



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

23 April 2018

Excellency,

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/222 of 22 December 2016 and my previous letters on the same matter, I have the honour to transmit herewith a Summary of the discussions between Member States and other relevant stakeholders at the High-level Event, convened on 22 March 2018, to launch the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028”.

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

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M. Lajčák', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Miroslav Lajčák

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

Summary of the High-level Launch Event of the Water Action Decade

International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028" on World Water Day, 22nd March 2018

In its resolution 71/222 of 21 December, the General Assembly proclaimed the period from 2018 to 2028 the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development" commencing on World Water Day, 22nd March 2018. The President of the General Assembly, Mr. H.E. Miroslav Lajčák convened an informal meeting of the General Assembly to officially launch the Water Action Decade. This launch event aimed to further improve cooperation and partnerships towards achieving the water-related goals of the ambitious 2030 Agenda.

The High-Level Event consisted of an opening segment with the following speakers:

- **H.E. Mr. Mahmoud Saikal**, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan delivered remarks on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Miroslav Lajčák;
- **H.E. Mr. António Guterres**, UN Secretary-General presented the Action Plan of the International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018-2028;
- **H.E. Mr. Emomali Rahmon**, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, initiator of the International Decade for Action and Member of the High-Level Panel on Water presented, on behalf of the members of the Panel, the outcome report, "Making Every Drop Count: An agenda for water action"; and
- **Miss Autumn Peltier**, a 13-year-old Anishinaabe water advocate from the Wikwemikong, First Nations delivered remarks.

The opening segment also included a video presentation from the High-Level Panel on Water entitled "Water's Promise: Making Every Drop Count."

Following the opening segment, a plenary and two high-level Panels took place:

Panel 1 under the theme: "Contribution of the Water Decade to the implementation of water-related SDGs: addressing challenges and seizing opportunities through strengthening cooperation and partnerships".

Panel 2 under the theme: "Role of relevant stakeholders in mobilizing necessary resources for the implementation and follow-up of water related SDGs".

Key messages and thematic issues raised during the event are summarized as follows.

I- Key Messages

Challenges

Participants underscored some of the challenges countries face in relation to water and sanitation. It was pointed out that while three quarters of the Earth is covered with water:

- only 2.5% is freshwater and less than 1% of it is available to sustain all terrestrial life and ecosystems;
- Water quality in lakes and rivers around the globe is deteriorating due to rising nutrient levels and other chemical pollutants, mainly from agriculture, industry and household waste;
- Likewise, one in six people do not have access to safe drinking water
- over 2 billion are drinking contaminated water, which leads in many cases to sickness and death.
- every minute one child dies from contaminated water, poor sanitation and hygiene.

Some speakers highlighted the link between water and human suffering, including in the Lake Chad Basin, the Gaza Strip and the Horn of Africa.

In addition, participants indicated that nearly 90% of all-natural disasters in the world are water-related and that cities, towns and villages are being battered by evermore-frequent hurricanes and storms. Some countries also highlighted specific challenges due to their geographical location, size and unique set of constraints.

Lastly, participants underscored that challenges related to water will increase in the future, as demand and competition will increase for drinking water, urbanization, agriculture, sanitation and energy. It is predicted that by 2050, the population will have grown by 2 billion, and therefore water demand will increase by more than 40%.

Opportunities

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. Water related goals will feature prominently in the international agenda and would offer an opportunity to foster cooperation and partnerships. In addition to the launch of the Water Decade, participants referred to the 8th World Water Forum in Brasilia in March, the Dushanbe Conference in June, the review of SDG6 at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) session in July, the annual Stockholm World Water Week in August and the Budapest Water Summit in 2019.

Participants highlighted the great potential of international and regional cooperation on water management, through integrated approaches, access to technologies and sharing of smart solutions and good practices. They recalled that water plays a pivotal role in achieving all other SDGs and therefore, can be used as leverage for sustainable development.

The Event also offered an opportunity for participants to draw attention to their activities and plans related to water and sanitation, including:

- water desalination,
- water pollution,
- hydro-energy projects,
- collecting and storage of rainwater,
- management of water related disasters.

In this context, the Voluntary National Review at the HLPF session in July is being considered as an important opportunity for Member States to highlight their projects and initiatives, as well as national policies and plans to address water challenges.

Commitments for the way forward

Participants welcomed and expressed their full support for the International Action Decade on Water for Sustainable Development and the Secretary-General’s Action Plan. Many expressed the intention to integrate the Secretary-General’s Action Plan into their national plans. Others referred to the report of the High-Level Panel on Water and its recommendations, as an important guide in achieving water related goals and targets. Participants emphasized the centrality of SDG 6 for sustainable development. They reiterated that the international community should work together, undertake coordinated efforts and adopt both urgent and long-term measures.

Participants stressed the need to:

- a) enhance cooperation and partnerships;

- b) mobilize financial resources;
- c) foster investments;
- d) improve knowledge generation;
- e) endorse appropriate technology transfer; and
- f) increase building capacity.

In this context, some made a call to support specific initiatives, such as the SIDS partnership framework.

Many delegations highlighted efforts being undertaken by their own countries to address water challenges, including in terms of improved legislation and infrastructure, water financing, preventing leakage and water reuse. Participants expressed their support for raising awareness, sharing best practices and promoting international cooperation on water issues at the United Nations. It was also noted that implementation of 2030 agenda requires better coordination of the review of global water related goals and targets. It was highlighted that solutions to meet SDG6 must be both global and local in nature – and must operate in tandem with multilateral and rules-based systems that foster an inclusive and sustainable global economy.

II- Thematic issues

Climate change

Climate change was identified as a serious threat to humanity. Participants stressed that water related challenges are spread across the globe, aggravated by the adverse impacts of climate change, including in terms of extreme weather events and water-related disasters such as flooding and droughts. Climate change is also adversely impacting the quality and quantity of water.

It was noted that by 2025 the total area of glaciers could decrease by an average of 30-45% and they may eventually disappear. Freshwater could decrease by 30-40%. Participants underlined that water challenges are further exacerbated by climate change, desertification, drought, land degradation and water-related disasters. Noting also that current changes in climate have led to the most serious water scarcity challenges in the Horn of Africa. Lastly, climate change was also highlighted as bringing new challenges to global water security. In this context, there was a call for action to address climate change and conserve glaciers.

Gender and youth perspectives

Safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities were identified as particularly important for the safety and health of women and girls and young people in general. It was noted that women, children, persons with disabilities and people in humanitarian crises are more at risk of being deprived of their fundamental right to water, sanitation and proper basic hygiene. It was recognized that women and girls should be actively involved in the development processes and in water conservation activities. Participants underscored that gender dimensions are critical to achieving SDG 6 with projects aimed at enhancing local management along with education and training programs especially for women and the creation of decent jobs. The international community must sustainably manage water resources and put more focus on conservation. Participants noted that the next generation needs more education on water consumption and conservation. Thus, the Water Decade should focus on women and children as the most promising agents of change.

Conflict prevention

International cooperation on water management can create an enabling environment for peace and security. It was highlighted that water scarcity can be a root cause of conflicts and humanitarian crises and an effective management of water resources is a critical component to secure peace. Participants stressed that water is a human right based on General Assembly resolution 64/292. Cooperation on water is key for a peaceful society. It was mentioned that water is not only a factor for migration, but it may increase the probability of outbreaks of conflicts, and contribute to food insecurity. Many expressed that transboundary water cooperation is a critical area as it fosters resilience, creates trust and ensures prosperity. References were made to examples of water cooperation worldwide. One of the panellists called on the international community to strengthen efforts to protect civilians and highlighted the importance of including water experts in peace-keeping operations underlining that water is a powerful instrument that can leverage peaceful cooperation.

Water Governance

Participants recognized that the harmonization of policies for the protection of water resources is much needed. They acknowledged the interlinkages between different agendas and stressed the need for an enhanced, coherent, and coordinated approach for cooperation on water-related issues. Furthermore, participants expressed the urgency to strengthen water governance, in order to address the mismatch between the ambition of SDG6 and the ability of the UN system to support Member States in its implementation. Some speakers expressed concerns over the fragmentation and lack of leadership of the UN system's action with regard to the water agenda. In this context, they expressed support for a dedicated intergovernmental platform to provide policy guidance and to help strengthen international cooperation, while others supported building upon existing mechanisms and frameworks, including UN-Water. It was also highlighted that water governance challenges should be addressed at all levels – community, local, national, regional and global levels.

Implementation of water related goals and targets

Participants highlighted the need for the Decade to contribute to the implementation of water related goals and targets, through promoting action oriented activities.

This includes inter alia:

- a) the establishment of appropriate policies and plans and their effective implementation on the ground;
- b) people's participation in the decision-making processes as well as implementation efforts, including the most vulnerable;
- c) to identify \$1.7 trillion US dollars that are needed between now and 2030 to deliver on SDG 6 and close existing gaps, which cannot be reached with public financing only;
- d) strengthening cooperation and establishing partnerships to achieve water related goals and targets and address investments gaps in needed investment for water infrastructure. and
- e) to strengthen technology, innovation and knowledge sharing, including in some specific areas such as infrastructure, agriculture, pollutants and waste management.

This included some announcements of partnership initiatives made by delegations and other speakers. The discussion focused on the critical issue of financing as well as the need for sufficient and adequate data to better inform policy making, follow-up, review and progress measurement.

Some speakers commended the use of education as a tool for improved water conservation and disaster resilience.

Role of stakeholders

Participants agreed that raising awareness and ensuring the involvement of all stakeholders is crucial to achieve SDG6 and the 2030 Agenda. This will bring together governments, UN entities, civil society organizations, businesses and academia – in a new partnership for water. It will facilitate the implementation of many recommendations of the High-Level Panel on Water, and the Secretary-General's Action Plan for the Decade ahead. The formation of a strategic network of partners on water is needed, including through bringing public-private partnerships calling on all actors to assume shared responsibilities.

Some participants highlighted major financial challenges that local municipalities are facing. In this context, it was suggested that all sources of funding should be considered, including through increasing investments. It is of utmost importance to encourage the private sector to enter the market, which can be motivated by profitable investments, supporting research and development, data collection and analysis. Participants agreed to further strengthen investments in sectors beyond water, such as urban development, food and energy that have positive spillover effects on a sustainable water management. Recommendations of the High-Level Panel on Water such as motivating all water use sectors to value water and collaborate towards an integrated water resources management have been highlighted.

To sum up, the role of the United Nations system in the implementation of water-related goals and targets has been continuously stressed, including in terms of mobilizing new and adequate resources to achieving the goals by 2030. The need to strengthen the mandate of UN-Water to enhance its strategic role in cooperation with bi- and multilateral financial institutions was widely recognized.