**Statement by Dr. Andrej Benedejčič, Ambassador for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, at the 12th IWG Structured Dialogue in Capitals Format (Cluster IV: Climate Change and Security), 23 March 2021**

Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to commend you, on behalf of Slovenia, for deciding to include the issue of climate change on the agenda of this meeting. Climate change is a **security challenge and a threat multiplier**. According to the latest Global Risk Report by the World Economic Forum, it continues to represent a catastrophic danger. Although lockdowns across countries have caused global emissions to fall in the first half of 2020, they could easily pick up again if we do not build back better after the pandemic subsides.

 The **OSCE**, as the largest regional security organization, should therefore **address the issue in a proactive fashion**. In doing so, the Organization should recognize that one of the most critical consequences of climate change is the **global water challenge**. In fact, just yesterday we marked the **World Water Day**. Let me therefore make the following three points:

* First, in our view, we need to generate broad support for the implementation of recommendations that the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace presented in 2017. Its report, which is aptly entitled A Matter of Survival, contains important conclusions regarding international water cooperation.
* Second, we believe it is in our collective interest to shape the global hydro-politics agenda. In practice, this means promoting comprehensive cross-sectoral and inclusive water management, expanding transboundary water cooperation, as well as promoting principles on protection of water sources and installations in conflict situations.
* Third, we think that information sharing on climate risks and management should pay special attention to the nexus between climate change, water and security.

Having said this let me also recall that the **OSCE has already taken important steps in the past** regarding this issue. The 2014 Security Day in Vienna on "Enhancing security through water diplomacy" produced important recommendations, also about the need for a gender perspective. The same goes for the 2015 Economic and Environmental Forum in Prague, which took place under the title of "Water governance in the OSCE area". We should mention as well the OSCE supported workshop on enhancing transboundary water cooperation that took place in Strasbourg in 2019.

This track record is all the more important in light of the fact that there are more than **150 river and lake basins**, which are shared by two or more OSCE participating States. It should be therefore only natural for the Organization to continue promoting security and stability by supporting effective and cooperative management of water resources.

Before concluding, I would like to point out that Slovenia has been actively focusing on this issue for some time. In our view, **water crises represent one of the most critical consequences of climate change** that could have serious security implications. According to UN statistics, three-quarters of natural disasters between 2001 and 2018 were water-related, including droughts and floods. We know this from first-hand experience, especially because of the **Southeast Europe floods of 2014**, which affected our immediate neighborhood. Slovenia engaged actively in helping to address the situation, also through its armed forces. One of the conclusions of that involvement was the need for sufficient airlift capabilities, both in terms of transport and medevac. Another was the need to ensure sufficient attention to the nexus between climate change, water and security at the international level.

Finally, let me say that it is also for this reason that one of the priorities the **Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU** in the second half of this year will be promoting water in EU external action. The importance that we attach to this issue explains as well why Slovenia took over the **Chairmanship of the Group of Friends on Water and Peace in Geneva** at the beginning of last year. It goes without saying that we are more than willing to share the results of deliberations in that forum with the Chairperson of the Economic and Environmental Committee of the OSCE Permanent Council and with the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities. We believe that such cooperation would be in the spirit of our shared **comprehensive approach to security**.

Thank you.