



United Nations Water Conference

Statement by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Action of Portugal at the General Debate

New York, March 22, 2023

Messrs. Presidents,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The year of 2022 was of particular concern for my country.

Due to the combination of low rainfall and unusually frequent and intense heat waves, this year was one the driest on record.

In the last 20 years, rainfall decreased by approximately 15% in Portugal, and recent studies indicate that it will decrease even more by the end of the century, between 10 and 25%.

These changes in rainfall patterns are already causing a very significant impact on the volume of water flowing into our rivers but also on our dams and aquifers.



This is only one of the consequences of climate changes that directly impact water resources, affecting all our communities.

While it is projected that the situation will become even more alarming in the future, we believe that today we are better prepared to respond to these challenges. Let us know how to cooperate, and build an agenda and effective instruments at the international level.

In Portugal, the response to these challenges includes the drive to reduce consumption and increase the efficient use of water, saving it and preserving it at its sources.

It also requires us to be more careful at our homes, to use water more efficiently in agriculture, and to return it in good condition to rivers and seas.

It also includes reusing water – by 2025, we wish to reuse 10% of all treated water, for purposes that do not required potable water, such as permanent crop irrigation, golf courses or street cleaning, with the clear application of circular economy principles.



We will seek new sources, particularly through desalinization and in water stressed regions and close to the sea.

It also includes sharing experiences, knowledge, innovation, and technology. It includes cooperation on water.

Therefore, I am particularly pleased to attend this Conference and witness the importance that, almost five decades later, water seems to have attained.

We need a strong water agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We presently face challenges that did not exist 46 years ago.

And new circumstances require innovative and integrated responses.

Today, more than ever, water is also fundamental for energy transition, renewable energy generation, energy storage and green hydrogen production.



Today, more than ever, we know how important it is to promote the integration of fresh water and salt water.

It was with this focus that, during the United Nations Ocean Conference convened in Lisbon in June 2022, we organized a Symposium on the connection between SDGs 6 and 14.

Today, more than ever, Portugal recognizes the importance of investing in water services. In hindsight, it was this pathway that allowed us to arrive at this Conference with maximum water quality levels for consumption when, 30 years ago, it was at 50%, and with sewage network coverage around 85%, when 30 years ago it was 28%.

The quality of our recreational waters and the improvements in health reflect this progress in water security. Therefore, we fully realize the importance and impact of this pathway for sustainable development and for the health of our oceans.

And we know the importance of international cooperation as an essential instrument for integrated management of international rivers.



I note the work undertaken by Portugal and Spain, as mentioned by the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, in the shared management of Iberian river basins under the Albufeira Convention signed by our two countries 25 years ago. We are proud of this work and wish to go deeper and improve it.

Water is, indeed, a cross-cutting and critical issue in the implementation of Agenda 2030. This is the reason why we have supported our cooperation partners at key moments, such as, for example, in the rapid response to the effects of severe drought and later floods that have assailed Mozambique and in supporting sanitation infrastructure projects in Cabo Verde.

It is for this reason that, based on our experience and lessons learned, we wish to contribute to this Conference our vision and contributions to the Water Action Agenda, which is as necessary as it is urgent.

We will not have achieved our mission as long as there is one person without dignified conditions of safe and easy access to water.



We must accelerate and redouble our efforts and commitments, improve financing, and create institutions that can ensure good governance and adequate regulation.

We must urgently improve the coordination and coherence of our work on water in the context of the United Nations.

The creation of the Special Envoy on Water may help to give Water the voice that it lacks.

Regarding our contributions, we wish to promote a Global Coalition for Better Policies and Regulation of Water and Sanitation Services. We wish to help in the response to the global challenge of improving management at the local, regional, national and transnational levels.

It is a Coalition that we will seek to promote, and I have the pleasure of inviting all to join us – Governments, regulatory bodies, donors, NGOs, international and regional organizations, and so many other agents in this sector.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Be it fresh, desalinated or salt, surface or aquiferous, crossing one or more countries, water and its management require action.

This is the reason why we are here.

Thank you very much.