

**JOINT STATEMENT FROM MEMBERS OF THE GREEN GROUP ON  
THE OCCASION OF WORLD WATER DAY 22 MARCH 2020**

*On the occasion of World Water Day on 22 March 2020, the Members of the Green Group – Cabo Verde, Costa Rica, Iceland, Singapore, Slovenia and the United Arab Emirates – reaffirm and underscore their commitment to addressing the impact of climate change on water resources and to help find feasible and long-lasting solutions to relieve global water scarcity.*

Water is the source of life. It lies at the core of sustainable development and is critical for socio-economic development, energy and food production, healthy ecosystems and human survival. We need water for almost every aspect of our daily lives including for something as basic as the washing of hands.

It is also a potential source of conflict. Growing demands for water, coupled with the absence of proper water supply management, have increased water stress in many parts of the world. This has intensified disputes between and within communities and societies and increased tension among nations.

As we commemorate World Water Day, a solution to the problem of global water scarcity continues to elude us. The World Health Organisation and United Nations Children's Fund have reported that 2.2 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water services and 297,000 children under five die every year from diarrhoeal diseases due to poor sanitation, poor hygiene, or unsafe drinking water.

While the numbers are staggering, they are likely to get worse as the impact of climate change becomes more acute this decade. The IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land states that up to 270 million people will be vulnerable to water scarcity globally owing to climate change. Water is the primary medium through which we will feel the effects of climate change. Higher temperatures, and less predictable and extreme weather conditions like drought or floods will affect the availability of water and the distribution of

rainfall, snowmelt, river flows and groundwater, thereby further deteriorating water quality. In such a scenario, countries which are the most vulnerable are the small island states and developing countries which lack the capacity and resources to overcome water-related challenges.

Water is in the DNA of all Green Group members. Cabo Verde, Singapore and the UAE face water challenges due to geographical constraints. Members like Iceland and Slovenia rely heavily on water for energy production, while Costa Rica experiences droughts caused by the El Niño phenomenon. Every Green Group member faces the challenge of balancing competing needs of urbanisation and economic growth while maintaining the sustainability of freshwater supplies for industry, agriculture and day-to-day life. Our common goal, to promote policies in favour of the environment and sustainable development, particularly from the perspective of small states, is what led to the formation of the Green Group in 2009. Each member aspires to act as a small but impactful point of reference within its region with the objective of catalysing a network of useful experiences on sustainable development for the global community.

Each member is tackling its water challenges based on its national circumstances. Some leverage innovation and technology. The UAE is the world's second-largest market for water desalination technology – accounting for 14 per cent of all desalinated water produced globally and housing the world's largest desalinated water reservoir in Abu Dhabi. Singapore has invested in membrane technology to supplement its limited water supplies with high-grade reclaimed water and desalinated water. Cabo Verde has employed a simple but effective *“rega gota a gota”* (drip-by-drip watering) system which reduces water losses through evaporation and leaching.

But innovation can only go so far. The earth's capacity to absorb water pollution and waste is finite. To ensure sustainable use of the world's water, governments need to bring about a paradigm shift in societies from the usual mindset of “take, make, use, then toss”. Costa Rica's “Peace with Nature” initiatives set the direction for the country to move towards carbon neutrality through the sustainable use of all natural resources. Slovenia is the first

European Union country to include the right to drinking water in its constitution which emphasises the importance of water. Slovenia has also a long tradition of transboundary water cooperation in the region. Singapore runs a “Make Every Drop Count” water conservation campaign annually to build a strong water conscious culture among its population through public outreach and education programmes. The UAE’s Water Security Strategy 2036 aims to reduce its total demand for water resources by 21 per cent, reduce its water scarcity index by three degrees, and increase the reuse of treated water to 95 per cent. Furthermore, the UAE is also a member of the “High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People”, which calls for protecting 30 per cent of the world’s land and seas by 2030.

Adopting good water saving habits starts at home and with our young. Changing mindsets goes a long way towards saving this precious commodity.

It is imperative that we get this right. Sustainable water management not only supports a country’s development but is an essential component of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Improving water management can help strengthen the resilience of water systems, improve ecosystem health, and reduce the risk of water-related disasters. These activities bring health to our communities, while paving the way for sustainable development and social stability in our respective regions. As our nations fight the dangerous COVID-19 pandemic, our collective response towards accessible, clean water for all counts more than ever.

. . . . .