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UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Remarks

Opening and Introduction

**Overview of the themes of the Interactive Dialogues of the UN 2023 Water Conference
Preparatory Meeting of the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive
Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action
“Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028**

New York, 25 October 2022, 10:00 AM

H.E. Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, President of the General Assembly
Mr. Gilbert F. Hougbo, Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Chair of
UN-Water

Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you at this preparatory meeting of the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028.

The world has changed dramatically since 1977, when the first UN Water Conference was held in Argentina.

Climate change has increased the frequency of extreme water-related weather events - from melting glaciers to sea-level rise, to intense heat and rainfall - impacting our lives and livelihoods and threatening our very existence.

Even a moderate increase in the global temperature could substantially raise climate change risks for more than 3 billion people already at high levels of vulnerability.

Global sea level is projected to rise 30 to 60 centimetres by the end of this century, even if greenhouse gas emissions are sharply reduced and global warming is limited to well below 2 °C.

Drought is estimated to put 700 million people at risk of displacement by 2030.

These numbers are sobering.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the critical need for access to clean water and sanitation.

It made clear that safely managed drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services are vital to human health. But unless progress picks up speed – dramatically – billions of people will still lack these essential services in 2030.

Decades of misuse, poor management and the over-extraction and contamination of freshwater and groundwater supplies have exacerbated water stress and deteriorated water-related ecosystems.

This affects human health, economic activities, and food and energy supplies.

Excellencies,

Against this grim backdrop, the UN 2023 Water Conference will be a major milestone to accelerate progress on water and sanitation at the midpoint of the Water Action Decade.

The main objective of today's preparatory meeting is to finalize the themes of the interactive dialogues, ensuring the participation of all relevant stakeholders.

Bearing in mind the inherent cross-cutting nature of water, the Background Note before you, presents the following suggested themes for the five interactive dialogues:

Theme 1 is Water for Health: addressing - Access to safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation, including Water quality, Poverty reduction, Good health, Quality education, Gender equality, and Partnerships.

Equitable access to safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) is critical for global public health, a healthy environment, and social and economic development.

Clean water, sanitation and hygiene are essential to the realisation of all human rights. To achieve universal access to safely managed water and sanitation by 2030, we must quadruple our current efforts to put the progress back on track.

Theme 2 is Water for Development: addressing - Valuing water, the Water-energy-food nexus, and Sustainable economic and urban development, including Water quality, Integrated water management, Zero hunger, Decent work, and Industry, innovation and infrastructure.

Water is a key driver for sustainable growth and poverty alleviation, as an input to almost all production, agriculture, industry, energy generation, and transport.

To combat water scarcity and to ensure water supply, Integrated Water Resources Management supports equitable water allocation and efficient water use.

Effective water management in any sector relies on technological advancement and regulatory innovations, often combined with experience on the ground.

Theme 3 is Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment: addressing - Source to sea, Biodiversity, and Disaster risk reduction, including Integrated water management, Affordable clean energy, Life below water, and Life on land.

Water-related ecosystems have significant economic, cultural, aesthetic, recreational and educational values to society.

But climate change is affecting our water resources and driving water-related disasters.

To enhance the resilience of critical water infrastructure, we should promote and explore multi-purpose usage and nature-based solutions, strengthen institutional collaboration and governance and account for water-related management and extreme weather events in our climate change adaptation strategies

Theme 4 is Water for Cooperation: addressing - Transboundary and international water cooperation, Cross-sectoral cooperation, and Water across the 2030 Agenda, including Integrated water management, Partnerships, and Peace, justice and strong institutions.

Countries must work closely to optimize the benefits from shared river and aquifer systems in collaboration with all stakeholders.

Effective legal and institutional frameworks at global, regional and basin levels can play a crucial role in cooperative water management.

Collaboration between policy makers, practitioners and academia is also key to provide the highest level of food and energy security, regional stability, and economic growth.

Theme 5 is the Water Action Decade: Accelerating the implementation of the objectives of the Decade including through the United Nations Secretary-General's Action Plan.

The UN Secretary-General's Plan for the Water Action Decade outlines the capabilities of the United Nations system and helps Member States implement the Water Action Decade.

Within the 2030 Agenda, water serves as an essential connecting factor for achieving the different SDGs. The Water Action Decade facilitates partnerships between the water and other sectors and calls for actions around the globe.

Excellencies,

The themes presented here, aim to leverage the interlinkages between water and other goals of the 2030 Agenda, to generate momentum towards sound policy and urgent action.

They are also underpinned by the five cross-cutting accelerators of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, namely Financing, Data and information, Capacity development, Innovation, and Governance.

I would like to take this opportunity to also draw your attention to the outcomes of a global online stakeholder consultation, led by UN DESA, which gathered substantive inputs and messages from stakeholders on the proposed themes.

More than 700 submissions were received from stakeholders based in 73 countries and from many sectors – including NGOs, businesses, academia, local governments, and others. A summary report is available on the Conference website as additional background information.

Excellencies,

The international community must work towards the Water Conference with a sense of urgency but also optimism. All participants are encouraged to announce voluntary commitments for the Water Action Agenda.

The interactive dialogues provide a platform for both Member States and stakeholders to propose integrated actions to move the agenda forward in an impactful way that leverages the value of water in achieving all SDGs.

As the Secretariat of the Conference, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) with the support of UN Water, stands ready to support the co-hosts and make the Conference a success. I look forward to a productive discussion today.

I thank you.
