



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

4 August 2017

Excellency,

Pursuant to paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 71/222 of 21 December 2016 entitled “International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028”, two working-level dialogues on water were convened on 22 March 2017 and 30 May 2017, to discuss improving the integration and coordination of the work of the United Nations on the water-related goals and targets and a suggested way forward.

In this regard, please find enclosed a letter from the Co-Moderators of the working-level dialogues on water, H.E. Ms. Katalin Bogyay, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Hungary and Mr. Lukmon Isomatov, Head of the Department of External Economic Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, which contains the summary of the dialogues.

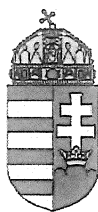
I take this opportunity to thank the co-moderators, as well as all Member States, for their engagement and positive contribution to the dialogues.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

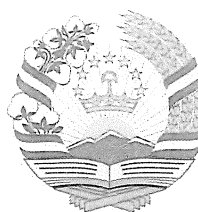
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Thomson'.

Peter Thomson

All Permanent Representatives and  
Permanent Observers to the United Nations  
New York.



**Permanent Mission of Hungary to the  
United Nations**



**Permanent Mission of Tajikistan to the  
United Nations**

03 August 2017

Excellency,

We, as representatives of the countries, which are actively advancing water issues here at the United Nations would like to express our sincere gratitude to you for entrusting us to co-moderate the working level dialogues aimed at improving the integration and coordination of the work of the United Nations on the water-related goals and targets under its sustainable development pillar.

As mandated, two working level dialogues were convened, constructive and interactive discussions took place between member-states, relevant regional and international organizations, relevant United Nations system entities, UN-Water and other important stakeholders on the above-mentioned issues.

To this end, we are pleased to enclose the summary of the working level dialogues, which contains the key messages and recommendations arising from our discussions.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

H.E. Ambassador Katalin Annamária  
Bogyay, Permanent Representative of  
Hungary to the  
United Nations (Co-moderator)

Mr. Lukmon Isomatov, Head of the Department  
of the External Economic Cooperation, Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan (Co-moderator)

To: H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, the President of the 71<sup>st</sup> session of  
the United Nations General Assembly

## **General Assembly Working-Level Dialogue on Water**

Improving the integration and coordination of the work of the United Nations on the water-related goals and targets under its sustainable development pillar

### **Summary of Discussions**

In accordance with paragraph 12 of the General Assembly resolution 71/222 of 21 December 2016, entitled “International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028”, the President of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson convened the first working-level dialogue on Water on 22 March 2017, coinciding with the commemoration of World Water Day. Resolution 71/222 called for two dialogues, the first of which addressed challenges and opportunities relating to the implementation of water-related SDGs as well as improving the integration and coordination of the work of the United Nations on the water-related goals and targets under its sustainable development pillar, with particular emphasis on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The first dialogue was held on 22 March and prepared in cooperation with and co-moderated by H.E. Ambassador Katalin Bogyay, Permanent Representative of Hungary to the UN and Mr. Lukmon Isomatov, Head of the Department of External Economic Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan. A subsequent working-level dialogue took place on 30 May in order to take stock of the discussions at the first dialogue and allow for an exchange of views on the relevance of possible next steps, based on the draft summary prepared by the co-moderators.

### **Structure of the Dialogues**

The dialogue on 22 March was well-attended and involved representatives from the Member States, international organizations and other relevant stakeholders. Opening remarks were delivered by the President of the General Assembly; the Co-Moderators; H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo, UN Special Envoy on Disaster Risk Reduction and Water, Chair of the High-level Experts and Leaders’ Panel on Water and Disasters. The opening remarks also included a video message by Matt Damon and Gary White, the co-founders of Water.org.

The dialogue included two panel discussions. Panel 1 considered the implementation of the water-related SDGs and how to address challenges and seize opportunities through strengthening cooperation and partnerships. Panellists included Ms. Lesha Witmert, Women for Water Partnership, Mr. Roberto Lenton, Daugherty Distinguished Fellow, Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute at the University of Nebraska and Mr. Zafar Adeel, Executive Director, Pacific Water Research Centre. Panel 2 took up the role of the United Nations system in improving the integration and coordination to support Member States and other relevant stakeholders in the implementation and follow-up of water-related SDGs. Panellists included Mr. Bai-Mass Taal, Former Executive Secretary of the African Minister Council on Water, Ms. Sanjaasuren Oyuun, Chair of the Global Water Partnership and Ms. Cecilia Scharp, Senior Advisor, Water and Environment, Programme Division, UNICEF.

After the panel presentations, participants took the floor. All the speakers who wished to intervene were given the opportunity to do so: fifty Member States and three stakeholders contributed to the interactive discussion.

At the second dialogue, held on 30 May 2017, thirty-three Member State representatives and two stakeholders took the floor. During the discussion, participants reiterated and further elaborated on their position regarding on ways of improving the integration and coordination of the work of the United Nations on the water-related goals and targets under the sustainable development pillar, with a particular emphasis on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### Key Messages

- **Water as a global challenge.** Despite recent progress, more than 660 million people still lack access to an improved source of drinking water and 2.4 billion are currently living without adequate sanitation facilities.

- Participants stressed that water-related challenges are spread across the globe, aggravated by the adverse impacts of climate change, affecting the water cycle through more extreme weather events and water-related disasters such flooding and droughts.

- Most of the world's wastewater is being discharged into the environment without treatment; in many regions, water use is exceeding renewable supplies. If not properly addressed, these challenges would undermine human health, impede sustainable economic development and threaten peace and security.

- It was recalled that the World Economic Forum identified water crises as the third most impactful global risk in the 2016 and 2017 Global Risks Reports.

- The Security Council Open Debate on Water, Peace and Security (22 November 2016) was raised which considered how investments in water security could be a means to ensure long-term international peace and well-being. Water scarcity and the projections that by 2050 at least one in four humans could face a chronic lack of fresh water was noted.

- Whether impacted directly or indirectly, almost all noted that no country would be immune from these challenges. However, cooperation on water and sanitation has the potential to support peace.

- **Implementing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 is key to sustainable development.** Participants welcomed the ambition and comprehensiveness of SDG 6 to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030.

- While building on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) on drinking water and sanitation access, new global targets on water quality, water use, water resources management and ecosystems were widely supported. Many saw SDG 6 as underpinning the success of other SDGs.

- Views converged that water needs to be mainstreamed into the broader development agenda.

- **The need for integration – two sides of the same coin.** While there was universal support for a water goal, many noted that the challenges of water could not be addressed through the water sector alone and that water would need to be integrated into approaches on many of the other SDGs. Increasing demand for water quality or quantity, for example, could require significant changes to how water is being used in agriculture.

- At the same time, sustaining and increasing agricultural productivity will mean developing reliable supplies of water and improving the efficiency of irrigation. It was noted that achieving SDG 2 (on food) and SDG 6 will require integrated approaches in both water and agricultural management to overcome the silos.

- It was also noted that an integrated approach is needed between water, energy, the environment, education, health and many more areas.

- Some pointed to the “Report on Strategic Alignment of future sessions of the Assembly with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” of 21 July 2016, the resolution on “Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system” of 9 December 2016, and the Secretary-General’s report “Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level” as reinforcing the need to mainstream water into existing UN processes.

- Several highlighted the interlinkages between SDG 6 and SDG 5 (on gender equality), especially considering that women and girls bear the burden of collecting water for domestic uses when water supply is not close to the home.

- **Countries bear the primary responsibility, but support is needed.** Many highlighted efforts being undertaken by their own countries and organizations to address water challenges, such as water pricing, basin level management, upgrading systems to prevent leakage, water reuse, improved legislation and including community voices in infrastructure projects.

- Considering that water is managed locally and SDG 6 is implemented locally or on the basin level, a participant suggested that the focus should be on bringing coherence at the local, national and regional levels. In this connection, capacity development for governments and regional organisations is needed.

- It was raised that many countries, especially LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS require more financial and technical support and the need for greater sharing of best practices and lessons learned.

- **Need for clarity on the work of existing water-related mechanisms and funds.** Participants noted that there are many structures that already exist for water but that there is a need to better understand their individual roles, responsibilities and capabilities. Several argued for a detailed review of the UN system’s efforts on water to identify gaps, duplications and challenges to cooperation before suggesting any new institutions. Some of the mechanisms mentioned included, UN-Water and its related monitoring initiatives, most importantly the Joint Monitoring Programme [JMP], the Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water [GLAAS), the Integrated monitoring of water and sanitation related SDG targets [GEMI].

- Several noted the importance of leveraging existing UN initiatives, frameworks, and international partnerships, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, Sanitation and Water for All, the Samoa Pathway, the Sendai Framework, World Water Forum, World Water Weeks (Singapore, Sweden, Africa) UNESCO IHE, along with legal instruments at the regional level.

- **Support for the Water Decade.** Participants joined in welcoming the “International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028” with most delegations noting their co-sponsorship of the resolution.

- The Decade was described as offering a broad and flexible framework to pursue common goals for action particularly to expedite implementation of SDG 6.

- By facilitating a smooth transition from the MDG era to the 2030 Agenda, the Decade will consider tools for monitoring related to integrated water resources management and sustainable development.

- Several suggested that Member States should start to look at how to line up and support the Decade. As the global community looks to the Decade, participants recommended that it is important to approach collective action with a view to water resources and in this effort partnerships will play a key role.

- **UN System that may not be up to the task.** Several participants suggested that there is a mismatch between the ambition of SDG6 and the ability of the UN system to support the Member States in the implementation. Several described the existing UN efforts on water as “fragmented” and lacking leadership and that water was not properly prioritized with the agenda of the individual UN agencies.

- Regarding UN-Water, besides praising its ongoing work a number of delegations found it insufficient to meet current needs.

- A number of countries expressed a need for a dedicated intergovernmental platform on water to provide policy guidance, enhance cooperation and support countries on water-related issues.

- At the same time, several spoke against the need for any new structures and noted the need to focus on improving the efficiency of water and sanitation coordination.

- Some suggested that it is important to avoid silos and that a single body to oversee water and SDG 6 could undermine efforts of overall integration among the SDGs.

- Others noted the importance of avoiding a “one size fits all” approach, and that existing structures at the national and regional level could be overridden by a global body. Relying on existing structures also helps to avoid a significant increase in the bureaucratic or financial burden of the UN system.

- Many delegations expressed concern that SDG 6 might not get the attention necessary within the broader High Level Political Forum (HLPF) process. Many felt that a review of water every four years within the HLPF would be insufficient to maintain global momentum and stressed the need to move beyond the “water community talking to the water community.” The National Voluntary Reviews as a possible coordination avenue was suggested, to ensure that water is properly prioritized to meet country needs.

- The fact that HLPF will perform an in-depth review of SDG 6 in 2018 was raised.

- One participant called for a “World Water Roadmap” and a “World Water Fund.”

- Many Member States stressed a need for the continuation of the dialogue under the auspices of the General Assembly or ECOSOC, while some delegations suggested bringing the key messages to work streams related to HLPF and the 2030 Agenda. Others questioned the right fora in which the dialogue shall be continued.

### **Possible ways to improve integration and coordination, as suggested by participants**

- Conduct a review of ongoing activities of the UN Agencies and mechanisms with the aim of identifying potential gaps, overlaps and areas for enhanced cooperation.

- Strengthen UN-Water and its mandate, increase the contributions of the UN member agencies to UN-Water, to better interact with the Member States.

- Explore the added value and drawbacks of platforms, including the Water Decade; to provide coherent policy guidance and oversee monitoring and follow-up.

- Catalyse the use of existing initiatives and frameworks that could integrate relevant activities and resources by sharing experiences and best practices, mobilize new sources of funding and build capacity (also at the national and local level).

- Ensure greater integration of water-related goal and targets into the broader HLPF framework.

- Use the National Voluntary Reviews within HLPF to ensure countries address water challenges.

- Invite the UN Regional Economic Commissions to host discussions on water resources and share best practices and lessons learned.

- Explore linkages with the ongoing reform of the UN Development system.