

UN 2023 Water Conference

General Debate

Statement By H.E. Mr. Irakli Karseladze, Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia

New York, March, 2023

Mr. Secretary-general,

Distinguished representatives,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

At the outset, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Governments of the Netherlands and Tajikistan for their commitment to make the UN 2023 Water Conference a success.

It is a great honor and privilege to address you on behalf of the Delegation of Georgia and share national perspective on the achievements, plans and challenges related to water resources.

This event gives a good opportunity to discuss and give further impetus to more effective and efficient water resources management, especially when we all are facing national and global challenges: 20% of my country is still occupied by Russia, Russia's unjustified, unprovoked and premeditated full-scale military aggression against Ukraine continues and socio-economic, humanitarian and triple planetary crisis, further aggravated by severe impacts of the pandemic threaten to reverse years of development progress on SDGs.

All of those requires from us extended efforts to ensure our next generations' safe, healthy, green and prosperous future.

We expect that this conference will further accelerate our efforts towards addressing challenges in achieving SDG 6 and other water-related goals and targets and we look forward to the ambitious Water Action Agenda that should

translate the discussions and commitments made during the Conference into decisive actions.

Let me also mention that Georgia as a member of the Core Group to appoint a UN Special Envoy on Water, looks forward to the establishment of a UN Special Envoy for Water by the Secretary-General that we believe will contribute to proper follow-up to the conference.

Dear colleagues,

I am honorably representing the country of Georgia. One of the most water-abundant countries in Europe, with 26,000 rivers, more than 900 lakes and reservoirs, 320 km Black Sea coastline, which are sufficient for both, public needs and economic development.

Despite many challenges, Georgia has one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, experiencing two digits economic growth for the past two years consequently. This enables us to accelerate country's development, been focused primarily on the needs and demands of our population.

We have already advanced in regards to water policy and legal framework. We have developed and submitted to the Parliament of Georgia a new Water Law, which considers all modern approaches and fundamental European principles including basin management, monitoring systems and basin cleaning among others.

Our declared priority in water sector is the implementation of the effective integrated water resources management, supporting adaptation to the climate change and providing full accessibility to the resources. Addressing many directions and balancing the needs of various sectors and stakeholders, promote more effective and sustainable use of water resources to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

Universal provision of sustainable water management and compliance with sanitary standards, equal access to safe and affordable drinking water, adequate and equal sanitary and hygienic conditions for all people by 2030 are those fundamentals imbedded in the SDGs and the Georgia's Vision of 2030.

There are two main missions: to provide all cities with 24 hours drinking water supply no later than 2025 and to provide all population of Georgia with standard based drinking water supply and sanitation by 2030.

Respected action plans are already elaborated and are in active implementation. In more than 200 locations all over the country the drinking water supply and sanitation projects are in physical implementation. Only for the last year 140 000 people were provided with 24 hours water supply.

More results are expected in 2023, as we aim to provide 200 000 more people with continues drinking water supply and eventually within the next 3 years, we plan to reach more than 500 000 people, where almost half of them have never had any of standardized drinking water supply before. This will lead us to have 80% of our population with 24 hours standard based drinking water supply.

Sanitation and hygienic conditions are integral part of the ongoing activities and plans we are pursuing. Having accumulating good experience in treatment plants, including the biological treatment, we are extending this approach through the construction of the modern sanitation treatment plants as well as, construction, the replacement and full rehabilitation of the networks.

Along with the development of the hard infrastructure, soft management systems like SCADA are being applied.

We are very much focused on significant reduction of the loses, both technical and financial. Certain measures are already applied and will be extended further in order to achieve by the end of 2030 of having losses less than 20%.

Despite Georgia's vast water resources, the challenges with regard to reduction of ground waters are being faced, which lead to the efficiency of debits and overall create huge challenges for the sustainable drinking water supply. One of the major reasons could be considered - global warming.

Which from this angle additionally warns us to be more conscious, to provide more contribution for the greener environment. And in this light Georgia as a

party to Paris agreement has upgraded in 2021 its mitigation targets to reduce national greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 to ambitious 35%.

And certainly, throughout the conventional developments we are very much focused on innovation in particular for the energy efficiency and natural sanitary modern and innovative treatment plants.

It has been already more than three decades since independent Georgia has been very much supported by the United Nations, and agencies, international development funds and financial institutions. Many of our development partners are represented here and I am greeting them with a sincere appreciation for those efforts and support what they have rendered to the development of my country.

And at the end, beyond those very important activities, there are projects which definitely are the game-changers not only for our country but for the wider international and regional understanding.

We are extending our efforts to advance Georgia's high mission to ensure physical connectivity through successful construction of East - West Highway, further development of transport and logistics infrastructure including the construction of a new deep Sea Anaklia Port. And furthermore, Georgia will act as an energy bridge connecting European power systems via construction of the Black sea underwater cable ensuring Georgia's contribution to the energy security of the European Union and Caucasus region.

All of those and many other successful efforts on the path to the European Union and NATO will remarkably extend Georgia's historical contribution to the European Union as its family member.

In conclusion, let me once again reiterate Georgia's strong commitment to deliver concrete solutions towards the acceleration of the implementation of SDG6 and all water-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

I thank you!