SPEECH PRESENTED BY THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

ESWATINI WATER SERVICES CORPORATION

MRS JABULILE MASHWAMA

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Co-Chairs of the United Nations Water Conference

King of the Netherlands, Your Majesty William-Alexander

President of Tajikistan, Your Excellency Emomali Raymond.

Secretary General of the United Nations

Heads of States and Governments

Ministers and Heads of Delegations

All friends of the water sector present here.

Good Morning

It is an honour and privilege to stand before you today, to talk about the water action agenda, something that resonates with me deeply as a woman hailing from one of the smallest and less developed countries in the world measuring 17,364 km², nestled between The Republic of South Africa and Mozambique in Southern Africa. I am privileged to be trusted with the responsibility of leading the primary water utility that provides water and sanitation services in the Kingdom of Eswatini.

On the onset let me thank the Government of the Netherlands and Turjikistan together with the UN Agency on Economic Affairs for hosting this historic event.

As we celebrate World Water Day 2023 where we are addressing ‘Accelerating change’ with the call to action ‘Be the Change’, we are all aware that the water supply and sanitation challenges throughout the water cycle undermine progress on all major issues, from health to hunger, gender equality to jobs, education to industry, and disasters to peace.
Water is a key driver of economic and social development. It is also one of the many vital natural resources needed to maintain the integrity of the natural environment. The Kingdom of Eswatini joined the world in 2015, to commit to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 as part of the 2030 Agenda – ultimately promising that everyone would have safely managed water and sanitation by 2030. As much as we are making significant strides, we remain off track, with 70.8% of our population using at least basic drinking water services, 64.3% people using at least basic sanitation services, 77.6% Freshwater withdrawal of available freshwater resources, and only 5.3% Anthropogenic wastewater that receives treatment.

It is apparent that we still have a portion of our population, schools, businesses, health care centres and other institutions that are held back because of access to water and sanitation. As per the theme, there is an urgent need to accelerate change – and challenge all of us to drive change to realise positive returns in SDG6.

The Kingdom of Eswatini’s national constitution recognizes access to water and sanitation as a human right and promotes the increase in sanitation coverage.

**Challenge’s in Water Supply and Sanitation Services**

Eswatini’s economy is an agro-based economy. The growing population, agricultural production, hydro power generation, and industrial productivity demands of the economy, in an era of increasing negative impacts of climate change, puts the country’s sustainable development and inclusive growth agenda at risk.

Climatic conditions that lead to limited water resources in the dry Shiselweni and Lubombo Regions further exacerbated by the difference between their spatial availability and the location of need drives high abstraction and conveyance costs.
To support the Government of Eswatini’s development agenda, our institution, Eswatini Water Services Corporation is currently implementing projects targeting rural, semi-urban areas in Eswatini. The Corporation owes her success to implementing such projects to the funding partners that have committed themselves to the development of the country and the improvement of the quality of life for our people. Because of such interventions, the gap between the proportion of people with access to improved water sources in rural and urban areas has significantly narrowed.

The challenges we face as a water utility that is mandated to work in urban areas, includes a high demand for EWSC services in rural and peri-urban areas and we are cognizant that such areas work against the mandate of the Corporation to be a going concern. This is due to the low affordability and unwillingness to pay for the services in rural and peri-urban area as evidenced by the high incidence of un-sustained rural water supply schemes. A lack of cost-recovery in rural and peri-urban areas is leading to a vicious cycle of indebtedness and strained delivery of rehabilitation and infrastructure growth funding.

The utility as other utilities world over, battles with high non-revenue water, which requires investment both human and technology. As there is increased demand for the utility to take over water supply in rural areas and the increased investment in rural infrastructure, the Corporation notes the increase in non-revenue water. With the bigger scale implementation of rural water supply extensions we have seen the increase of non-revenue water from the lowest in 2017 at 25 % to the current 34% in 2023.

As previously mentioned, sanitation services are lagging as we note the limited investment into Wastewater Infrastructure, appropriate sanitation facilities for marginalized communities, and the adherence to Environmental legislation.
Forging a way forward

Despite evident challenges, the country’s institutions continue to work together to implement water and sanitation projects, to improve the country's indicators.

It is paramount that we collaborate to promote sustainable water management practices if we are to achieve progress on water and sanitation and expedite transformation. This entails investment in projects and innovations that increase access to clean water, lessen water waste and pollution, and promote water efficiency. To provide access to clean water and safe sanitation, it is necessary to consider the needs of women and girls, as well as the vulnerable, marginalized, and rural populations. We do need more support in the coordination of our WASH interventions to realise maximum benefit in our concerted efforts.

We therefore, appeal to the nations of the world and users of this precious resource to support water saving initiatives and we further appeal to donor agencies and all governments to allocate adequate funding and to develop innovative policies and governance mechanisms that will drive and support the achievement of SDG6.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to take this time to express our sincere appreciation to the co-convenors of this conference: The King of the Netherlands, His Majesty William-Alexander and the President of Tajikistan, His Excellency Emomali Raymond.

We also pass our most sincere appreciation to the country’s development partners, who include the United Nations, World Bank, African Development Bank, European Union amongst others. Thank you for your commitment and support to the country’s development agenda.
As a leader in the water sector, I take this opportunity to publicly commit to accelerating change through sustainable partnerships and innovation. I pledge to continue to work towards driving green technologies from project design to improve the sustainability of our natural resources. I will advocate for change by supporting policies and initiatives that promote sustainable water management practices. I make this commitment believing that I am the change. Be the change.

I thank you