

UN High Level Meeting on Water
18 March 2021
Joint Statement

- On the occasion of the High-Level Meeting on the “Implementation of the Water-related Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda” on 18 March 2021, which is one of the landmark meetings feeding into the “Midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, Water for Sustainable Development, 2018–2028”, we have joined efforts to issue this Cross Regional Statement on Water.
- **Water is a matter of life and source of existence for all living.** The critical importance of water has been highlighted by the COVID 19 pandemic, as access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and hygiene are amongst the first lines of defense in the absence of a vaccine, in particular in many developing countries. The human rights to water and sanitation must be promoted, protected and fulfilled at all times.
- Water is inextricably linked to the three pillars of sustainable development. We share a **strong commitment to advancing SDG6, as well as all water related aspects of the 2030 Agenda, as appropriate, and supporting the implementation of the objectives of the Water Action Decade**, including its Midterm Review conference in 2023. Achievement of the water-related goals and targets is essential to the successful implementation of relevant development agreements, including the New Urban Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. We value the recommendations of the 2018 High Level Panel on Water Report “Making Every Drop Count”, the 2018 UN Water SDG 6 Synthesis Report on Water and the SDG6 Global Acceleration Framework as well as welcome the Water and Climate Coalition.
- While SDG 6 is an essential enabler of the 2030 Agenda, water issues suffer from **lack of visibility in international processes**. The advancement of water issues is long overdue. Effective, coordinated and consistent international cooperation is needed to strengthen the complementarity of actions and programs dedicated to the water and sanitation sector. Deepening our understanding of the interconnections and potential synergies between SDG 6 and the other Goals of the 2030 Agenda would help in taking important steps towards accelerating its implementation, including exploring synergies and complementarities between SDG 6 and SDG 14.
- About 2.5 billion people (36% of the world’s population) live in **water-scarce regions**. By 2050, more than half of the world’s population will be at risk due to water stress, and desertification alone will threaten the livelihoods of nearly one billion people in about 100 countries. Intense water scarcity may displace as many as 700 million people by 2030.

Growing populations and increasing demand for food and energy, as well as climate change, will exacerbate scarcity problems. We share a collective commitment to support the unserved and underserved to ensure the equal enjoyment of the human rights to water and sanitation. Thus, the international community is required to take stock of the efforts already made and take urgent action to avoid leaving the most vulnerable countries behind.

- **Climate change affects water availability and demand** as well as the frequency and intensity of floods and drought. Its impact on the hydrological cycle not only leads to biodiversity loss, but also adversely affect the provision of water-related ecosystem services, such as water purification, as well as the provision of water for drinking, agriculture, and fisheries. **Water pollution** has clear health and socioeconomic impacts and is associated with biodiversity loss and reduced ecosystem functioning.
- **Integrated Water Resources Management** acknowledges that water needs to be managed as a system – usually as a basin, sub-basin, or aquifer - and water system boundaries often do not correlate with political or administrative boundaries. To achieve good governance and increase water use efficiency and sustainability, technical, financial, and institutional solutions must be in place, followed by effective and coordinated cross-sectoral implementation.
- **Current levels of financing remain substantially inadequate** to reach the international community's goal of universal availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation. We support international financing and public and private investments as important tools, also , governments are encouraged to improve the enabling environment and explore new approaches for investment in environmentally sustainable water and sanitation related infrastructure and services, while ensuring the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.
- **Multi stakeholder and multi-disciplinary approaches**, are critical to achieve integrated water resource management, which does not only involve the different levels of government, but also includes civil society, academia, local communities, women and girls, youth and private sector. The absence of safe drinking water and sanitation negatively impacts the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and places a disproportionate burden on them. Political leadership is a must to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- **Information about water** quantity, quality, distribution, access, risks, and use is essential for effective decision-making. Yet major gaps in water data and decision-making systems exist, and science-based climate change informed water data is required. We need to enable policymakers to employ quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated, fit-for-purpose data, smart technologies and strong and robust monitoring mechanisms to develop effective cross-sectoral policies, in order to leave no one behind.

- Worldwide, more than 286 rivers and about 600 aquifers cross borders, and almost 90 percent of the world's population lives in countries sharing transboundary waters. However, 60 percent of transboundary river basins and a much higher percentage of shared aquifers still lack any cooperative and adaptive transboundary management mechanisms. **Strengthening transboundary water cooperation** is essential for reaching the water-related SDG targets and the broader sustainable development goals. Political will is required to define and jump-start or accelerate transboundary actions in support of SDG6 and other water-related targets.
- **Water-related disasters** must be addressed. This requires capable prevention, effective preparedness and effective use of available resources. Increased resilience against climate change and enhanced adaptation stimulates economic activity, ensures fiscal stability, and provides the foundation for sustainable societies and livelihoods. Countries need to improve early warning and response systems.
- **Political dialogue and water diplomacy** must be strengthened, including in the framework of conflict-prevention and building opportunities for cooperation. Peace and sustainable development around shared water resources contribute to regional stability. Countries within and/or bordering crisis zones and facing water scarcity, as well as those that host large numbers of refugees and displaced persons should get special support. Capacity building and training programs are needed, especially in developing countries, to build capacities in water negotiation and mediation.
- **We support the UN and its relevant entities** in their work to deliver on the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda and other agreed upon intergovernmental frameworks towards safe, secure, resilient, ecologically sustainable and inclusive water and sanitation access worldwide, and call for strengthening their activities' coordination under UN Water. We urge the adoption of a UN system-wide approach that integrates the UN activities related to water: most notably the Water Decade and the Global SDG 6 Accelerator Framework, within the framework of the planned Midterm Review.
- We welcome the PGA's High-Level Meeting on Water and the Secretary General's vigorous efforts in support of the Water Decade, and acknowledge the consultative process that preceded the upcoming High-Level meeting. We remain committed to an open, inclusive and transparent Midterm Review Conference in 2023, where all water-related SDGs and especially SDG6 will be discussed to support further action, initiatives and success, and enhance means of implementation and partnerships.

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