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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Cryosphere, Climate, Cooperation: Preserving Glaciers & Snow for the Water Action Agenda

Thursday March 23, 14:00-15:15
Conference Room 5, UNHQ

Organized by: Kyrgyz Republic, Peru, Nepal, ICCI

Background on the event

Preserving the cryosphere (Earth's frozen regions, including high mountains) is essential to ensuring freshwater availability and reducing disaster risk. Glaciers and snowpack provide critical sources of water for drinking, agriculture, industry, and hydropower in many mountain and downstream areas. As the cryosphere diminishes due to climate change, these communities face increasing hazards related to flooding, erosion, landslides, and more. Cryosphere melt also contributes to saltwater intrusion, which further threatens global freshwater resources. The melting cryosphere therefore puts billions of lives and livelihoods at risk, along with critical ecosystems and infrastructure – and will continue to do so for many generations. Yet despite its significance to societies around the world, including those that are far from ice and snow, the cryosphere has too often been marginal to global policymaking. This side event therefore highlighted the crucial importance of preserving the cryosphere for water action, by limiting global average temperature rise to 1.5°C, as well as pathways toward urgently needed adaptation.

Water Action Agenda

As noted above, preserving the cryosphere is essential to ensuring freshwater availability and reducing disaster risk for billions of people worldwide. The International Cryosphere Climate Initiative (ICCI) therefore works to support urgent and ambitious climate action in order to preserve as much of the global cryosphere as possible. This includes serving as the Secretariat to the “Ambition on Melting Ice” (AMI) on Sea-level Rise and Mountain Water Resources high-level group, whose founding members include side event co-organizers the Kyrgyz Republic, Peru, and Nepal. AMI works to ensure that policy-relevant knowledge about climate-induced

changes in the global cryosphere is understood by publics and policymakers worldwide; it supports policymaking at all levels that is informed by the latest evidence from cryosphere science and advances urgent and ambitious climate action; and it assists countries with adaptation and disaster risk reduction related to the growing, serious impacts of cryosphere change, including as linked to the Water Action Agenda. AMI's founding members include mountain, polar, and low-lying countries, as well as countries dependent on mountain water resources and healthy coastal aquifers. This commitment to the Water Action Agenda aims to accelerate the implementation of SDG 6 and 13, which are inextricably interlinked through the cryosphere. See <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/preserving-cryosphere-water-action-agenda>.

Key issues discussed

- Nature and scale of societal and economic consequences resulting, and projected to result, from cryosphere changes in diverse national and regional contexts.
- Implications of latest cryosphere science for climate ambition and the Water Action Agenda, especially as related to impacts on freshwater availability from diminishing mountain glaciers and snow as well as saltwater intrusion due to global sea-level rise.
- National and international perspectives on policy solutions to address water-related challenges resulting from cryosphere melt.
- Importance of cross-sectoral, multi-scalar, and transboundary approaches to mitigating and adapting to cryosphere change, in support of water action.
- Collaborative approaches to raising the cryosphere, mountain, and water agendas in an integrated manner through climate action: e.g., through the Group of Friends of Mountainous Countries, established under the initiative of lead event organizer the Kyrgyz Republic; the UN Mountain Partnership, of which all organizers are members; and the high-level group Ambition on Melting Ice on Sea-level Rise and Mountain Water Resources, of which all organizing countries are founding members.

Key recommendations for action

- Support research and multi-stakeholder dialogue to improve and communicate knowledge about water pathways linked to cryosphere change.
- Incorporate the latest scientific evidence about cryosphere change into water- and climate-related policymaking processes.
- Recognizing the transboundary nature of challenges to water action posed by cryosphere change, advance transboundary dialogue and cooperation.
- Ensure that the cryosphere, mountain, and water agendas are not siloed in global scientific, civil society, and policymaking processes, but rather are addressed and advanced in an integrated manner.
- Advocate for urgent and ambitious global climate action to preserve the cryosphere, and therefore to secure freshwater availability and reduce disaster risk in mountainous and downstream areas, including as related to mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage.