

Ladies and gentlemen,

One is a country with soaring mountains,  
and the other has low-lying polders.

One country lies upstream and the other is  
downstream.

One country is landlocked, and the other is  
coastal.

One is where rivers begin, and the other is  
where rivers flow into the sea.

The differences between Tajikistan and the Netherlands couldn't be greater.

As co-hosts, we may seem like an odd couple. We're opposites, each with a completely different water balance.

Nonetheless, together we are delighted to welcome you to the start of the UN 2023 Water Conference. Because together, we represent virtually the whole 'world of water'.

We even represent the Small Island Developing States, because part of the

Kingdom of the Netherlands lies in the Caribbean, and comprises Aruba, Curaçao and St Maarten. As well as the islands of Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba.

Together, we want to emphasise that water is our common denominator. Let's remove all the barriers that separate water-related issues. Everything we need to live a decent life is directly related to water. Our health, food, safety, habitat, economy, infrastructure and climate.

Water security is one of the defining concerns of our time, and it will determine our collective sustainable future. Leonardo

da Vinci was absolutely right when he said that water was ‘the driving force of nature’.

That driving force is now under threat. We face a future with too much or too little water, or water supplies that are too polluted.

Research commissioned by the UN has shown that almost half of the world’s population will suffer severe water stress by 2030.

Not just ‘stress’, but ‘*severe* stress’.

And the worst affected will be those who are already vulnerable.

Let's not forget that 2030 is only seven years away.

## The Sustainable Development Goals

Report 2022 painted an alarming picture in almost all areas. In the words of that report, interlinked crises are putting the Agenda for Sustainable Development in grave danger, along with humanity's very own survival.

We all know it. We all feel it. Now it is time to rise above our partial and sectional interests, see the big picture and get moving. We, as members of the

international water community, can be the drivers of change.

We have to value water – surface water *and* ground water – and use it more efficiently and sustainably in every sector, locally and globally.

So it's encouraging that our invitation to attend this Water Conference has been accepted by so many.

Not only by the members of the United Nations, but also many stakeholders: companies, towns, indigenous groups, organisations run for and by women, nature organisations and scientific

institutes. Rarely has a UN conference made such a splash!

I'm also happy to see that the younger generation is highly motivated and ready to help find solutions. But as they themselves have said, we can't leave all the problem-solving up to them. It's our responsibility to do everything we can.

During this conference, we want to get the water wheel spinning. We won't rest until water is given the place it rightly deserves on global agendas and policy programmes. We will bring all our commitments, pledges and actions together in a Water

Action Agenda. And we will create a fluid connection between water and the broader work of the United Nations up to 2030 and beyond.

Above all, we will talk to each other and share our experiences.

And if I could offer just *one* tip: seek out the company of those who are *outside* your own field.

If you're a diplomat, seek out an engineer.  
If you're an engineer, talk to a policymaker.



If you're a policymaker, meet up with someone from an NGO.

If you work for an NGO, have coffee with a finance professional.

If you're over 50, have a talk with someone younger.

And if you live in Europe, turn your attention to Africa or Asia. Or vice versa.

Follow the example of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Seek collaboration in the murky waters of contrast. Water is our common ground! There's so much to discover and achieve!

I wish you all a fantastic UN 2023 Water  
Conference!

Thank you.