

UN 2023 Water Conference

General Debate

Statement of Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection of Germany

Ms Steffi Lemke

22 March 2023

Heads of state and government,

Colleagues,

Excellencies,

Access to safe drinking water and to adequate sanitation are human rights. Just like the right to food and to a clean and healthy environment. It is our joint obligation to enforce these rights for everyone.

The global water crisis puts all these rights at risk. Water pollution, over-use, droughts and floods are endangering all global development. They jeopardise the Paris climate targets and the 2030 Agenda.

Without water there is no food. However, in many places, agriculture has not yet adapted to the conditions arising from the climate crisis. This has added a food crisis to the water crisis, further stoked by the impacts of the Russian attack on Ukraine. Moreover, water is at the heart of the three major environmental crises – climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Today, we are focussing on how to stop these multiple crises from deteriorating further.

Responsible water management is a key to achieving this. In Germany, we have just adopted a National Water Strategy to support our national implementation of SDG 6. This presents us with major challenges.

But the international challenges are disproportionately greater. To date, global implementation of SDG 6 has been too slow, too fragmented and poorly coordinated. This has to change. The Bonn Water Dialogues developed concrete recommendations in a cross-regional, inclusive process.

One of these recommendations notes that water does not stop at national borders. For that reason, we can only manage water sustainably by considering water bodies in terms of their entire catchment area. This is why it is crucial to foster intergovernmental agreements on transboundary water management. In this context, I am encouraging countries to join and implement the two UN water conventions. Two projects from the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) support partners in Africa and Central Asia in the transboundary management of shared water resources.

Improving water supply can also reduce discrimination against women. Women are key to accelerating progress on the global water targets. That is why the German government strives for gender equality in international cooperation, including in the water sector.

As one of the biggest donors in the water sector, Germany will continue to meet its responsibility. To achieve SDG 6, we need innovative financing approaches in addition to public funding. Together with our partners, we are helping to leverage public and private funding. For example, under the new Urban Water Catalyst Fund. Our International Climate Initiative especially supports integrated water management as one of the key measures for climate change mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity conservation.

To overcome the global water crisis, we need comprehensive change. Today's conference can only be the beginning of this:

- We need **regular UN conferences on water**, at the highest level to drive joint solutions forward.
- We call for better **donor and UN coordination**. To ensure best possible support for member states, the United Nations must take a more efficient and coherent system-wide approach on water.
- A core recommendation of the Bonn Water Dialogues is to establish a stronger voice for water in the UN. In that spirit I repeat our call for a **UN Special**

Envoy for Water. This initiative already has the support of 150 delegations. Germany is willing to contribute financially to this as well. For we are convinced that only a Special Envoy can ensure that water continues to be prioritised in multilateral cooperation in the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We need ambitious, targeted and cross-sectoral commitment. Germany is ready to play its part in the framework of the Water Action Agenda.