Thank you, (Madam) Chair

It is a great honor for me to speak on behalf of Asia Pacific CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCEM).

In Central Asia, as in many parts of the Asia Pacific region, the challenges of water scarcity or the complexities of managing transboundary water resources are exacerbated by climate change. It is also a narrative that highlights a significant gap in the approach to water governance – the underrepresentation of women. Despite being primary caretakers, users, and stewards of water in their communities, women's voices are often sidelined in decision-making processes related to water management. This oversight is not merely a matter of equity; it is a critical flaw that hampers our ability to achieve sustainable water security.

Women in rural communities are very much dependent on water and energy resources to sustain their livelihoods, families and food security. Lack of access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities exacerbates their struggles, placing them at a higher risk of waterborne diseases and their overall health. To have the full spectrum of innovative ideas and strategies, we must ensure that women are not only participants but leaders in the dialogue and decision-making processes regarding water management.

Empowering women in the water sector means more than just increasing their numbers in meetings or forums. It involves actively listening to their voices, incorporating their knowledge into policy and practice, and dismantling structural and systemic barriers that limit their participation and leadership. Achieving gender equality in water governance is not merely a goal in itself but a means to enhance the effectiveness, sustainability, and equity of water management solutions. There are many examples of women champions in the water management sector: like women applying drop irrigation in Uzbekistan in water scarcity regions, in Tajikistan - women heads of the Water Users’ associations, activities of the Central Asian Women's Water Alliance and many others.

Women possess unique knowledge and perspectives that are crucial for developing effective water management solutions. Their understanding of water's role in sustaining households, agriculture, and community well-being is invaluable. Yet, the potential of these insights remains largely untapped due to persistent gender disparities.

To address water management challenges, there is a need to commit to a more inclusive approach. It's high time to recognize and elevate the role of women as agents of change in the water sector. This will open new pathways to water security that are not only more equitable but also more resilient and sustainable.

The pathways towards effective water management in Central Asia and beyond is a collective responsibility that requires the engagement of all stakeholders. By ensuring that women's voices are heard and their contributions valued, we can move closer to a reality where water is managed wisely and equitably for the benefit of all.

We appreciate the efforts made thus far to address water management challenges. However, we must go further to ensure that these efforts prioritize and reflect the needs, rights, and voices of women and girls, leaving no one behind and ensuring Development Justice transformational shifts.
Thank you.