



Permanent Mission of Iceland
to the United Nations

Statement by H.E. Jörundur Valtýsson,
Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations

United Nations Water Conference
23 March 2023

Madam/Mr. President, Excellencies,

Iceland is pleased to address the UN 2023 Water Conference and thanks the co-hosts, Tajikistan and Kingdom of the Netherlands for their leadership and excellent work in organizing this conference.

Water is fundamental to our existence. It is a human right, essential for all aspects of life and inextricably linked to the three pillars of sustainable development. And although it is abundantly clear that access to water provides enormous economic and health benefits, in addition to essential gender equality outcomes, we are far off track when it comes to the achievement of SDG6.

Madam/Mr. President,

We have plenty of fresh drinking water in Iceland, and my country is among the richest in terms of water resources. We therefore have an obligation to contribute to improving people's access to water in areas where water scarcity is prevalent. That is why Iceland has, for decades, worked with local authorities to improve access to clean water and sanitation facilities in several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This also aligns with our emphasis on gender equality in our development cooperation, as the lack of access to safe drinking water

disproportionately impacts women, who often have the primary responsibility for fetching water. SDG6 is at its core a gender goal. We need to ensure women's active participation in all decision-making regarding water management, and that their voices are heard and taken into consideration, from policy and national budget decisions, to designing and constructing community water infrastructure.

In Mangochi district in Malawi, Iceland has worked with local authorities to secure over 400 thousand people with access to clean drinking water. This is more than the entire population of Iceland. Now it takes an average of 8 minutes for families in the targeted areas to collect water. Before the water project was launched, it took an average of 28 minutes.

In Buikwe district in Uganda, Iceland and the local authorities have increased the percentage of households that have access to safe drinking water from 58% in 2015 to 89% in 2021. Iceland also works closely with UNICEF on the achievement of SDG6, such as in refugee-hosting districts in north-eastern Uganda, improving access to water, sanitation, and hygiene for both refugees and the hosting communities. In Sierra Leone, UNICEF and Iceland have supported access to climate resilient water, sanitation and hygiene services in rural fishing communities.

Madam / Mr. President,

While Iceland is indeed rich in water resources, it is important to ensure their protection and sustainability for the foreseeable future. That is why Iceland adopted last year its first national water strategy for the years 2022-2027. We must not take for granted what we have - and ensure we preserve it for future generations.

The Sustainable Development Goals are all interconnected, as demonstrated by the fact that climate change is driving water scarcity

and floods. Droughts are leading to less, and more contaminated, water. Floods damage infrastructure and can lead to water contamination. This we are witnessing most recently in Mozambique and our partner country Malawi where cyclone Freddy has devastated the already vulnerable communities, leading to increased concerns that Malawi's ongoing cholera outbreak will further worsen. Also, the most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provides us with a stark warning. If we do not correct course immediately, events such as those occurring in Malawi will increase in frequency and duration, disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable.

Water and land are also interconnected. Land degradation, desertification and drought needs to be addressed to achieve universal access to water by 2030. When land degrades, it loses its natural ability to absorb, filter and store water. Restoring degraded land and fighting land degradation, coupled with sound water management, are therefore key to ensure availability of water by 2030.

Madam/Mr. President,

We have the tools at our disposal to significantly improve global access to water. What we need is universal political and financial commitments to SDG6. And everyone has a role to play, including governments, individuals, civil society, the private sector - and the United Nations. This momentous conference and the Water Action Agenda will hopefully drive this forward.

This is, indeed, a watershed moment. Iceland is committed to play its part in this new tide of water action. By sustainably managing its water resources, by investing in improved water access for vulnerable populations and by increasing its climate financing.

Thank you.