Foreword

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The title of this important book – the *Research Handbook on International Water Law* – has an abstruse ring. Its subject however addresses questions that are at once of momentous and everlasting concern to humankind. It is water that sets planet Earth apart from the myriad of inhabitants of the entire celestial cosmos. It is water that is the essential element of the creation and sustenance of life.

The surface of the Earth has for centuries been divided by the borders of nations. To say that those nations are governed by the law that regulates their relations would be to use the term ‘governed’ loosely. To speak of international law as the law we have rather than the law we need recognizes the inadequacies of international law. That law nevertheless is of great importance to the well-being and prospects of humankind.

Water and international law come together in the concept that is the concern of this book, international water law. The roots of international water law – particularly in respect of international rivers – go back to the earlier years of international law. It is however in its later years that international water law has developed. In view of the extraordinary expansion in Earth’s human population in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and the accelerating pace of climate change since about 1880, produced largely by human use of fossil fuels, worldwide demand for clean water has greatly grown and threatens to grow dangerously in future. The need for an effective international law regulating competing demands for water will increase as those demands burgeon.

This book brings together the experience of a group of authors and practitioners who analyse and promote international water law as one of the tools available to secure future access to the life-giving resource that is water. The authors of these essays are as international as their topics. They are experts in their fields. The result is a trail-blazing book of significant value and consequence.