



Statement  
by

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of the United Nations General Assembly

on behalf of

the President of the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations  
General Assembly

Joint Spain Algeria Initiative for Water Strategy in the Western  
Mediterranean Basin

New York  
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*Please check against delivery*

H.E. Mourad Benmehidi, Permanent Representative of Algeria

H.E. Román Oyrzun, Permanent Representative of Spain

Secretary-General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the President of the General Assembly, who unfortunately cannot be here today, I have the honour of addressing today's meeting.

We are here to discuss one of the world's most valuable commodities in a basin that is shared by two continents and is an important source of commerce, trade and transport. It is also part of region under significant water stress, with notable declines in recent decades, and thus an emblem of why the world needs enhanced water cooperation and diplomacy.

I am pleased to bring you wishes of support and encouragement from the PGA as you launch this initiative and seek to adopt a Strategy for Water in the Western Mediterranean.

I would like to commend the Governments of Algeria and Spain, not only for developing this initiative but for convening today's meeting. You are providing us with the opportunity to discuss how the sustainable use of water can be promoted at local, regional and national levels including through a framework for international development cooperation.

With billions of people struggling because of urgent water needs, it is my sincere wish that the outcomes of this meeting can be distilled into practical solutions that improve lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is often stated that water is the source of life. And while this is certainly true, there is also a double-edged nature to this unique resource. It is perhaps more accurate to say that “water - of the right quality, in the right quantity, in the right place - is the source of life.”

Ensuring that we get this “water equation” right is one of the fundamental challenges confronting our globe today. Doing so includes determining how we manage and develop this precious resource in a way that responsibly promotes economic growth and alleviates poverty, without undermining our environmental resources. At the same time, the impacts of climate change call for significant adaptation, even in countries that have achieved a basic level of resilience with respect to their water resources. As water deficits rise and demand grows, water increasingly becomes a precious commodity, leading to heightened risk for tension and conflicts.

Similar to other regions, the Western Mediterranean basin suffers from water deficits due to intensive abstraction of both surface and groundwater bodies for domestic, agricultural and industrial purposes, as well as declining biodiversity as a result of drought, forest fires and floods.

The joint initiative between Algeria and Spain is meant to address these challenges by strengthening water policies, surveillance systems, data systems, and infrastructural systems. This collaboration will also include sharing of experiences, technology and knowledge transfer, as well as capacity building in the fields of human resources and management, and investment promotion. And while the countries of the region will no doubt benefit, there is much for other countries to learn as well. Your initiative exemplifies the potential and benefits of North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation to tackle complex and shared challenges.

Excellencies,

It is clear that the sustainable management of water resources is a challenging undertaking, yet I believe it is not one that is beyond our reach. Setting ambitious

objectives can galvanise efforts and drive change. We need only look to the international community's achievement of the MDG target on access to drinking water.

As we now begin to trace the contours of a new sustainability agenda, universal access to clean water will remain an essential component in our efforts to eradicate poverty. To further enhance our work on water cooperation, I encourage your involvement in the PGA's high-level events and thematic debates as part of his intention to "set the stage" for the post 2015 development agenda.

Two of these are particularly relevant to our discussions today. The first thematic debate, to be held on 18 and 19 February, will focus on Water, Sanitation and Sustainable Energy. Another High-level event, to be held in May, will explore contributions of North-South, South-South, Triangular Cooperation, and ICT for Development to the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Beyond the conference rooms of this august institution, our commitment to put water at the core of the sustainable development agenda is one that has the potential to save thousands of lives and directly improve the living conditions of individuals and entire communities. Initiatives such as yours can help us turn our pledges into reality.

I wish you great success in your deliberations and in the development of this important strategy.

Thank you.

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