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Governance Roundtable intervention

For consideration by the President of the General Assembly for the UN 2023 Water Conference,

The opening speakers of the Governance Roundtable on 24 October described goals for the session. The gamechangers they encouraged for this conversation was to avoid the "mindsets of yesterday" and ways to seek involving those affected by water challenges in governance institutions. To these calls, the gamechanger I proposed as a youth and young professionals' delegate for water is: shift to considering youth as stakeholders in water as you do industry, agriculture, financiers, women, and other commonly recognized groups. Who better to forget the "mindset of yesterday" than those who will be here for the future of water, for the longest?

Youth and young professionals under current governance system norms have the least access to raise their voices. We are challenged from barriers that range from logistical, legal, social, and educational roadblocks which prevent us from engaging with the decision-makers over our shared water. These are unique challenges faced by people who by the characteristic of our youth are biologically the most affected by poor water quality or water insecurity.

We also represent solutions to challenges that water governance from the local-to-international levels of management face. Stakeholders at the Governance Roundtable called for better community involvement, buy-in, and feedback avenues to water management institutions. The speakers and moderators acknowledged the need for improvements in these areas. If you want local buy-in for local-to-global programs, governance institutions, or regulations, youth are your key. We are your key to our communities' support, and a key to building for a long-term scope and success of water management and governance.

The gamechanger I submit is achievable. A key element will be for existing management institutions and financing partners to institutionalize youth and young-professional representation in their forums and spaces. Delegations for global and international forums, local conservation districts, regional transboundary projects - all benefit from dedicating institutional resources to youth involvement. We bring energy, community knowledge, community trust and buy-in - the things you seek. We are also going to be here the longest - who better to ensure that your programs have a long-term future?

Youth and young professionals are a powerful, under-utilized cross-section of water reliant-sectors and our communities. As you act on the gamechanger I propose, you can measure yourselves against this reality: the youth you engage with should look as diverse as the communities we belong to. These efforts must show a heterogenous group of youth involvement.

The gamechanger for youth and young professionals in governance of water is highly feasible in particular for local and domestic levels of management. Opening yourselves to institutionalizing support for youth and young professional voices in water management does not require significant capital investment, new financing mechanisms, or other challenges of high cost. It requires a willingness to adapt to include us in hours of operation for participation sessions, engaging virtual access platforms.

To close, I note that during the Governance Roundtable, approximately six speakers who were established career representatives to the UN, from institutions with a long history of participating with the UN, spoke on youth representation. They each mentioned us in one sentence, at the end of their remarks, in every case. Only one representative of a youth group spoke. This is an example of the limits of our current governance systems to allow for youth inclusion. Is it not time to talk with us, rather than about us?