



UN 2023 Water Conference Secretariat  
United Nations Headquarters in New York City

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BIRMINGHAM

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12 March 2023

Re: Written Statement to the UN 2023 Water Conference by [University of Birmingham, UK](#) - [UNESCO Chair on Water Science](#) and UNESCO UNTWIN on Hydroecological Interfaces

## Water as the climate connector: a new era of powerful collaborations towards action

The modalities resolution for the UN 2023 Water Conference (A/RES/75/212) calls for collaboration and multi-stakeholder engagement to act - by accelerating innovative and transformative change - towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 and other water-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

Water is the 'climate connector' that offers opportunities for collaboration across the SDGs, Paris Agreement targets on climate change, and Sendai Framework on disaster risk reduction.

That is because sustainable water management - which is an essential part of adaptation to a warmer world and building our resilience to climate change - involves governance, organisations, and individuals across scales - from international to local communities - and across a wide range of water-related disciplines, geographies and impact sectors.

Through the work of our [UNESCO Chair in Water Sciences](#), we have witnessed over nearly a decade how important knowledge exchange is as a tool to communicate the importance of [water security](#) to society and develop solutions to tackle [wicked water problems](#) related with too much (flood), too little (drought) and too polluted (poor water quality) water.

For example, exchanges between scientists, policymakers, businesses, and the public make the latest scientific knowledge accessible to key stakeholders who can use this information to make better informed decisions about water-related issues.

The UN 2023 Water Conference is “a once-in-a-generation opportunity to unite the world around the water crisis and accelerate action towards water and sanitation for all”. It represents an unparalleled opportunity to build trust between groups and foster active collaboration between industry, government, scientists, and citizens.

Together, we must intensify efforts to help bridge the gaps between research, education, policy, and practice. We must work across academic disciplines to connect and deliver [world-leading, transdisciplinary research](#) and to foster action through such collaboration. Partnership (as captured in SDG 17) is the only way to identify and action the most pressing real-world impacts at pace and scale. This is essential in the face of the [climate emergency](#) and [water crisis](#).

Cross-border exchanges are particularly valuable as they make it possible to share resources and human capacities. These vital international exchanges are something that can be facilitated by institutions with campuses in multiple locations - like the University of Birmingham with its presence in the [UK and Dubai](#).

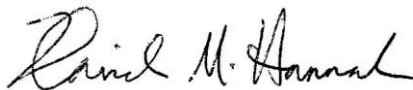
There are, of course, some significant threats to global scientific collaboration and exchanges, which must be addressed. Global crises, such as geopolitical polarisation and economic turmoil, can lead countries to be more insular, even if their scientists are not. While competition can, of course, be a catalyst for innovation, there is a point at which aggressive competition can be counterproductive and block the flow of data and knowledge. At this time of geopolitical tension and economic strife, all stakeholders – and certainly not just researchers – must actively engage in sharing ideas that transcend borders, with no single country holding a monopoly on them.

Aside from geopolitics, there are several barriers to exchange and collaboration that must be brought down as a matter of urgency. Governments must work to overcome the complex and uncertain landscape of regulations and data jurisdictions, as well as the lack of universal platforms for [data sharing](#). Both policy and Fourth Industrial Revolution (digital) technologies have a vital role to play here.

Lastly, there is the issue of funding. Shifting government priorities – often shaped by macroeconomic forces – can lead to unstable and short-term funding environments. There are also shrinking dedicated funding mechanisms to support water research across regions. What we need is a truly shared international agenda on water research and impacts, a stable framework for international funding, and a global environment that enables rapid innovation. That is a big ask, but we are dealing with the biggest and most important of all the global challenges – water and sanitation for all in a changing world.

We need to engage in an era of vigorous collaboration that could be defined at the UN 2023 Water Conference - to set the compass for the next few decades of action for the water sector and beyond. We must connect opportunities for partnership with utmost urgency.

Yours faithfully,



Professor David M. Hannah; Professor Stefan Krause  
Professor of Hydrology; Professor of Eco hydrology & Biogeochemistry  
UNESCO Chair on Water Science; UNESCO UNITWIN on Hydroecological Interfaces