

Vision statement UN 2023 Water Conference
“Our watershed moment: uniting the world for water”

Context

Water is a fundamental part of all aspects of life. Water is inextricably linked to the three pillars of sustainable development, and it integrates social, cultural, economic and political values. It is crosscutting and supports the achievement of many SDGs through close linkages with climate, energy, cities, the environment, food security, poverty, gender equality and health, amongst others. With climate change profoundly affecting our economies, societies and environment, water is indeed the biggest deal breaker to achieve the internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The ongoing water and sanitation crisis is a threat to everyone as poor water management increases or multiplies the risks in all aspects of life. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed our shared vulnerabilities and reminded us of our common destiny. Populations are growing, agriculture and industry are getting more water-intensive, and climate change is worsening. Without a functioning, resilient water cycle for all people everywhere, human health and environmental integrity will always be threatened and a sustainable, equitable future will remain out of reach.

Today, a quarter of the global population – 2 billion people – use unsafe drinking water sources. Half of humanity – 3.6 billion people – live without safely managed sanitation. And 1 in 3 people – 2.3 billion – lack basic handwashing facilities at home.¹ Over 80% of wastewater is released to the environment without being treated or reused.² And, droughts could be the next pandemic³. Almost three quarters of all recent disasters are water related, having caused economic damage of almost US\$700 billion in the past 20 years.⁴

However, water does not only present us with challenges. It also presents us with a great opportunity. If we understand the complex relations and interlinkages, value water holistically, and manage water inclusively at all levels and across all interests, then water can be the dealmaker, the leverage point for a green economy, climate resilience and a more sustainable and inclusive world. Water – because of its many interlinkages – can bring together all stakeholders (individual, institutional, informal) to forge coalitions, strengthen capacities and provide solutions to be replicated and scaled.

For this to happen, there is a need to move away from single, targeted and reactive short-term actions towards more holistic, integrated and future-oriented approaches and projects. We must meet environmental, cultural, social and economic challenges with sustainable, equitable and resilient solutions, identify hotspots and innovative opportunities that can be scaled up, including blue and green investment opportunities, and build capacities across all layers of society - informal, individual and institutional, across borders, boundaries and sectors. We need to rapidly find a new balance to ensure sustainable development of water

¹ <https://www.unwater.org/publications/who-unicef-joint-monitoring-program-for-water-supply-sanitation-and-hygiene-jmp-progress-on-household-drinking-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-2000-2020/>

² <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/water/wwap/wwdr/2017-wastewater-the-untapped-resource/>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jun/17/the-next-pandemic-drought-is-a-hidden-global-crisis-un-says>

⁴ <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/disasters/>

resources – water for people, economy and nature – and respect the planetary boundaries whilst investing in adaptation for resilient communities, economies and ecosystems.

We know what we have to do. We must work up to four times faster⁵ to get on track to meet Sustainable Development Goal 6 – to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030. Let us act now with the speed and priority commensurate with the urgency of this crisis.

In this context, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed in its resolution 71/222 the period from 2018 to 2028 as the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development” aiming to further improve cooperation, partnership, capacity development and catalyze actions in response to the ambitious United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To successfully implement the goals and objectives of the Water Action Decade, including SDG 6 and other internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, in 2018 the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 73/226 on the midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028, in which it decided to convene, in New York, from 22 to 24 March 2023, the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028, or the “UN 2023 Water Conference”. In December 2020 the General Assembly adopted resolution 75/212 detailing the modalities for this Conference.

Vision

The Netherlands and Tajikistan, as co-hosts of the Conference, will strive to make the Conference a watershed moment for the world. Our vision for the Conference is that we all fundamentally understand, value and manage water better and take concerted action to achieve the internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

While the Water Action Decade is an essential enabler for the 2030 Agenda, including SDG 6, additional enhancement of a UN system-wide approach to water is necessary for the achievement of water-related goals and targets and to reinforce the international water voice and cross-sectoral connections.

The preparatory process and the Conference will be grounded in a foundation of consistency, continuity and commitment, making sure that coalitions forged, opportunities identified, and promises made can lead to impactful results, replication and scaling up, ensuring that 2023 is indeed the springboard for catalyzing action for water security for all.

Both the preparatory process and the Conference itself will seek to shine the spotlight on commitments that create impact and set a clear agenda for the second half of the Decade and beyond until 2030, while promoting a longer-term approach and perspective, going beyond 2030. To scale up commitments including concrete actions and agreements, an effort will be made to promote successful and scalable solutions.

⁵ <https://www.unwater.org/publications/summary-progress-update-2021-sdg-6-water-and-sanitation-for-all/>

The Conference shall (as stated in the modalities resolution OP 4 a-h):

- Assess the progress made in the implementation of the objectives of the Decade, including the Secretary General’s Plan: Water Action Decade 2018–2028, while reaffirming the internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Identify possible challenges and obstacles as well as opportunities and innovative ways and means to support the implementation and acceleration of progress;
 - Co-hosts strive to help strengthen local, national and international action for water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and integrated water resources management (IWRM), and create support for an integrated, comprehensive and preventive approach towards water challenges;
- Exchange views and develop actions and initiatives needed for accelerating progress;
- Support further action, initiatives and success, and enhance means of implementation and partnerships as well as cooperation at all relevant levels, including international cooperation, as appropriate, to accelerate the achievement and promote the implementation of the objectives of the Decade, including with regard to sustainable development and integrated management of water resources, including through collaborative approaches;
 - Co-hosts strive to bring together countries and stakeholders that will present their concrete plans, agreements and actions through voluntary commitments and partnerships;
 - Co-hosts strive to support an action agenda for change in the way societies use, allocate and value water;
- Share ongoing efforts, best practices and experience;
- Involve all relevant stakeholders to assess challenges and opportunities relating to, as well as support further action to implement the Conference’s objectives;
- Invite States and other relevant stakeholders to announce voluntary commitments;
- Co-hosts strive to make the Conference the place where the water sector and especially other sectors will show water as the catalyst for sustainable development: “water as dealmaker, because it connects all SDGs”.
- Contribute to the follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda by providing an input to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

Principles

The Conference and its preparatory process will be organised based on the following three principles:

Inclusive: both in terms of (a) the Conference process (ensure vertical and horizontal inclusiveness) and in terms of (b) the results (leaving no-one behind).

- This participatory, collaborative and inclusive approach helps to ensure strengthening capacity at all levels: individual, informal and institutional.

Action-oriented: the Conference aims to lead to concrete results through concrete actions and plans on the ground.

- 2023 cannot pass by without challenging the status quo and reaching beyond our vested interests.

Cross-sectoral: The Conference should mobilise all other sectors to improve the way they manage and utilize water resources. These sectors need to bring their plans and actions to the Conference.

- Water can drive the different partners apart – as a scarce resource or even a source of conflict – but water also brings them together, forging partnerships through inclusive collaborations. We need better water governance, finance, assessment and collaborative mechanisms to validate these cross-interest collaborations, ensuring a water secure world for all by all.

Conference information

Date and venue: 22-24 March 2023, New York, UN Headquarters

Theme: Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028

Key objective: Support to achieve the internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Format: 6 plenary meetings and 5 interactive dialogues

Presidents of the Conference: Governments of Tajikistan and the Netherlands

Secretary-General of the Conference: Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations

Preparatory meeting: a one-day preparatory meeting, by November 2022, New York, UN Headquarters, stakeholders are welcome as observers

Website: <https://sdgs.un.org/2023-un-conference-water-action-decade>