic initiatives, he said they included an in-person ministerial conference in Kinshasa in April. Such consultations at the highest level allowed for the facilitation of negotiations, he added, recalling that, on 24 June, President Tshisekedi reassured the Bureau of the Assembly of the African Union Heads of State and Government that he is working to restore trust and find consensus among the three States.

He said that, upon their conclusion, the President Tshisekedi affirmed that he would provide a comprehensive report to the Bureau. In the meantime, the President requested that all sides abstain from taking positions that could complicate the talks. Those efforts, with the assistance of observers, led to the drafting of a document that will soon be presented to the three Governments as the basis for negotiations, he said. Noting that the filling of the reservoir and operation of the dam were among the points agreed, he emphasized: "A solution remains possible in this crisis. The will is there." However, efforts are required to "break the ice of mistrust", he said, expressing hope that the Council will provide support for the efforts of the African Union and the facilitator to forge a peaceful resolution "in this sensitive part of the Horn of Africa".

Statements

TAREK LADEB (Tunisia) called for an agreement that respects the vital interests of the people and countries involved, stressing that the Nile is a source of livelihood and development for Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan. There is urgent need for a cooperation mechanism on the use of water and the settlement of disputes that protects the rights of the upstream countries without harming the interests of those downstream. "This is not impossible," he said, emphasizing that it requires political will to settle outstanding legal and technical issues. The three should continue negotiations under African Union auspices, with a view to reaching a legally binding agreement in a reasonable time frame, he added. That would pave the way for a new era of constructive cooperation and partnership, as agreed by the African Union Bureau on 21 July 2020, and in line with the 2015 Declaration of Principles. The Council must support the African Union in sponsoring the negotiations by sending a clear message on the issue, he stressed, encouraging the countries involved to resume talks and work constructively for an agreement.

BARBARA WOODWARD (United Kingdom) emphasized her country's strong emphasis on consensus around issues affecting a shared natural resource, adding that many of the elements needed to reach consensus on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam are captured in the 2015 Declaration of Principles, in particular the commitment Not to cause Significant Harm and the one relating to Equitable and Reasonable Utilization. The three States have continued talks to reach a more detailed trilateral agreement on the filling and operation of the dam, she said, while noting the disappointment of Egypt and Sudan that a resolution has yet to be reached, as well as the stated commitment of all three countries to the African Union-led talks. She called upon all three sides to refrain from actions that undermine negotiations and to engage urgently to seek a mutually acceptable agreement.

MARTIN KIMANI (Kenya), noting that the Nile Basin has been a source of hope and connection throughout history, said its more than 257 million inhabitants will be impacted by the statements and decisions made halfway around the globe in the Council Chamber. Recalling that the objectives of the 1999 riparian Nile Basin Initiative included developing the basin's water resources in a sustainable and equitable way, he said the goal of the region's peoples is only to throw off the shackles of poverty and the ills of war. However, the concerns of two riparian States, Egypt and Sudan, regarding the legitimate use of Nile waters by the third State, Ethiopia, are also legitimate. "Kenya stands with the three States, recognizing their equality and that all their people equally deserve development and prosperity," he said, commending those Governments for placing their faith and confidence in the African Union's mediation mechanism while emphasizing the critical importance of the principle of subsidiarity. Kenya is confident that Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan will make the principle of "African solutions for African challenges" a reality, he said.

MONA JUUL (Norway) agreed that Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan have legitimate interests in the Nile and its water resources, emphasizing that a sustainable solution to the dam issue can only be found by the States themselves. Noting that much has already been agreed through the Declaration of Principles, she described the latter as a good framework within which to seek equitable and reasonable use of the Blue Nile. What remains is for all sides to reach consensus on the modalities for future cooperation, based on those Principles, and on transparency and trust, she said, stressing: "This requires constructive

engagement, political will and the courage to find compromise.” She echoed calls for the three countries to refrain from any action that could undermine negotiations.

INGA RHONDA KING, (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), acknowledging that the Nile River is indispensable to the development of each country, encouraged all three to reconsider their entrenched positions and continue with the trilateral negotiations in good faith. The African Union is the best suited to facilitate the peaceful settlement of disputes on the continent, she said, emphasizing the importance of respecting the Principle of Subsidiarity, as well as Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. “The existing disagreement is among family members,” she asserted, expressing confidence that Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan will resolve their difficulties, “as all families do, with wisdom and harmony”. Noting that “our sister nations” have a shared history linked by the Nile, with which their futures will remain interwoven, she said it is in their collective interests to find a palatable solution, especially given that they have already agreed on 90 per cent of the issues.

VASSILY A. NEBENZIA (Russian Federation), while saying he is aware of the significance of the largest hydropower project in Africa, noted the legitimate concerns of Egypt and Sudan over its possible negative impact in the absence of an agreement. However, there is no alternative to settling the dispute other than negotiations, he said, emphasizing that the search for a solution must be carried out in the spirit of the 2015 Khartoum Declaration and take into account the progress achieved in defining the dam’s modalities. “Mutual understanding and trust are required,” he added, cautioning that statements about the possible use of force should be avoided. “We are concerned about escalation of confrontational rhetoric”, as disagreements on development should not lead to threats to peace and security, he stressed. Gradually reaching agreement on filling the reservoir and operation of the power station could help to find a mutually acceptable agreement. The best outcome would be negotiations among all countries in the Nile Basin, he said, welcoming the involvement of the African Union, including its committee of technical and legal experts. However, he called upon the regional organization to intensify its focus, noting that increasing the number of mediators and observers will not bring added value, although their involvement would be possible with the consent of all countries involved. He went on to propose that all interested parties, under the mediation of the African Union Chair, hold talks on site since all three sides are currently in New York. Describing that option as the best contribution the Council could make in the quest for a solution, he underlined his country’s readiness to provide satellite monitoring of the reservoir’s filling at the request of all involved.

LINDA THOMAS-GREENFIELD (United States) warned that the Horn of Africa is at an inflection point, while emphasizing her country’s commitment to addressing the interlinked regional crises. The United States supports collaborative efforts by Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan to resolve their differences, she said. “We believe this is an issue that can be reconciled” through political commitment, she added, stressing that the concerns of Egypt and Sudan over water security and safe operation of the dam can be reconciled with Ethiopia’s development needs. That begins with negotiations under the leadership of African Union, which should recommence based on the 2015 Declaration of Principles and the July 2020 statement by the African Union Bureau. The United States is committed to providing political and technical support to facilitate an effective outcome, she added, urging the African Union also to tap the expertise of South Africa, the European Union and the United Nations. She also urged Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia to discuss the full range of options with the United States, while cautioning all involved against taking any action that could jeopardize the negotiation process. They should commit to a solution that is acceptable to everyone, she said.

SVEN JÜRGENSON (Estonia) expressed concern over heightened tensions surrounding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, an issue to which there are no easy solutions. “Therefore, it is twice as important that all three parties involved are willing to make the necessary concessions, which would allow them to arrive at a fair and equitable solution.” He called upon all three to negotiate in good faith. Noting the role of the African Union, he nevertheless expressed regret that no agreement has yet been reached on important outstanding issues. The African Union should remain the main forum for

those talks, adding that Estonia also supports the participation of observers. He urged all three parties to refrain from taking any unilateral actions that might escalate the situation, and cautioned against any further delays, declaring: "The time to come to an agreement is now."

GERALDINE BYRNE NASON (Ireland) said it is clear that a negotiated settlement is the only solution to the critical issue under discussion today. "A lasting agreement on how the dam is managed is absolutely critical for the long-term stability and development of the entire region," she emphasized, noting that cooperation on transboundary water is key to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan are experiencing first hand the impacts of climate change, population growth and rapid urbanization, which will only increase water-management challenges. "The parties are right to be looking ahead for their own people's future, but they need to do this in relative harmony and together," she stressed. Noting the African Union's efforts in leading negotiations and the facilitation by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, she said those complex talks should continue to draw on the necessary technical expertise and political support. Meanwhile, the three States should avoid actions that might damage the prospects for agreement and redouble their efforts to explore confidence-building measures, decrease tensions and build trust. As noted in the Declaration of Principles, that could include a reciprocal information-sharing arrangement with the support of observers, she said.

T.S. TIRUMURTI (India) said that, as a lower and upper riparian State, his country is only too aware of how difficult negotiations on transboundary water issues can be. India's experience is that transboundary water disputes should be resolved through bilateral or plurilateral mechanisms agreed by the primary stakeholders, taking into account technical details, historical usage and socio-economic aspects, he said. Going forward, Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan should pursue bilateral engagements, and cooperate fully with the African Union in a focused manner, to reach a long-term solution that will serve the development needs of the upper and lower riparian regions, he emphasized.

ABDOU ABARRY (Niger) described the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam as a project with immense potential, but whose construction has become a source of misunderstanding and tension among the three relevant States. Calling for renewed political will to engage in negotiations, he said the African Union should be granted the authority to submit proposals on a final agreement. Urging Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to refrain from any acts that could put such an agreement at risk, he emphasized: "Peaceful coexistence is priceless." He went on to point out that his own country is part of a successful nine-State water management framework known as the Niger Basin Authority. Welcoming the African Union Assembly's recent communiqué pledging to push forward with negotiations, he spotlighted the important principle of subsidiarity, saying it should lead the three relevant countries to resolve their own challenges.

ENRIQUE JAVIER OCHOA MARTÍNEZ (Mexico), while expressing regret that no notable progress has been achieved despite many years of negotiations, said that whereas the Council must be attentive to any matter that risks becoming a threat to international peace and security, the current matter is regional in nature and should be viewed in accordance with the principle of prevention. He added that the global community should support the African Union's mediation efforts. He urged the three relevant countries to reach agreement on filling the dam and to abstain from any actions that could undermine the goodwill needed to reach agreement. He pointed out that Mexico, like other Council members, has a long history of sharing water resources, both on its northern border with the United States and its southern border with Belize and Guatemala. The International Boundary Water Commission, established between the United States and Mexico in 1989, could serve as a good template for similar arrangements between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan, he suggested. While offering to share his country's experience, he nevertheless cautioned that managing water resources is never without challenges, and emphasized the importance of a dispute-resolution mechanism.

DINH QUY DANG (Viet Nam) said there is a growing tendency to use international watercourses in ways that may not ensure the legitimate rights and interests of riparian countries, especially those downstream. He emphasized the importance of further codifying and developing international law

relating to the sustainable use of transboundary watercourses, including through the United Nations Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. With regard to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, he said all sides concerned should build upon the results already achieved and implement the 2015 Agreement on Declaration of Principles. It is also high time for the African Union to speed up its efforts to help Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan resolve outstanding issues, including legal and technical questions, he stressed.

ZHANG JUN (China) said completion of the dam can enhance mutual trust and win-win cooperation through joint efforts. Referring to the 2015 Declaration of Principles and multiple rounds of negotiation held under African Union auspices, he noted the positions expressed in recent letters to the Council by the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. China fully understands the concerns of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan, he said, while encouraging them to resolve their differences through dialogue and consultation. African countries have “a fine tradition” of doing so, he added, expressing hope that they will resume dialogue and reach an agreement that is acceptable and beneficial to each of them in a spirit of friendly cooperation. The Council should support such efforts and create a favourable external environment for the sake of peace and development in Africa.

NICOLAS DE RIVIÈRE (France), Council President for July, speaking in his national capacity, declared: “All parties have legitimate interests to assert.” However, after a decade of negotiations, confidence has been damaged and the continued filling of the dam’s reservoir is raising tension in the absence of a prior agreement, he noted. The priority must be to avoid adding to the problems already confronting each of the three countries, especially the ongoing democratic transition in Sudan, Ethiopia’s development challenges and Egypt’s efforts to meet the needs of its people. They should demonstrate the political will to resolve their differences through dialogue, with the support of the African Union, and to refrain from any action that could undermine talks and the achievement of a negotiated solution, he emphasized. Praising the African Union’s leadership, he stressed: “These efforts must continue and be strengthened.”

SAMEH HASSAN SHOKRY SELIM, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, said more than 100 million Egyptians face an existential threat from a dam of mammoth proportions being built along the artery that gives them life. “It has cast a long and dark shadow on the future and fate of the people of Egypt,” he emphasized. On 29 June 2020, he recalled, Cairo warned the Council of the burgeoning danger and cautioned against moves to gain exclusive control over a shared river and underscoring the need to avert an escalation of tensions that could jeopardize peace. Within days, Ethiopia unilaterally began filling the dam and declared that “the Nile is ours”. Egypt’s response was one of restraint, seeking an equitable agreement that preserves the interests of all parties, he stated. Having engaged in years of talks under African Union auspices, Egypt has attempted to forge an African solution to that African problem. “Yet, we have failed,” he said, adding that, despite those efforts, the dam was filled unilaterally without an agreement to protect downstream communities. On 5 July 2021, Ethiopia began the second filling.

“This manifestation of irresponsibility and callous indifference to what it could inflict demonstrates bad faith and an attempt to impose a fait accompli against the will of the international community,” he declared. While commending the European Union’s statement today expressing regret over moves, he encouraged the Council to do likewise, a position that has not been reflected in any of today’s interventions. Denouncing Ethiopia’s violation of international law and attempts to transform a boundary river into an instrument of political control, he said the failure of negotiations and the absence of a viable settlement compelled Egypt to request the Council’s intervention “expeditiously and effectively” in a situation that could endanger international peace and security. Egypt’s position is informed by an abiding faith in international law and multilateralism as vehicles for stemming strife, he stressed. The Council’s value lies in its authority to uphold peace rather than “stand by in indifference” while communities are threatened, he said.

Egypt, he continued, seeks to conclude a legally binding, equitable and reasonable agreement containing provisions on stemming any adverse effects and protecting riparian interests from harm, while ensuring that its water security is not imperilled by the operation of Africa's largest hydropower facility. "Agreement is not beyond reach," he stressed. The repeated failure of negotiations is not due to lack of scientific legal expertise, but rather to Ethiopian intransigence. "The cause of this crisis is political," he said, characterizing Addis Ababa's position as one of comity or charity under the illusion that the Blue Nile is an internal river it can exploit to its exclusive benefit. Ethiopia refuses to sign a legally binding agreement and has instead proposed to designate the text as mere guidelines and rules. It insists on codifying its unlimited right to amend the dam agreement, invoking a "mythical injustice" brought on by an unfair status quo. In reality, Ethiopia has never concluded an agreement on the Nile under a threat or compulsion, he noted, demanding that Egypt's upstream co-riparian comply with international law.

Recounting Egypt's exhaustive efforts – under the auspices of the African Union – he said Ethiopia has torpedoed even an environmental assessment of the dam's impact. It is "deeply disheartening" that the African Union-led process, in its current format, has reached an impasse, he added. Calling upon the Council to prevent the dam from becoming a threat to Egypt's existence, he said it should call on parties to reach an equitable agreement within a defined timeline, recognizing the gravity of the situation and fulfilling its duty to maintain international peace. The Council is instructed under Article 24 of the Charter of the United Nations to act on behalf the general membership to advance the principles guiding the Organization's work, he recalled. The Council must adopt the draft resolution circulated by Tunisia's delegation, he said, clarifying that Egypt does not expect it to formulate legal and technical solutions or impose a settlement. Rather, the resolution is political in nature: its purpose – "imminently balanced" – is to relaunch negotiations in a format that enhances the leadership of the African Union Chair and enables international partners to use their expertise to help forge an equitable agreement. Such an accord should aim to effectuate the two meetings of the African Union's Bureau, which instructed the three sides to expeditiously finalize a legally binding agreement on the filling and operation of the dam. Adopting the resolution would reaffirm the Council's resolve to uphold its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and send a signal on its commitment to peace in Africa, he said, underlining that anything less would be a dereliction of duty.

MARIAM ALSADIG AL SEDEEG AL MAHADI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sudan, reaffirmed the need for the process to continue under African Union auspices, urging the Council to play a positive role in resolving the dispute. Since the outset, she said, Sudan has supported the dam's construction from an understanding that its advantages would not be restricted to Ethiopia and that it would operate according to a legally binding agreement that considers the equitable, reasonable use of cross-border resources without inflicting harm on downstream States. Useful in preventing drought, the dam would be filled and function in a way that Sudan is informed about and understands, she said. Citing other cross-border examples, she said four West African States have cooperated around the Senegal River since 1972, and eight States manage the Niger River under a legally binding agreement concluded in 1980. The Renaissance Dam, she pointed out – with its capacity of 74 billion cubic metres and location near Sudan's border – could present a threat to half of the latter and all of Egypt in the absence of coordination with downstream communities, she said, emphasizing that millions of people have lived along the Nile for millennia, subsisting on river agriculture. Khartoum could "in no way" allow the dam's filling and operation to be determined unilaterally, as Ethiopia has done.

In June 2020, she recalled, Ethiopia unilaterally notified Sudan of the dam's opening, which allowed 2.5 billion cubic metres to flow in just 72 hours, inducing panic and terror in downstream Sudanese communities, she recalled. On 5 July 2021, Addis Ababa's Irrigation Minister informed Khartoum of plans to fill the dam for a second year, which again will cause considerable damage to Sudan, sweep aside neighbourly rights and imperil the security of Sudanese citizens, she said, underlining that, without a regular exchange of information, the safety of Sudan's Roseires Dam – located 100 kilometres away and which irrigates 70 per cent of the country's agriculture – will also be threatened. "It is crucial for us to be kept abreast on the filling and functioning methods of the Renaissance Dam so that Sudan can plan its

agriculture projects," she insisted. Pointing out that her country is now open to the world, she said that is thanks to its recent revolution and the sacrifices made by Sudanese youth, which freed Sudan from a totalitarian regime. Khartoum is resolved to preserve stability and has carried out deep economic reforms, based on its faith in cooperation with the rest of the world. Ethiopia's attempts to impose hegemony are "extremely serious" and jeopardize Sudan's promising future, she said. The two countries are linked by a history of cooperation, solidarity and safeguarding mutual interests by strengthening brotherly relations, she stated, declaring: "We wish to continue down this same path."

She went on to cite Sudan's "colossal" efforts to persuade Egypt and Ethiopia to sign the Declaration of Principles in 2015 and agree to an initiative by Khartoum's Prime Minister in June 2020 aimed at fostering dialogue on the pending questions. Sudan also responded to efforts by South Africa and the African Union, which participated in all negotiating rounds, to find an internal solution to the dispute. In the last round, Khartoum proposed transforming the negotiation mechanism into a mediation platform, with the participation of the United Nations, the European Union and South Africa, all of which had been observers in previous rounds. "Ethiopia rejected all such proposals," she said, adding that the Council must call upon all three States to resume the African Union-led talks, with the involvement of international mediators, to ensure Ethiopia abstains from unilateral moves. She stated "unequivocally" that the issue is "a just cause" which will ensure that the filling and functioning of the dam happens pursuant to a legally binding agreement. Silence by the Council would send the wrong message, signalling its tacit approval that Ethiopia's moves are acceptable, she stressed.

SELESHI BEKELE AWULACHEW, Minister for Water, Irrigation and Energy of [Ethiopia](#), said it is unfitting of the Council's time and resources to hold discussions on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. In June 2020, members urged his country, alongside Egypt and Sudan, to continue their negotiations under the African Union-led process, he recalled, saying his country's Government did so in good faith. The dam is not the first of its kind in Africa or in the world, nor is the reservoir that will store water and generate electricity, he pointed out. "Perhaps what puts [the dam] in distinction from other projects is the extent of hope and aspiration it generates for 65 million Ethiopians that have no access to electricity," he said. Describing it as "the right dam built at the right place" for the benefit of the broader region, he expressed regret over Ethiopia's inability to utilize it to date, emphasizing his country's best wishes at heart for its neighbours, Egypt and Sudan. Ethiopia believes in their ability to cooperate for the mutual benefit of all three countries, he said.

"Unfortunately, we are here because Egypt, and more recently Sudan, have expressed their opposition to this hydroelectric dam," he continued, pointing out that both have dams and canals, large and small, that they constructed without regard for the rights of other riparian countries and in spite of Ethiopia's pleas for consultation. Emphasizing that no viable alternative to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam exists, he said that, unlike Egypt and Sudan, Ethiopia has no considerable ground water reserves, nor does it desalinate. Nearly 70 per cent of its water comes from the Nile Basin, he added, noting that his country's focus is on maximizing scarce water resources through sustainable, green use. He went on to express his belief that agreement between the three States is within reach while warning: "Ethiopia does not respond well to undue political pressure and interference." Addis Ababa will continue to negotiate under the auspices of the African Union, he stressed, declaring: "None of us ought to stand thirsty while watching the other drink."