



## ***Powerful New Global Arena Needed to Confront Coming Water Challenges, Elite Board Tells UN***

*Blunt valedictory report from SG's water and sanitation advisory board suggests routes to next generation world water goals; Calls for major institutional upgrades and a UN-wide "water-cultural revolution"*

The supreme importance of water and sanitation to development and well-being merits creation of a powerful new global arena inside the UN, dedicated to resolving water conflicts and common challenges while tracking progress against the world's newly-agreed development goals.

The new intergovernmental platform, supported by strong, independent panels of world scientists, counsellors and monitors, is part of a sweeping set of recommendations and conclusions released today by UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation ([unsgab.org](http://unsgab.org)) at the end of its 11-year mandate.

Created by then-SG Kofi Annan in 2004 to advance water-related Millennium Development Goal targets, the elite 21-member UNSGAB — which includes OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría — warns that today's institutional infrastructure requires a major upgrade for the world to possibly meet water and sanitation-related objectives in the 2030 Agenda — the new "Sustainable Development Goals" adopted by UN Member States this year for achievement by 2030.

"There is currently a mismatch between the integrated and ambitious 2030 vision of freshwater and sanitation management and the international political structures available to contribute to its implementation," says the report, presented by UNSGAB Chair Uschi Eid to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at UN headquarters, New York.

The proposed body would be the world's preeminent sphere for reaching consensus on common water and sanitation concerns, and to assess progress. It would closely involve the private sector and other major stakeholders, supported by both a secretariat (UN-Water) and a panel of independent experts mandated to amass authoritative information on water and sanitation issues and stimulate research to fill knowledge gaps. It would inform international decision-making "in a balanced, fact-based, transparent and comprehensive way."

Objective monitoring of progress towards world water targets for 2030 would complement the effort, as would a new independent Board to the Secretary-General to succeed UNSGAB.

Also called for: A Heads of State Panel on Water to champion and lead global advocacy around critical issues.

### **Blunt valedictory report: Designate sanitation a medical issue**

The Board's valedictory report underlines that water, sanitation and hygiene are central to human health and contains blunt messaging with the constructive intent of enhancing the UN's handling of water issues, which have been accorded newly elevated status within the world body.

"Considering that a lot of UN organizations are dealing with water but only as a marginal issue, nothing less than a full-scale water-cultural revolution within the UN is needed," the report says.

"Relevant UN organizations need to allocate (more) core funding to water and need to review their policies. It is, for example, high time that WHO endorsed water, sanitation and hygiene as primary prevention."

Noting "persistent and serious data inconsistencies in water-related UN communications," the Board says a 2012 claim that the global goal for safe drinking water goal had been met was underpinned by the wrong assumption that all "improved" water sources provide safe, uncontaminated water.

UNSGAB points out "there is a difference between a drinking water source that is only 'improved' and drinking water that is truly safe."

"In many quarters, the correction has been made: safe means safe, that is, uncontaminated. However, in too many others, including official UN statements, the fallacy persists and the global need for safe drinking water is thus seriously underestimated."

The UNSGAB report also calls for global-level UN data to better illuminate back-sliding in access to water and sanitation services in cities: "the global regression seen today in urban areas is not currently being explicitly reported."

Says UNSGAB Chair Uschi Eid: "Certainly, a lot has been accomplished, but the bucket of water challenges to be solved remains quite full."

"With the benefit of 11 years of perspective, our Board's distinguished members offer recommendations for global action and institutional reform, together with advice on how future independent advisory boards may organize for maximum impact."

Clustering comments around seven themes, the report details the efforts and accomplishments of the Board and other international actors, along with insights and recommendations on future strategies and actions.

Selected highlights:

### **1: Build attention to water: create the will to act now and in the future**

*Water continues to be undervalued and badly managed. The symptoms of lack of attention can be seen everywhere.*

*Most countries do not adequately monitor either the quantity or the quality of water resources and wastewater in particular, and the monitoring of sanitation and drinking water also remains a challenge.*

*Too many countries respond to water-related disaster emergencies but do not integrate water risks in development planning.*

*Water is distressingly under financed compared to other types of infrastructure.*

*Lack of adequate access to drinking water and sanitation plagues billions of people, especially the poorest.*

### **2: Drinking Water: More. Managed. Monitored. Made safe**

*Safe should mean safe. To end confusion, the UN, governments and other relevant actors should only use the term 'safe drinking water' when they mean uncontaminated drinking water.*

*To achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, efforts to expand drinking water services must urgently be stepped up. For this, governments must fast-track institutional reforms, boost funding, eliminate corruption and strengthen capacities in their water services sectors.*

*Organize and reinforce national and global monitoring of drinking water quality.*

*WHO, UNICEF and UN-Habitat should make efforts to ensure that the global regression in access to drinking water (and sanitation) in urban areas is better reported.*

### **3: Bring sanitation into the mainstream**

*Widen the focus beyond the home – toilets are needed in schools, clinics, workplaces, markets and other public places.*

*Prioritize sanitation as preventive medicine and break the vicious cycle of disease and malnutrition, especially affecting women and children.*

*Get serious about scaling up innovative technologies along the sanitation chain and unleash another sanitation revolution, as key economic and medical enabler in the run-up to 2030.*

*Make a business case for sanitation by realizing the resource potential of human waste.*

*De-taboo the topic of menstrual hygiene management, which deserves to be addressed as a priority by the UN and governments.*

#### **4: Push for increased and improved financial flows**

*Increased priority to the water and sanitation services sector as well as water resources management in national budgets.*

*At country level, secure additional financial resources of all kinds, including user fees and public budgets ... find the blend of tariffs, taxes, and transfers that ensures the financial viability of all utilities to provide improved services.*

*Encourage better knowledge of country-wide expenditures on water.*

*Facilitate achievement of all water-related SDG targets by thoroughly estimating related economic costs and benefits.*

*In the water sector, make more efforts to apply for and use funds available for climate change adaptation (and mitigation) measures.*

#### **5: Catalyze better water resources management — Integrated water resources management and the Nexus Approach (which recognizes the interrelationships between water, energy and food systems) within and between countries, across sectors**

*More emphasis must be given to the reality that water scarcity, water pollution and deterioration of water-related ecosystems pose a threat to global sustainable development.*

*Follow the imperative for integrated management in agriculture, industry, cities, watersheds, and public health and disaster risks.*

*Implement the Nexus (the intersection of water, energy and food issues) Approach at scale to enhance cross-sectoral policy making at the global level. Begin by strengthening the scientific basis through more dedicated research. Share lessons learned from successful Nexus interventions in the growing number of regions that are experimenting with this approach. Promote the Nexus Approach both top-down, by anchoring it in policy and ensuring top-level commitment, and bottom-up, through concrete projects.*

## **6: Demand UN attention to pollution prevention, wastewater treatment and safe reuse**

*Countries must develop national wastewater policies and master plans, including cost estimates, timeframes, and sustainable financing plans, to ensure that capital investment plans are matched by external and internal funding sources. They must also pay more attention to wastewater operations and maintenance. National policies must include pollution prevention and safe wastewater reuse as well as on-site and off-site sanitation, considering all available technical options.*

*International financial institutions as well as UN and bilateral organizations with capacities in wastewater management should step up their support to countries. UN-Water members should make experiences of successful wastewater strategies available.*

*Countries must expand the focus on urban wastewater to include industrial pollution, agricultural sources and resulting ocean contamination, and should endorse river basin clean-up actions worldwide.*

*Universities and research institutions should further develop the global evidence-base on wastewater pollution, treatment, recycling and safe reuse to better inform decision-makers.*

## **7: Promote protection and prevent death and damage, from water-related disasters**

*Climate change, urbanization and poor water management have increased disaster risk almost everywhere, especially in urban deltas.*

*Water-related disasters must be addressed as part of development planning, including required social protection.*

*Disaster risk reduction should put more emphasis on preventive measures, risk sensitive investment and building resilience, including through infrastructure investments for climate change adaptation.*

*Linkages between government and local authorities at all levels, especially at city-level, need to be improved, with the help of a user-friendly and innovative knowledge portal, as does collaboration between nations.*

*To take the necessary preventive action to protect the lives of hundreds of millions people in vulnerable environments, international and regional actions are needed to further raise awareness and develop capacities, in particular for workers who are often at highest risk and in need of training and equipment.*

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Among other UNSGAB observations and recommendations, the report urges a global approach to water, noting that “globalizing forces, such as virtual water flows, increasing water scarcity,

water pollution and ecological degradation, intensifying water-related disasters and persistent and emerging global public health threats ... in many parts of the world, need to be more systematically addressed from a global perspective.”

The report calls for businesses to develop comprehensive strategies to mitigate water risks, and for governments to engage with the private sector, “both as an enabling partner and as a key player that needs to be held accountable.”

As well, governments should consider making water-use reporting legally mandatory for listed companies and large cities.

Within governments, “extraordinary measures need to be considered, such as the creation of well-embedded water units within ministries of finance, in order to strengthen water financing at national and local levels,” and requiring water impact assessments of development investments, which would help promote funding for wastewater management.

Finally, the report recommends

- \* Documenting and targeting for action the world’s 20 water scarcity hotspots in both North and South, and
- \* For high priority to be placed on water management in post-conflict and fragile environmental contexts, which would help combat “causes for migration and flight.”

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## **Appendix**

### **UNSGAB members, 2015**

*Mahmoud ABU-ZEID, Egypt*  
*David BOYS, Canada*  
*Juanita CASTANO, Colombia*  
*Margaret CATLEY-CARLSON, Canada*  
*CHEN Lei, China*  
*Giorgio GIACOMELLI, Italy*  
*Angel GURRIA, Mexico*  
*HAN Seung-Soo, Korea*  
*Kenzo HIROKI, Japan*  
*Omar KABBAJ, Morocco*  
*Olivia LA O' CASTILLO, Philippines*  
*Antonio MIRANDA, Brazil*

*Maria MUTAGAMBA, Uganda*  
*Poul NIELSON, Denmark*  
*Eric ODADA, Kenya*  
*Gerard PAYEN, France*  
*Judith REES, UK*  
*Richard (Roy) TORKELSON, USA*  
*Yordan UZUNOV, Bulgaria*  
*Koos WIERIKS, Netherlands*

**Chair:**

*Uschi EID, Germany*

**Past chairs:**

*His Excellency Ryutaro Hashimoto, former Prime Minister, Japan*  
*HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal, Jordan*  
*His Majesty King Willem-Alexander, the Netherlands*

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**UNSGAB fact sheet**

- \* Business ranks the water crisis #1 global risk, based on impact to society (World Economic Forum, 2015)
- \* Projected global increase in water demand between 2000 and 2050: 55% (OECD, 2012)
- \* Number of people currently living in river basins where water use exceeds recharge: over 1.7 billion (Gleeson et al., 2012)
- \* People who still lack improved drinking water sources: 1 in 10 (663 million in total)
- \* People without access to improved drinking water: 8 in 10 live in rural areas; the number of people without such access is increasing in urban areas and in sub-Saharan Africa (WHO/UNICEF JMP, 2015)
- \* Number of people who use a source of drinking water that is faecally contaminated: at least 1.8 billion (Bain et al., 2014)
- \* The world has missed the Millennium Development Goals' target for basic sanitation by almost 700 million people
- \* People who still lack improved sanitation facilities: 1 in 3 (2.4 billion in total)
- \* People who practise open defecation: 1 in 8 (946 million in total) (WHO/UNICEF JMP, 2015)
- \* Estimated loss in developing countries from lack of access to improved water sources and basic sanitation: 1.5% of GDP (WHO, 2012)
- \* Priority given to public water expenditures varies widely between countries: from less than 0.5% to more than 2% of GDP (World Bank, 2009 & GLAAS, 2014)

- \* Water utilities in developing countries unable to cover their basic operation and management costs: over 1/3 (out of 1700 surveyed) (IBNET, 2014)
- \* Freshwater withdrawals for energy production are expected to increase by 20% through 2035
- \* Agriculture's share of worldwide freshwater withdrawals: about 70% (WWAP, 2014)
- \* Expected increase of people living in river basins under severe water stress: from 1.6 billion in 2000 to 3.9 billion by 2050 (over 40% of world population) OECD, 2012
- \* Number of countries with no publicly available information on flows of wastewater generated, treated or re-used: 57 Average wastewater treatment rate in countries: high-income, 70%; middle-income, about 33%; low-income, 8% (Sato et al., 2013)
- \* Nitrogen effluents from wastewater are projected to grow by 180% and phosphorus effluents by over 150% between 2000 and 2050 globally (OECD, 2012)
- \* Number of people affected by floods, droughts and storms between 1992 and 2012: 4.2 billion (95% of all people affected by disasters)
- \* Economic losses from water-related disasters between 1992 and 2012: US \$1.3 trillion (ISDR, 2012)
- \* Expected economic value of assets at risk by 2050: US \$45 trillion (over 340% increase from 2010) (OECD, 2012)

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## **UN High-Level Water and Sanitation Days 2015**

18 - 20 November, UN HQ, New York

The new 2030 Agenda has water and sanitation at its core, with a dedicated Sustainable Development Goal (SDG #6) on water and sanitation and clear linkages to other Goals, such as those relating to health, food security, climate change, resiliency to disasters and ecosystems.

The UN High-Level Water and Sanitation Days 2015, Nov. 18 - 20 at UN Headquarters, New York, will be marked by a set of coordinated events during which participants will reflect on the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the interconnected water-related SDG targets for achievement in the next 15 years.

18-20 November: Final UNSGAB Meeting and Closing Ceremony (20 November)

18 November: 2nd UN Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters

19 November: UN World Toilet Day