

Opening Remarks

By

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*At the
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Celebration*

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**Excellencies, Ministers and Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the People and Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and that of my own, it is with profound pleasure that I stand here and address this august gathering on the occasion of the 2018 Regional Nile Day Celebration.

On this day, we all commemorate our bold step to establish this first-ever, all- inclusive trans-boundary water resource institution – the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI). The Shared Vision we had established for NBI enunciates our desire to achieve *“sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefit from, the common Nile basin water resources.”* It is also a commonly formulated and guiding principle for our collective action which is still valid, still relevant and calls for more and renewed commitment.

The Nile Basin hosts a set of complex drivers that makes this geo-strategic region a priority to security for both Basin countries and the international community at large.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me briefly outline the common challenges that are still with us, these are challenges which prompted Member States to establish NBI to speed up their socio-economic development in the first place:

1. A majority of Nile Basin inhabitants live under

extreme poverty:- According to the 2016 UNDP Human Development Report, the Nile Basin is home to the most deprived population of the globe, with only minimal access to adequate food, sanitation, energy, education, health, etc. For the average Nile Basin person, particularly in upstream countries, survival from one day to the next is still a monumental challenge.

2. Nile basin countries' agricultural systems, particularly in upstream countries, are still of limited productivity and are vulnerable:- the economies of most of the upstream countries are based on subsistence agriculture with limited inputs, technologies and irrigation. This limitation in turn makes them highly vulnerable to climate shocks and repeated crop failures resulting in food shortages and frequent famine.

3. Nile Basin is undergoing high population and urbanization pressures coupled with high economic growth rates:- The population of the Nile Basin is still undergoing rapid expansion, already quadrupled to half a billion and is projected to reach 1.2 billion by 2050. Urbanization in the same region is growing at an estimated rate of 4 to 5% yearly.

4. Climate Change Impacts are likely to be pronounced in the Nile Basin and will make the task of Nile Basin countries even more daunting:-Rapid population growth and rapid urbanization coupled with rapid economic growth would ultimately translate into demand for more food, more energy and more water. The pressure on Nile Basin countries to provide food, water and energy to their growing population would be complicated because of the well-established fact of Climate Change impacts which would adversely affect the Basin and the high vulnerability.

In addition, this region would also have to cope and live with more frequent extreme events – prolonged droughts or floods, either of which will be catastrophic to our most vulnerable communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Given the above challenges, it is only natural that Nile Basin countries are expanding construction of hydraulic infrastructures to tap the potential of the Nile in their respective territories. But then again, the Nile is the longest trans-boundary river, but not the most water abundant. It is cutting across 11 countries and sustaining more than 250 million people directly. Actually, by the standards of the world's greatest rivers, the Nile is a water scarce river.

Here lies the rationale for the organic emergence of the Nile Basin Initiative. When 250 million people – soon to reach 500 million-***are dependent on one common resource, the Nile***, one has to learn how to use its waters efficiently, and how to manage and benefit from this common resource responsibly and cooperatively. There is no other way. What happens upstream affects downstream countries, and vice versa.

**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my firm belief that the foresight and vision of the founders of the Nile Basin Initiative will be constantly validated as the years pass by. Nile Basin cooperation is not an option. If we are to transform our region into a zone of common prosperity, peace, political stability and economic integration, it is a must.

Managing a common pool resource such as the Nile is not an easy undertaking. It is expected to be fraught with twists and turns, periods of success interspersed with periods of setbacks. In this regard, I find the theme of this year's Regional Nile Day Celebration—***Shared River, Collective Action*** - very appropriate.

In the Nile we have a common shared resource and having a common resource demands acting in unison, in cooperation, in coordination and in harmony! It means having a basin-wide planning and management perspective in addition to national ones in order to synergize and optimize our efforts; in order to make more from each drop of our Nile which is increasingly getting scarcer per capita wise.

During its nearly two decade lifespan, the NBI has achieved commendable results, especially if we consider the immense challenges and the unfavorable baseline it started from. NBI has provided and still is providing the only basin-wide platform for fruitful dialogues.

This said, Nile Basin cooperation has unfinished tasks and challenges to overcome. It has still to put in place a permanent, predictable legal and institutional foundation. Thus, it is possible to make the cooperation sustainable and reassuring to our communities, to public and private sector within and beyond the Basin. It is time that nearly 20 years of transitional arrangement gives way to permanence!!

In the final analysis, making Nile Basin cooperation durable is a task that only we, the riparian basin countries, can and must handle. Nobody else can do this for us. We need to demonstrate to the world that our cooperation is organic and emergent within the Basin, and not an agenda brought from without.

This is not to say that the international community has not been and cannot be of assistance. Indeed, their financial and technical contribution has been critical during the formative periods of the NBI. Our African Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development needs crucial regional and global visions that helps to focus on what can be done and advance sustainable development that leaves no one behind while taking into account people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

All the same, it is us the Nile Basin countries that must own the responsibility to make Nile Basin cooperation a Collective Action undertaking of all our countries. It is our duty to promote this Collective Action to ensure that all basin countries develop and benefit from the Nile!!

It is our duty to promote this Collective Action as the only guarantor to sustain our common Nile and the biodiversity therein, not only for us but also for future generations as well!

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As the day is the annual event held to commemorate the establishment of the Nile basin Initiative in 1999, I believe, it has also marked a major milestone in the history of the Nile Cooperation prior to efforts such as the HYDROMET of the 1960s and the TECCONILE of the 1970s were beset with lack of inclusivity and absence of an institutional framework.

Among other things, Nile Day provides an opportunity for Basin citizens and friends to come together to celebrate the benefits of Nile cooperation, and exchange experiences, views and ideas on topical issues related to the cooperative management and development of the shared Nile Basin water and related resources.

With these few words, it is now my pleasure to declare the 2018 Nile Day Officially Opened and wish you all a successful commemoration.

I thank you!