

**Water Conference: Plenary - General Debate – UK Intervention**  
**Thursday 23 March, Time tbc**

**UN Headquarters - Plenary**

The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith

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Environment at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

## SPEECH

[BEGINS]

Thank you Chair, and to the organisers of the UN Water Conference.

Your Excellencies,

It is a pleasure to say a few words, on behalf of the UK.

It is almost impossible exaggerate the importance of water

...for proper *sanitation* and *hygiene*, for the ecosystems on which *food* security relies, and for *all* life on earth.

Yet for 700 million people – that's 1 in 10 of us – water *scarcity* is a daily reality.

4.3 billion people struggle for at least *one month, every year*.

And around *half* the world's population experience *extreme* water scarcity for at least *some* part of the year.

In *4 out of 5* of households facing shortages, the burden falls on women and girls

– with a devastating impact on everything from *education* to *safety*.

Then add to that rising sea-levels,

the acute vulnerability of small islands and coastal communities,

ever more rapidly disappearing glaciers, rainforests, and wetlands that underpin global climate and weather systems

– and you don't need to be an expert to understand that these figures,

and the associated costs to the tune of hundreds of millions every single year,

as well as the numbers of lives lost –

...will simply *mushroom*.

We know that one of the *most* important things we can do is keep warming within 1.5 degrees by making deep cuts to emissions across all sectors,

...*including* the water sector,

...building on the progress we made in Glasgow and Sharm El Sheik, when we come together for COP28.

So, I encourage everyone to use the **Water Tracker**, ahead of the Global Stocktake in UAE –

...so we make the most of this practical tool to help us draw together our collective experience,

...and we help *more* countries integrate water into more *ambitious* national climate plans.

And for our part, as well as getting our house in order back home in the UK,

with around half of Europe's water footprint falling overseas,

on some of the most fragile and important habitats and some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world

we need to think well beyond the impact that our supply chains are having well beyond our own borders.

So, I urge *all of you* to join the 28 signatories from governments, business, *and* civil society that have now

endorsed the **Fair Water Footprints Declaration** that we first launched at COP26 in Glasgow.

Together, we now represent 185 *million* people, and more than \$5.1 *trillion – and counting*

...and we're committed to raising *ambition* and catalysing a *decade of action*

...for *zero* water pollution

...sustainable water *use*, and fair *access*

...and to protect and restore the natural systems for which there can be no *substitute* – and which provide the water that sustains us *all*.

As well as getting serious about shifting the impact of the *hundreds of billions* of dollars of *public* money the world currently spends on energy, fishing, or land-use subsidies

...*away* from destruction and towards *renewal*

...governments *can and must* use all the *levers* they uniquely hold to increase investment in solutions from all sources,

and make the whole *market* recognise the true value of natural systems and the cost of environmental destruction

...so we get *trillions* of dollars flowing in the right direction.

That is exactly what the **Resilient Water Accelerator** is designed to help do –

so we support the efforts of countries around the world to secure finance for water,

and make sure it is fast-tracked to the communities that need it

– so I urge everyone to join us.

And today, I am delighted to **announce** that the UK is launching a new programme to support the efforts of governments in up to five developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia,

... to help strengthen national systems and draw in the wider investment we need to make sure more people have access to more reliable, resilient water, sanitation, and hygiene services.

Finally, I just want to say that I realise none of this is particularly easy.

But ultimately, water is mission critical for everything else we want to achieve,

so we need leaders *everywhere* to step up and *lead*

– across governments, sectors, and society,

and keep at it, relentlessly, in the months and years ahead.

So, let us make the most of our time together now –

and work together make this the decade that best practice becomes the norm,

so we secure clean and plentiful water for people everywhere,

for generations to come.

Thank you.

**[ENDS.]**