



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

7 February 2017

Excellency,

Pursuant to paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 71/222 of 22 December 2016 entitled “International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028”, and to my letter dated on 12 January 2017, I have the honour to share with you the concept note for the working level dialogue to discuss improving the integration and coordination of the work of the United Nations on the water-related goals and targets under its sustainable development pillar, prepared in collaboration with 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, Co-Moderators of the dialogue.

The first water dialogue will be convened on 22 March 2017, at 10:00am in the Trusteeship Council Chamber. The programme of the event will be circulated in due time.

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

Concept Note

1. Background

For over 40 years the United Nations has been actively engaged in strengthening and promoting its water agenda, starting from the first United Nations Water Conference, in Mar del Plata, March 1977, which was a major milestone in the history of water resource development for the last century. The UN commitment continued at many other opportunities, including its Conference on Environment and Development, held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, as well as the General Assembly resolution 58/217, which proclaimed the period 2005-2015 as an International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' and placed a special emphasis on promoting the participation and involvement of women in water related issues, and strengthening the international cooperation at all levels.

At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 (Rio+20), Member States recognized that water is at the core of sustainable development and essential for human health and well-being, food security and energy, social and economic stability, and for protecting and maintaining balanced ecosystems.

The ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2015 has set the objective to achieve sustainable development and eradicate poverty. Its implementation will need an active engagement by all development actors in a multi-stakeholder fashion, based first and foremost on commitments by Member States. Sustainable management of freshwater resources and sanitation is a vital element of the 2030 Agenda. SDG 6: "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all" focuses on the entire water cycle, including the management of water, wastewater and ecosystem resources. That is a positive shift over the last years, which makes the water agenda more comprehensive and integrated.

The 2030 Agenda recognizes the need for country-led "robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review" in order to support national implementation and accelerate progress. It envisages that the global review framework shall be centered on the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF) under the auspices of UNGA and ECOSOC and that the thematic follow-up and review at the global level, while being open and inclusive, will essentially build on the work of UN functional and regional commissions and other intergovernmental bodies.

In order to help build support and momentum for rapid start-up on the implementation of water related SDGs and targets, the UNGA adopted, last year, a resolution declaring 2018-2028 as an International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development". The Decade would strengthen and enhance the progress achieved during the "Water for Life" Decade and will put greater focus on the sustainable development and integrated management of water resources.

2. Challenges

The scarcity of fresh water resources constitutes a serious challenge to meet our universal goals of eradicating poverty, ensuring prosperity, sustainability and security. Indeed, today, nearly 1 billion of the world's population doesn't have access to safe drinking water and more than a quarter of the world's population does not have access to basic toilet and decent sanitation. Per capita water availability is seriously dwindling; over the past four decades it dropped to one third.

At a more fundamental level, if the world continues on its current path, the world may face a 40% shortfall in water availability by 2030, affecting all countries, in particular the most vulnerable such as LDCs and SIDS, as well as water-scare countries.

These conditions will be exacerbated by many factors, including urbanization, population growth, desertification, drought and climate change. Indeed, pressure by high demand for water resources is on the rise, while actions in preservation and sustainable use become more urgent. Growing populations, more water-intensive patterns of economic growth, increasing rainfall variability, and pollution make water one of the most important risks to achieve poverty eradication and sustainable development.

Floods and droughts already impose huge social and economic costs around the world. Climate change significantly modifies the hydrological cycle, increases the variability of water supplies and reduces snow-pack, which, in many regions of the world, serves as the only source of water storage. Climate studies further suggest that the world is likely to see crucial changes in the temporal and spatial distributing of water resources and the frequency and intensity of water-related disasters. This may have dramatic effects on livelihoods, demographic and migration patterns and many regions of the world will be particularly vulnerable.

Despite a huge progress over the past thirty years in water science and technology, proper capacities to implement those, particularly in developing countries, are lagging behind.

The greatest opportunity is, however, that there is sufficient water available in the World. Groundwater resources, that represent 90 % of the unfrozen water, have the potential to provide for the right adaptation capability. Nevertheless, as these resources are extremely vulnerable, water governance systems would need to be improved to balance the availability across scales. Such a solution is realistically in humanity's reach provided that water governance is in place and progressively developed. When countries or regions commit to prioritizing water challenges, we have seen that significant progress can be made. Countries and the international community as a whole must work together, undertake coordinated efforts and adopt both urgent and long-term measures. This is particularly true in the case of waters shared among sectors as well as surface and groundwater shared between communities and countries. It is truer now than ever before that "water connects, it does not divide."

While the UN System is doing commendable policy work in safeguarding freshwater resources, a framework for a more efficient involvement in terms of coordinating coherence could further enhance the on-going efforts.

3. Objective

Pursuant to paragraph 12 of the General Assembly resolution 71/222 of 22 December 2016 entitled "International Decade for Action, Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028", the President of the General Assembly appointed H.E. Ms Katalin Bogyay, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Hungary and Mr Lukmon Isomatov, Head of Department of External Economic Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, as Co-Moderators of the working-level dialogue to discuss improving the integration and coordination of the work of the UN on the water-related goals and targets under sustainable development pillars, with particular emphasis on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, while preserving its integrated and

indivisible nature, and a subsequent working level dialogue to take stock of the discussions at the first dialogue and exchange views on the relevance of possible next steps.

The first dialogue takes place on 22nd March, coinciding with the celebration of the World Water Day, and aims to identify current pressing gaps and challenges as well as appropriate recommendations. The second dialogue, whose date will be decided later, should offer the opportunity to take stock of the progress made and exchange views on possible next steps.

The dialogue will consist of an opening segment and Panel discussions that shall be informal, inclusive, open-ended and interactive, with the participation of Member States, representatives of the UN System, civil society, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders. The outcome of the dialogues is a Summary to be prepared by the Co-moderators.

4. Guiding questions

The following questions aim to facilitate the interactive and inclusive discussions among key stakeholders around the main issues:

- What role Member States and relevant stakeholders can play in guiding the implementation of the Agenda 2030 in general and for SDG6 in particular and what are the gaps and challenges in the implementation of the water-related SDG and targets?
- How could the United Nations improve the integration and coordination of policies and what would be the most efficient approach to increase the level and quality of contributions and support of the UN system to the implementation of water-related goals and targets?
- In terms of sustainable management of water resources what do we expect from cooperation among Member States and relevant stakeholders? How could cooperation in knowledge generation and dissemination, exchange of information and good practices be improved?
- How can partnerships contribute effectively to improving capacity development for better understanding and responding to the water-related challenges?
- How to focus on the specific role of women in advancing the implementation of water related goals and targets of the sustainable development pillar?