

PGA remarks to the opening plenary of the 2023 UN Water Conference

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Opening plenary of the 2023 UN Water Conference

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[As delivered multilingual version]

Your Majesty, King Willem-Alexander,

Your Excellency President Emomali Rahmon, thank you for gathering us here to discuss our most precious, yet undervalued and misunderstood resource: water.

Distinguished Heads of State and Governments,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Excellencies,

Water friends,

At the midpoint of the sustainable development agenda, we are at a watershed moment, as we heard this morning already.

We know that we cannot fulfil our promise of sustainability, economic stability and global well-being by speeding up conventional solutions.

We neither have enough time nor planet. There is simply not enough fresh water left anymore. Water that flows freely in rivers, across boundaries and that is distributed over the whole globe in the form of atmospheric rivers – is now severely lacking.

Le cycle de l'eau nous unit tous. C'est, de fait, un bien public mondial. L'eau qui pleut en Europe aujourd'hui coulait le long des rivières Africaines le mois dernier. L'eau pompée

des puits en Amérique du Sud aujourd'hui est la fonte des glaciers andins, créée lorsque les premières espèces humaines se sont installés sur le continent.

(French translation: The water cycle unites us all. It is, de facto, a global common good. Water that rains in Europe today was flowing down African rivers last month. Water that is pumped up from wells in South America today is melted Andean glaciers, created when the first human species moved into the continent.)

The water that makes 60% of me, of you all as you sit here in this moment, has been part of other living bodies at least 10 times over the course of the millennia.

There is no doubt: we are water, we don't fully own water, we share it in space and through time.

We must acknowledge the fact that water is a global common good and adjust policy, legislation, and financing accordingly.

To work in favor of people and planet, not procrastination and profit. Even in time of increasing geopolitical divide.

В настоящее время мы сталкиваемся с глобальным водным кризисом. Фактически, три вида водных катастроф создали человеческую катастрофу. Слишком много воды отнимает жизни, слишком мало воды препятствует достойному развитию человека, слишком грязная вода угрожает нашему здоровью и природе, частью которой мы являемся.

(Russian translation: We have today a global water crisis. To put it bluntly: the three forms of water disasters have created a human disaster. Too much water takes lives, too little water hinders dignified human development, too dirty a water threatens our health and the nature we are part of.)

The solution is in our hands. It is not rocket science. A cooperative water-secure future starts with political will, economic intelligence, and cultural tolerance and acceptance. The acknowledgement of what led us to the water crisis and the understanding of the integrated nature of the solutions that we need.

What do we need to succeed?

We need to devise a common financial culture that is water-, climate-, and biodiversity-smart.

Financing that benefits everybody, from the indigenous and marginalized to the lucky ones who were born to wealthy parents.

We urgently need to stop wasting water. Circularity must be our priority, not extracting ever more.

We must devise integrated land-use, water and climate policies that help us to make people and nature resilient, and feed the ever-growing hunger worldwide.

Integrated policies that allow us to benefit from water as a lever of climate mitigation and adaptation. Integrated policies at local, national and global levels that will foster cooperation.

We need to guarantee access to safe drinking water and sanitation to all. This is a human right and a question of dignity.

We can work together to empower states and stakeholders through the global water information system that is our life insurance for resolving the dilemma of water availability, demand and storage.

نَحْنُ بِحَاجَةٍ لِلاتِّفَاقِ عَلَى مِيثَاقٍ تَعْلِيمِي يُؤَكِّدُ عَلَى أَنَّ لَدَيْنَا الْعِلْمَ وَالْمَعْرِفَةَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ، بِالإِضَافَةِ إِلَى آلِيَةِ تَفْكِيرٍ جَدِيدَةٍ تُتَبَّحُ لَنَا
اِبْتِكَارٍ وَتَنْفِيزٍ أَجَنَدَةٍ مُتَكَامِلَةٍ لِلْمِيَاهِ وَالْمَنَاحِ وَالطَّاقَةِ وَالْغِذَاءِ

(Arabic translation: We need to agree on an education pact to make sure we have the knowledge, wisdom and new way of thinking, to devise and implement an integrated water, climate, energy and food agenda.)

We need to be inclusive and innovative.

We need to assemble legislative and enforcing public governance and private sector ingenuity.

Stakeholders of diverse talents, ages and cultures can synergize the change we need so urgently.

It must be both a change of mind and heart.

We need to be bold.

We can agree on gamechangers.

Gamechangers that are seeds to a different, more fair, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient water future for all.

Gamechangers that reach beyond water and facilitate cooperation and action on a global agenda of transformation in socio-economic development, as well as in environmental sustainability and health.

Gamechangers that will help us to shift from reactive to proactive water solutions.

Solutions that will support the transformation from increasing insecurity to increasing predictability and more stability.

Let me finish with an invitation: This conference is not a venue to negotiate positions, advantages, and compromise. I invite you to deliberate solutions that are science-based, sustainable, pragmatic and in solidarity. Solutions that will flow into the Water Action Agenda. For a better tomorrow, for all.

The world is watching us.

The expectations are high.

The forthcoming three days are crucial, and the following months and years of delivery will be determining.

This chance is here and now.

We may not have another.

Thank you very much.