

UAE's OPENING STATEMENT BY H.E ABDULLA BALALAA - ASSISTANT MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS FOR ENERGY AND SUSTAINABILITY AT THE UAE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS DELIVERED AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL SESSION OF THE 2026 UNITED NATIONS WATER CONFERENCE 3 MARCH 2024

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen - **Good Morning**

Allow me to welcome you all to the Organizational Session of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference, marking the official kickoff of a process that must lead to a **bold, transformative, and lasting global action on water.**

We gather today with a shared purpose: **water is life, water is stability, and water is progress.** It connects communities, fuels economies, and sustains ecosystems. Yet, for far too long, it has been undervalued, underfunded, and underprioritized on the global agenda. **This must change.**

The UAE understands the true value of water - not as an abstract policy challenge, but as a lived experience. In one of the world's most water-scarce regions, water has shaped our history, defined our present, and will determine our future. We have learned to innovate, adapt, and push the boundaries of resilience - not just to survive, but to thrive.

At COP28, we elevated water within the global climate agenda. That was just the beginning. Climate change, economic growth, and human dignity are all deeply intertwined with water. There is no climate security without water security. There is no sustainable economic development without equitable access to water. The UAE is committed to driving innovative, inclusive, and scalable solutions - leveraging finance, technology, and partnerships to deliver real impact for people and the planet.

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Yet, despite progress, the statistics remain alarming:

2.2 billion people still lack access to clean drinking water.

3.5 billion people still lack safe sanitation.

And 4 billion people experience severe water scarcity for at least one month each year.

Colleagues,

no nation is immune from the devastating effects of water scarcity. It exacerbates food shortages, fuels public health crises, threatens economic stability, and can undermine peace and security. Water is not just a challenge **it is the key** to solving them all.

The reality is clear: if we are to meet our 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, we require six times faster progress on drinking water access, five times faster progress on sanitation, and three times faster progress on hygiene services. This requires more than just policy adjustments - it demands a **fundamental shift** in the way we prioritize, invest in, and manage water resources at every level.

The 2026 UN Water Conference is our moment to turn words into action. The UAE and Senegal are privileged to co-chair this landmark gathering, and we are calling on governments, international organizations, private sector, financial institutions, NGOs, civil society, youth, and Indigenous Peoples to unite in a shared mission: **accelerate global water action.**

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In the lead-up to 2026, we are committed to an inclusive, impact-driven, and transparent preparatory process. Since May last year, we have actively engaged with diverse stakeholders to shape a conference that is bold, solution-oriented, and results-driven. Today marks a critical milestone in that journey. We are here to listen, engage, and co-create ensuring that no priority is overlooked and no voice is unheard.

This Organizational Session is the first mandated meeting in our preparatory process, and we approach it with an open mind to address all global priorities on water with the urgency they demand.

I would like to conclude by thanking the international community for entrusting the UAE and Senegal with the responsibility of convening the world in the UAE on such a critical topic. We are privileged to work alongside Senegal, a long-standing champion on water, and together, we will drive a conference that is ambitious, unifying, and action-oriented.

This is our opportunity to raise global ambition, and I urge you all **to push boundaries, reimagine solutions, and scale impact**. Let's make 2026 the year we turn commitments into implementation for today and for generations to come.

Thank you.