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High Level International Conference, International Decade for Action

“Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2028

20 June 2018, Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Plenary Statement on behalf of UNDP

Mr. Gerd Trogemann, Istanbul Regional Hub, UNDP

Check Against Delivery

His Excellency, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Tajikistan

His Excellency, the United Nations Under-Secretary General, Department for Economic and Social Affairs

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to deliver a brief statement on behalf of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, Mr. Achim Steiner, who very much regrets not to be able to be here today.

Allow me to express UNDP’s sincere appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for organizing this important conference, and for its warm welcome and hospitality here in the beautiful city of Dushanbe. This conference represents one in a series of important contributions of the Republic of Tajikistan towards the mobilization of international efforts to address water-related challenges, and to demonstrate the critical role of water in sustainable development.

Water and sustainable development are intrinsically linked. Water cuts across the 2030 Agenda, across people, planet and prosperity. Reliable and accessible water and sanitation services are critical for human well-being, health and productivity. Equitable access to water and other resources is critical for livelihoods and the eradication of poverty and hunger. In short, water is indispensable for sustainable human development.

It is important to underscore the vulnerability of the water resource. It is increasingly over-exploited or polluted in societies that do not have sufficient safeguards or capacities to protect the environment.

The huge socio-economic benefits provided by the earth's freshwater and marine systems underscore the need to take adaptive, integrated, ecosystem-based and participatory approaches to the management of water resources. Through a coordinated portfolio operating in over 100 countries, UNDP's Water and Ocean Governance Programme help partners apply such approaches at local, national, regional and global levels, towards a more equitable and sustainable development path.

Agenda 2030 and the SDGs represent the world's most transformative, comprehensive and integrated commitment yet to a people-centered and rights-based approach to end poverty, build shared prosperity and protect the planet. The International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development" plays a critical role in drawing our collective attention to the centrality of water and to the fact that at the world needs to intensify its efforts to achieve the water-related goals and targets. To achieve the goals and targets by 2030, we need to be more effective in sustaining our past achievements and we need to innovate to put the use of water onto a more sustainable path.

Allow me to highlight three key challenges in this regard:

1. Managing water in a holistic way;
2. Ensuring good water governance and regulatory innovation;
3. Closing the gap produced by inequality and leaving no one behind.

Adopting a holistic perspective means to take on all three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – and ensure access to water for multiple uses. As recognized by the High-Level Panel on Water, "we need to identify and take into account the multiple and diverse values of water to different groups and interests in all decisions affecting water. There are deep interconnections between human needs, social and economic well-being, spiritual beliefs, and the viability of ecosystems." (HLPW outcome document)

Good water governance is all about guiding water use – including who access the resource and how it is protected from over-use and pollution – towards a more sustainable path. Commitment and innovation is needed to ensure that investments into improved water and sanitation services continue to render services to the intended users. Where systems fail to be maintained or reach those intended, we face a governance failure due to roles and responsibilities insufficiently defined, insufficient capacity or lack of accountability. Such failures need to be addressed by building shared agendas for water management; by developing regulatory frameworks that spur innovation and reward efficient resource use and equitable allocation.

At the global level, the quest to eradicate poverty has lifted millions of people out of extreme poverty. At the same time, inequalities are increasing, and threaten to tear our societies apart. Unequal access to water and sanitation services, as well as to land and water resources, must be addressed with unwavering commitment and boldness. This may well be water's prime contribution to sustainable development.

Accelerating progress on the global water goals towards achieving the SDGs is possible, but it will require all of us - governments, the UN system, private sector, civil society and citizens at large to engage, to innovate and co-create.

The 2030 Agenda provides us with a common framework to pursue this great ambition. The International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development" provides an opportunity to raise awareness, generate commitment and define joint action. It is our joint responsibility to take the action needed to advance the water agenda.

Thank you.