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PRESS RELEASE

SECOND WATER, GROWTH AND STABILITY (WGS) CONFERENCE OPENS TODAY IN HAMMAMET, TUNISIA

Stakeholders meet to support the MENA region in advancing water management and security through the Water, Growth and Stability Initiative (WGSIni)

The **second WGS conference “Water, Growth and Stability in MENA”** kicked off today at the Golden Tulip Taj Sultan’s Conference Centre in Hammamet, Tunisia. The event runs from July 11 to July 14.

The World Bank publication *2016 World Development Indicators* places strong emphasis on UN Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6), which has to do with clean water and sanitation. Water is vital for achieving enhanced security, sustainability, development and human well-being, and these objectives can be achieved by expanding international cooperation and support for capacity building in water-related activities and programmes. Such efforts are also in line with the SDG 6 claim that the “delivery of water supply and sanitation is not just a challenge of service provision; it is intrinsically linked with climate change, water resources management, water scarcity, and water quality.”

In April 2016, multiple stakeholders from the MENA region and beyond met for the [first WGS conference](#) at the Regional Environmental Center (REC) in Szentendre, Hungary, to discuss a course of action that would contribute to bolstering water management and security at national and local level, as well as to facilitate regional cooperation and engagement for attaining a more sustainable use of water resources. The [outcome document of the first WGS conference](#) introduced the [Water, Growth and Stability Initiative](#) (WGSIni), which is a milestone output of the REC project Sustainable Use of Transboundary Water Resources and Water Security Management in the MENA Region ([WATER SUM](#)), which is supported by the Government of Sweden through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

At the second WGS conference, key actors in the water sector across the MENA region will continue to advance the WGSIni through enhanced collaboration. Taking a regional approach towards water management involves sharing experiences in transboundary water cooperation, the mutual transfer of knowledge and good practices, local-level water security planning, and combining regional and global efforts in the water sector.



The high-level segment was opened by H.E. Saâd Seddik, Minister for Agriculture, Hydraulic Resources and Fisheries of Tunisia, who, after thanking the organisers and greeting participants, stressed the importance of initiatives that enhance interactions between international, national and local-level authorities, CSOs and other key stakeholders. He highlighted Tunisia's efforts in facing the many water-related challenges across the country and the crucial role that water plays in a balanced agricultural sector, which, in turn, is essential for food security

H.E. Zoltán Szentgyörgyi, Ambassador of Hungary to Tunisia, underlined how the Budapest Water Summit 2016 — the next milestone for the WGSIni — represents a defining moment in advancing dialogue and cooperation in the water sector. He invited all the dignitaries present to attend the Budapest Water Summit 2016 and to contribute to its positive outcome.

“By developing the WGSIni, we are achieving a twofold purpose: to contribute to the implementation of the WATER SUM project as well as to create a broader framework to support countries and stakeholders to meet and discuss opportunities together”, said Dr. Radoje Lausevic, REC Deputy Executive Director and WATER SUM Project Director. Dr. Lausevic stated that building skills and capacities and sharing knowledge and lessons learned in water management, sustainable development, climate change and water security should be a top priority across the MENA region and beyond.

Next came brief statements from participating officials from the main national water authorities of Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia.

The high-level segment set the stage for the conference's working sessions, which will see the launch of three WGSIni forums — the Municipality Forum; the Civil Society Forum, and the Women's Forum. These forums will allow participants to discuss and work on specific cross-cutting topics through an inter-institutional and inter-sectoral approach. The structure of the conference is completed by the presence of eight working teams (WTs), comprising well-established local water security action planning teams from Jordan and Tunisia, with the participation of members of the Civil Society and Women's Forums.

The second WGS conference has been organised by the REC with the support of the Tunisian Ministry of Agriculture, Hydraulic Resources and Fisheries, and the Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation.

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About the REC: **The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC)** is an independent international organisation, which was established in 1990 by Hungary, the United States and the European Commission. This non-advocacy, not-for-profit organisation is legally based on a charter signed by the governments of 32 countries and the European Commission. The REC works in various fields of sustainable development, building bridges between solutions and stakeholders on topic areas such as biodiversity; capacity building for SDG implementation; climate change and clean energy; education for sustainable development; environmental financing; health and environment; law development, enforcement and compliance; local governance; participatory governance; smart cities and mobility; sustainable resource use and **water management**. www.rec.org

The regional project **Sustainable Use of Transboundary Water Resources and Water Security Management (WATER SUM)** promotes the more sustainable use of water resources in the MENA region. Donor: Government of Sweden. www.watersum.rec.org

The **Water, Growth and Stability Initiative (#WGSIni)** is a framework for the creation of a knowledge-based platform; a dynamic network of water experts; and an e-learning tool for capacity building and the dissemination of lessons learned. The WGSIni was launched in April 2016 as an [output](#) of the multi-stakeholder conference [Water, Growth and Stability: Transboundary Water Cooperation for Sustainable Growth and Stability in the Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\)](#) under the framework of the project [Sustainable Use of Transboundary Water Resources and Water Security Management](#) in the MENA region ([WATER SUM](#)). www.rec.org/wgs.php