High-level Conference on
the International Decade for Action

Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028

Statement by Gilbert F. Houngbo
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Dushanbe, Tajikistan
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Your Excellency [   ], President of the Republic of Tajikistan,

Your Excellency [   ]...

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am delighted to be here today. On behalf of UN-Water, I would like to extend our gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for organizing this important Conference.

2. The timing could not be better. Earlier this year, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2018 to 2028 as the International Decade for Action: “Water for Sustainable Development. We hope this will pave the way for the international community to find innovative solutions to today’s global water challenges. And looking ahead, in a few weeks we will have the first in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goal 6 at the High-level Political Forum in New York.

3. Water is both a complex and a cross-cutting issue. Countries are facing a range of water issues, from increasing water scarcity to water-related disasters. From inadequate access to safe water and sanitation, to cross-border issues of water resource management.
4. **Climate change** is leading to more frequent and extreme weather events, and causing greater levels of water pollution, water scarcity and flooding.

5. **Water resource management** is critical to so many of the Sustainable Development goals. As the Chair of UN-Water, and as President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), I am deeply concerned at how far away we still are from achieving these vital objectives.

6. As we enter into our discussions, I would like to ask you to consider **three key questions**:

7. **Firstly**, do we have the means to implement SDG6 so that everyone has access to safe water and sanitation?

8. **Second**, do we have the capacity, the technology and the resources to ensure access and sustainability?

9. And **third**, can we achieve SDG6 in harmony with the other Goals, or do we need to accept trade-offs?

10. As UN-Water’s SDG 6 Synthesis Report 2018 shows, **achieving SDG 6 will not be an easy task**.

11. Today, 844 million people still lack basic water services; 2.1 billion lack safely-managed drinking water
and 4.5 billion – substantially more than half the world’s population – still lack access to safely-managed sanitation.

12. **The situation is very worrying.** Evidence shows that water pollution is worsening, and water resource governance structures are weak and fragmented. Freshwater supplies are also under stress from agriculture, industry and population growth.

13. **The Water Action Decade is an opportunity to reverse this trend,** by scaling up new financing mechanisms, technology transfer and capacity development. For example, we will need to use ODA as a catalyst to leverage new funding sources.

14. Developing new financing mechanisms and scaling up green and water efficient technologies are essential. But so, too, are investments in capacity development – from policy-making and service provision, to monitoring and accountability.

15. There is also a need to **invest in knowledge and training,** because infrastructure and technology can only be effective if people on the ground have the skills and training to operate and maintain new systems.
16. With the launch of the Decade, the world has started a conversation that will improve the performance of the sector.

Ladies and gentlemen,

17. It is my hope that during this Conference we will share our experiences and learn from the perspectives of Member States, United Nations, international and regional organizations, financial institutions, civil society and other stakeholders.

18. Making the right choices to achieving SDG6 will yield benefits across the entire 2030 Agenda, including health, infrastructure, gender equality and, of course, the environment.

19. I am confident that all of us here today are willing to play our part and make a difference.

Thank you.