



**Statement delivered by H.E. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Head of  
Delegation of the Holy See at 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**

22 – 24 March 2023, New York  
(5 minutes)

Mr./Madam President,

The Holy See is pleased to participate in this Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” 2018-2028, and takes this opportunity to offer a few considerations during the general debate.

Throughout history, in different times and places, the fundamental significance of water has been reflected in cultural, social, and religious traditions. “Water is a symbol of regeneration because it is the drink we constantly need; it cleanses and constantly restores life.”<sup>1</sup> Put simply, without water there is no life. Our bodies are composed mostly of water, and we rely on it for our very survival, “yet this resource has not been granted the care and attention it deserves. Even today we continue to make the mistake of wasting [water], disregarding it or polluting it.”<sup>2</sup> Universal access to water, its sustainable and responsible use and management, are indispensable for the achievement of the common good of the entire human family. At this midway point in the decade for action for sustainable development, it is timely to recall the cross-cutting importance of water within each of the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

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<sup>1</sup> *Aqua fons vitae*. Orientations on water: symbol of the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, March 2020, N. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Cardinal Parolin, Video Message on behalf of Pope Francis to mark World Water Day, 22 March 2021.

Almost half the world's population still lives in poverty, and it is the poor who suffer most from the lack of water, with thousands dying every day.<sup>3</sup> Even when water is available, millions of people only have access to unsafe water, which “results in many deaths and the spread of water-related diseases.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated “existing social and economic inequalities, highlighting the damage caused by the absence or inefficiency of water services among those most in need.”<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the way water is wasted in places of abundance shows, in the words of Pope Francis, “that the problem of water is partly an educational and cultural issue, since there is little awareness of the seriousness of such behaviour within a context of great inequality.”<sup>6</sup> As a starting point to address this, the Pope has called for the rational use of water, and greater responsibility and solidarity in the management of resources, applying a vision that looks beyond ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, increasing accessibility to water depends on greater investment in the infrastructure required for its extraction, filtration, purification, and conservation. The primary responsibility for the management of water resources rests with governments, but “collaboration between States, the public and private sectors, as well as an increase in initiatives by intergovernmental bodies, is more necessary than ever.”<sup>8</sup> At the same time, it is necessary to guard against the tendency “to privatise this resource, turning [water] into a commodity subject to the laws of the market.”<sup>9</sup>

Our reliance on water for survival continues to become more evident as the effects of climate change take hold in the form of floods, drought, rising temperatures, and natural disasters. “All these phenomena damage and impair water quality and thus prevent a serene and fertile life,”<sup>10</sup> heightening

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. A/RES/70/1.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, 24 May 2015, N. 29

<sup>5</sup> Cardinal Parolin, Video Message on behalf of Pope Francis to mark World Water Day, 22 March 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, 24 May 2015, N. 30

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 3 October 2020, N. 117.

<sup>8</sup> Cardinal Parolin, Video Message on behalf of Pope Francis to mark World Water Day, 22 March 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, , encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, 24 May 2015, N. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Cardinal Parolin, Video Message on behalf of Pope Francis to mark World Water Day, 22 March 2021.

the urgency of common action to combat climate change and to implement measures to mitigate its consequences.

Mr./Madam President,

Water is a source of life. Therefore, recognizing it as a primary good that should be available to all, impels us to develop and implement adequate policies that “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.”<sup>11</sup> Such policies must be rooted in the recognition that the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation are inextricably related to the right to life and human dignity, and must be accompanied by personal and common gestures of respect towards natural resources and our brothers and sisters who lack the basic resources they need for their survival. Let us seize the historic opportunity of this conference to renew our shared commitment to ensure that water is available to all, is suitable for human consumption, and its management is sustainable and does not harm the environment.

Thank you, Mr./Madam President.

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<sup>11</sup> A/RES/70/1, Sustainable Development Goal 6.