JOINT STATEMENT FROM MEMBERS OF THE GREEN GROUP ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD WATER DAY, 22 MARCH 2021

On the occasion of World Water Day on 22 March 2021, the Members of the Green Group – Cabo Verde, Costa Rica, Iceland, Singapore, Slovenia, and the United Arab Emirates – reaffirm their commitment to finding long-lasting solutions to the global water problem while safeguarding the value of water for generations to come.

Water has long been recognised as a vital resource that underpins stable and functioning societies, and is a critical driver of sustainable development. This recognition is exemplified by the global community's annual commemoration of World Water Day since 1993. This year, as the world faces multiple paradigm shifts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and many other global challenges, we must ask ourselves, "What does water mean to us?"

We need to first get the basics right and put the world back on track to achieving SDG 6 by 2030. Three years on from the launch of the International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development, we still have much to do to reach all our water-related goals and targets. In 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that 2.2 billion people lack access to safely managed water services. One year later, this figure remains the same. In addition, more than 820,000 people continue to die each year as a result of unsafe drinking water, and the lack of sanitation and hand hygiene. These are fundamental problems that need to be addressed urgently.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how important clean water, and basic sanitation and hygiene are in preventing the spread of diseases. At the same time, it has hampered and delayed the necessary actions required to ensure access to these basic provisions. Even as governments grapple with the immediate impact of the outbreak, they must place renewed focus on securing universal access to safe and sustainable water supplies to boost resilience against future pandemics. We also cannot ignore the impact of the climate crisis. Drought-like conditions, floods, and extreme weather events have already

begun to affect the availability and distribution of water, especially in small island states and developing countries.

All Green Group members share a common goal of promoting the sustainable use of water whilst meeting their population, economic, and industrial needs. We also have a common ethos in ensuring that our peoples value water for future generations.

Therefore, our members have adopted strategies to tackle their water challenges while taking into account their unique national circumstances and ensuring that all stakeholders' views are heard. We have also invested in technology and innovation, including nature-based solutions, to boost water resilience. At the same time, we continue to look for synergies to address the intertwined challenges of climate change and water resilience.

Cabo Verde's geographical location in the Atlantic extension of the Sahel / West Africa and its characteristics as an archipelago of nine small-inhabited islands increase the country's exposure to extreme weather events, including drought and climate change. For Cabo Verde, compliance with SDG 6 targets is of paramount importance in the context of its severe historical recurring droughts that strongly affect water availability and, subsequently, people, health, livelihoods and the economy in general, taking into account that up to 80% of drinking water is provided through desalination. Cabo Verde has implemented an institutional framework for integrated water management and related projects offering investment and partnership opportunities. Among the priority areas are the provision of drinking water for domestic needs, agriculture, tourism and other economic activities, the massive expansion of water supply networks, drainage networks, recycling of waste water and solid and organic waste, and the promotion of energy efficiency in the production and distribution of water.

Costa Rica recently included the human right to access to water in its Constitution, reaffirming the vital role of this resource for wellbeing and sustainable development, including as a key source for renewable electric

energy in our matrix, and recognising that climate change, desertification and extreme weather events are direct threats to its enjoyment. Costa Rica also believes that an integrated management of our water resources should allow for both the protection of sources as well as recharge areas, so that human activities have the least impact on these resources. In February 2020, the Government of Costa Rica launched a country-wide effort called “Clean Rivers”, a National Strategy for the Recovery of Urban Watersheds 2020-2030. This initiative promotes a whole of society approach in the conservation, restoration and protection of watersheds in order to improve the health of the country's urban rivers. One year after its implementation, the Strategy has made real and continuous progress, replicating the experience in other urban micro-basins and enhancing ecosystem services in order to achieve sustainable and resilient cities.

In **Iceland**, freshwater resources are abundant and water generally unpolluted. Water serves multiple purposes: Aquifers provide drinking-water, geothermal water is used for heating and the power of glacial rivers and geothermal steam for electricity production. The Act on Water Management provides holistic protection for water and ecosystems. The aim is to provide comprehensive assessment of water bodies and establish coordinated management of water resources. Furthermore, improving access to clean water and sanitation is one of Iceland’s goals in international development cooperation. Iceland collaborates with district governments in Malawi and Uganda and with UNICEF in Sierra Leone and Liberia to increase access and use of safe water, sanitation, and hygiene services (WASH).

In **Singapore**, we work closely with businesses to encourage them to save water through co-funding water efficiency projects, offering water efficiency awards, and setting benchmarks. Singapore opened its first dual-mode desalination plant in February 2021, which is designed to reduce energy consumption by drawing seawater during dry weather and drawing fresh water during rainy weather. Later this year, Singapore will open one of the world’s largest floating solar panel systems, which will generate enough energy for the day-to-day operations of Singapore’s five local water treatment plants and make Singapore’s waterworks one of the very few in the world to go 100% green. Singapore is also building its first integrated solid waste and used water

treatment facility, the Tuas Nexus, to harness synergies across the water-energy-waste nexus to maximise energy and resource recovery.

Slovenia, a country abundant with water of relatively high quality, faces challenges of having *too much water* more often than of *not having enough water*. In terms of climate change adaptation, Slovenia is introducing sustainable flood protection schemes, developing sophisticated methods for drought management, preparing climate-proof urban design for climate-adapted cities, while actively including youth in capacity building processes. Slovenia applies a multi- stakeholder cross-sectoral approach to its integrated water resources management decision-making process. Fully understanding the importance of transboundary cooperation, Slovenia engages in bilateral, sub-regional, regional and transnational management of water from 'source to sea', again making multi-stakeholder involvement an important part of the process. Slovenia has a tradition of joint green-infrastructure based projects with neighbouring countries.

As a water-stressed country, the **UAE** is implementing the UAE Water Security Strategy 2036 that aims to cut down total demand for water resources by 21%, reduce the water scarcity index by three degrees, and increase the reuse of treated water to 95%. Furthermore, the country seeks to boost the share of reverse osmosis (RO)-based desalinated water to over 50% of the potable water supply mix by 2036. To achieve this target, it is planning to launch two new RO facilities with a combined production capacity of almost two million cubic meters of water per day in 2022 and 2030. The UAE is also investing in R&D to tackle water scarcity, including exploring rain enhancement, and adopting smart agritech and water-saving cultivation methods, such as vertical and hydroponic farming. A prime example is the world’s largest vertical farm that is being developed by Emirates Flight Catering and Crop One. Wastewater treatment and the use of treated water for purposes such as irrigation and district cooling is also steadily increasing.

Water is not an inexhaustible gift of nature. It is a precious resource that needs to be used and conserved wisely. Sustainable water management will play an essential role in keeping us safe from future pandemics, improving the

livelihoods of local communities and the health of ecosystems, reducing the impact of climate change, and, ultimately, bringing about greater global stability.

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