



## **Statement at the Water Conference 2023**

Red Dot Foundation and the Global Diplomacy Lab would like to put forward these remarks. Water Intelligence and Water Diplomacy is critical to the successful implementation of SDG 6.

Water is a basic human right which some, but not all, enjoy. In 2010, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted Resolution 64/292, declaring water as a basic human right. Yet, today, one in three people worldwide still do not have access to safe drinking water. The burden of the lack of access disproportionately affects women and girls. In fact, in 80% of households that lack water, women and girls are responsible for collecting water. It is estimated that collectively, women spend a total of 200 million hours per day collecting water. Every day, they stand in long lines for water or walk long distances to collect water. An additional 266 million hours per day are spent searching for a place to defecate. That is time lost from schoolwork, time lost from providing for their families.

We face a growing global water crisis. Providing universal access to clean water and sanitation (SDG6) will unleash the potential of those women and girls. Countries are progressing toward the UN's SDGs by 2030 – including UN SDG 6. However, achieving SDG 6 is starting to be beyond our reach, especially as the world population continues to grow. The world's current population of 8 billion is predicted to grow to 8.5 billion by 2030, and 9.7 billion by 2050. The percentage of the global population using “safely managed drinking water services” increased by 8% in 10 years – from 66% in 2010 (when the UN resolution was adopted) to 74% in 2020<sup>4</sup>. At that rate, we will reach 82% in 2030, meaning that the goal will be missed for 1.5 billion people.

Disruptions to the global water cycle are contributing to this crisis. We know that the total amount of water on the planet is finite. Scientists are being encouraged to “rethink” this global water cycle. Scientific data are enabling us to get an ever-more precise and accurate understanding of the processes controlling the water cycle, processes that focus on both the “visible” water on the land surface as well as the “invisible” water far above us in the atmosphere and deep beneath the surface.

And while scientists are getting better at learning how to predict the global water cycle, human undertakings are making it harder to predict. This lack of knowledge creates a space where even right intentions can lead to wrong actions. We need flexible and agile leaders who are making decisions informed by the ever-evolving science of the global water cycle. The transformative changes in how society plans and prioritizes water are not something that can be left to scientists. We need scientists to be able to curate it, analyze it, and use it to advance our ever-evolving knowledge. And we need decision-makers to be able to assimilate that knowledge and a society that supports the policies and practices that are based on that knowledge. The knowledge of the global water cycle needs to go mainstream.

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That knowledge is so integral to our survival that it deserves its own name: Water Intelligence. One's Water Intelligence quotient (or Water-IQ) could be defined as knowledge of facts established by the consensus of the scientific community. The Water-IQ becomes our ability to understand how human activities impact the water cycle and what actions are available to mitigate or adapt to climate change. But is one's Water-IQ enough? Specialized knowledge of experts from different disciplines and community actors also matters. If societies are to achieve the aspirational SDG goals, including SDG 6, we need to engage experts from other disciplines to work together to create the necessary knowledge to improve policies and practices. And we need to engage actors from local, regional, and global communities to use that knowledge to inform decision-making pathways to improve access to safe water. Therefore, we need also to support collective Water-IQ, the Water-IQ that emerges from "collective efforts," which can be measured by the intelligence incrementally added by each new individual participating in "collective actions."