

Statement by

**H.E. Ms Tanja Fajon,**

**Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs**

at the

**UN General Assembly INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE 5: Water Action Decade: Accelerating the implementation of the objectives of the Decade, including through the UN Secretary General's Action Plan**

New York, 24 March 2023

*Co-chairs,*

*Your Excellences,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The Water Action Decade was proclaimed to stimulate progress towards achievement of SDG 6. Secretary General's Report on the midterm review of the Decade recognizes progress has been made. However, we still need to quadruple our efforts to achieve universal access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene. This is unrealistic with acceleration only. We need transformation.

**As in any transformation, a perceptual and cultural change** is required: Water must turn from one of the most undervalued resources into what it should represent - a global public good, and a human right for all, but not free of charge.

Water is much more than a resource to satisfy the needs of humankind. It is the lifeblood of nature and a potential driver for transformational change in tackling the triple planetary crises.

Water can also drive change in our flawed economic system - a change towards inclusive growth and sustainable livelihoods, based on equity and justice, including environmental justice.

**Only a water secure world is a world at peace**. The "zero-sum" policy when it comes to water is unproductive. It may bring instability and conflict to our doorstep. The lack of cooperative agreements on shared waters, particularly **groundwater**, is of concern.

To help turn this challenge into an opportunity for a virtuous circle of benefits and progress, Slovenia joined the recently established **Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition**.

We believe in the convening and motivational power of coalitions. We joined the **Multi-stakeholder coalition on gender equality in the water domain** and its Call to Action to make sure women's voices are heard. Universal access to water cannot be achieved otherwise.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

Some of the **biggest challenges** for this conference and the water in general have been:

1. the (in)visibility of water on our agendas, and
2. transcending the fragmentation and getting out of the water bubble.

We need more dialogue on water within the **UN system** and **an enhanced UN system-wide approach to water**.

It is high time for a **clearly defined structure on water within the UN system**.

We support **strengthening the coordinative function of UN-Water**, through a potential update of its role and functioning in the following areas:

* political advocacy role, ensuring the whole UN system speaks with one voice on water;
* ensuring coherence of UN effort by strengthening the engagement with the UN Regional Economic Commissions and the UN development system's country-level support, as foreseen in the Global SDG 6 Acceleration Framework;
* ensuring that all these efforts strengthen cross-sectoral approaches.

SDG 6 should be further mainstreamed into planning, work and reporting of the UN; for example in the ECOSOC reports, with a specific part on water in the next report. Include a "freshwater" segment in UN sustainable development themes and international conferences on specific issues. In most of these, water is hardly mentioned, often just in parenthesis.

Tying-in water to **other inter-governmental processes** on climate, food security, energy, health, environment etc. should no longer be an uphill struggle. We succeeded at COP27; let us replicate this success in other processes.

This could be one of the tasks for a **UN Special Envoy for Water.** He – or preferably she - would ensure visibility of water on the global political agenda, galvanize political will, strengthen coherence of action, mobilize additional funding, and secure the follow-up of the outcomes of this conference.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

We cannot afford to wait another 46 years for a third UN Water Conference. **Regular bi- or tri-annual high-level intergovernmental meetings on water at the UN**, clearly mandated, are needed to keep the momentum, mobilize action, garner new initiatives and ideas, and help change the practices and narratives that hinder progress.

We see a **need for a close follow up of the conference and the Water Action Agenda** to realize the transformative change of how we manage and value water. We propose to clearly outline the roles the Special Envoy, UN-Water, UNDESA and existing structures will play in the follow-up of the Conference and of the Water Action Agenda.

To facilitate this task, review the proposals made in the Interactive Dialogues and in the conference summary, and ensure follow-up through relevant UN processes, I **call upon the UN Secretary General to come up with a Plan of Action**.

The UN **Water Action Decade** will continue to serve as a platform for policy dialogue, exchange of good practices and building partnerships to address water issues at all levels. In five years, when we look back on the achievements of the Decade, we should be able to say that commitments made at this conference, have resulted in a transformational change on our common path towards a more water secure world.

I thank you!