



# **UN WATER CONFERENCE 2023**

## What Lies Beneath the Tip of the Iceberg?

Observations from a long-time  
Water Stewardship Practitioner

Marcia Brewster | President, UNA-USA Westchester Chapter



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Marcia M. Brewster** is currently President of the United Nations Association (UNA-USA), Westchester (NY) chapter and had held that position earlier from 2011-2018. She has also served on the UNA-USA National Council since 2018. She worked for the United Nations for over 30 years, both in New York and at the regional UN office for Asia and the Pacific, based in Bangkok, Thailand. She devoted most of her career to United Nations programs related to water and sanitation, sustainable development and gender issues. Until 2006 she was Senior Officer for water resources in the Sustainable Development Division at United Nations headquarters in New York. She served as Manager of the UN's Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water and is deeply concerned about women's empowerment and gender equality. She was also Editor-in-Chief of the international journal *Natural Resources Forum* for 11 years and has a number of published research studies and policy papers for the UN and other organizations. She has made frequent public speaking presentations on topics including water and sanitation, gender issues and international careers.

Marcia serves on a number of executive and advisory boards, including the Advisory Board to the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Mercy College, the Water Discovery Center in Upstate NY and the Town of Greenburgh Water Advisory Board. She has an MSc from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and spent 14 years living and working in Asia. She lives in Hastings on Hudson and has twin sons.





# ABOUT THIS REPORT

I was honored to represent UNA-USA and the Catskills Water Discovery Center at the UN Water Conference from 22-24 March at UN headquarters in New York. This report is a summary of one person's observations as an attendee to the Conference, and also through the lens of a three-decade career at the United Nations, most of it focusing on global and local water challenges and solutions.

I intentionally chose the iceberg graphic for the cover of this report, and the subtitle of "What Lies Beneath the Tip of the Iceberg." At the highest level, solutions to the scourge of water insecurity might seem very simple...we need more water, in the right places, at the right times, and it has to be cleaner and safer for people and for the planet. That's the "tip" of the iceberg. What lies beneath is the bulk of the work: the complex challenges that will only be solved by recognizing their interconnectedness. Lasting solutions will require collaboration and cooperation across the globe.

It was an epic meeting -- I was gratified to see so many women, indigenous people and youth delegates. What a change from the last UNWC in 1977, when all representatives were from national governments, most were men and the conclusions were largely decided in advance. This time, there were roughly 6,500 participants! The special events, the side events inside and outside the UN, and the interactive dialogues were very exciting and inclusive. It was also wonderful to see so many friends and colleagues from decades of my UN career and beyond.

My hope after the event is that the majority of the over \$300 billion in pledges from governments, donors, multilateral banks, and the private sector will be honored.



Representation  
Included:

18

Heads of State



80

Ministers

~35

UN Organizations



Local Leaders

Treaty Organizations

NGOs

Civil Society  
Organizations

Youth

# CONTEXT

I was interviewed by the Women for [Water Virtual Summit](#) before the conference began. My interview on the history of UN work in water since the UN Water Conference in 1977, particularly in its work on women and water, with the Women of Water virtual summit can be found [here](#). An excellent overview of the entire meeting can be found at UN Water conference summary, [here](#).

**Women of Water GET REAL Virtual Summit**  
 Where and Why Women Are LEAKING From the Water Career PIPELINE  
 5 Days, 45 Extraordinary Conversations  
**Mon 3/27: Day 1**  
 Women AND Water vs Women OF Water (International Views), Plus Attraction to Water (Girl Scouts & University Experiences)

Hosted By: DrCat Shrier

 Marcia Brewster UN Association USA (Hastings-On-Hudson, NY)	 Lilian Coelho F AgriParisTech-Suez on Water For All (Paris, France)	 Sylvia Radlova MA (Gender and Diversity Consultant, Former IWA Senior Project Office for DE)	 Dahira Sabri, PhD (Cairo, Egypt) Water & Climate Change Consultant, Co-Chair, Water Quality Task Force, IWRA	 Maghna Mulheijer (Wageningen, Gelderland, Netherlands) Program Manager, Meta Meta
 Nancy Hoghland, J.D., Oly, Olympic Swimmer and Title IX Expert (Lubbockville, N)	 Amanda Jones, MPA Tucson Water and Founder, Women in Water (Tucson, AZ)	 Allyson Odegaard-Begley Sr. Assoc, Hazen & Sawyer, Waterhouse Arizona Spec. Ed (Phoenix, AZ)	 Pamela Bingham STEM DEI Advocate, Operations Manager, LMD Center for Community Engagement, Environmental Justice & Health (Petersburg, VA, USA)	

Register Now at [watercitizen.org/women](http://watercitizen.org/women)



The Cochairs of the conference were: HM King Willem Alexander (Kingdom of the Netherlands, pictured above) and President Emomali Rahmon (Republic of Tajikistan), whose countries were hosting the conference. Delegates to the conference were from national and local governments, including 18 heads of state, 80 ministers, and many municipal leaders and mayors. Almost all the 35 UN organizations that have water programs were represented, including many of the leaders of UN-Water.

Other treaty organizations were represented, including the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Biodiversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Private sector companies that are trying to reduce their consumption of water were represented, and they presented CEO Water Mandate's Water Resilience Coalition, committed to reducing water stress. Of course, there was a formidable representation of international water and sanitation organizations, such as the International Water Resources Association (IWRA), World Water Council (WWC), Global Water Partnership (GWP), the Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Women for Water Partnership, the Pacific institute, and many more. Finally, there were thousands of people who represented International NGOs, civil society organizations, students and youth, women and indigenous people.

The opening day was World Water Day, March 22nd, with the theme "Accelerating Change: Be the change you want to see in the world", and the World Water Development Report 2023 (Partnerships and Cooperation for Water) was launched. The whole conference focused on #wateraction, and commitments by each and every participant about what actions they would pledge to achieve SDG #6 by 2030. Among the government ministers, we heard from the U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland.

The Vision Statement for the Water Conference was "Our Watershed Moment: Uniting the World for Water," and an infographic was published to illustrate this theme (below).

# VISION STATEMENT UN 2023 WATER CONFERENCE

OUR WATERSHED MOMENT: UNITING THE WORLD FOR WATER

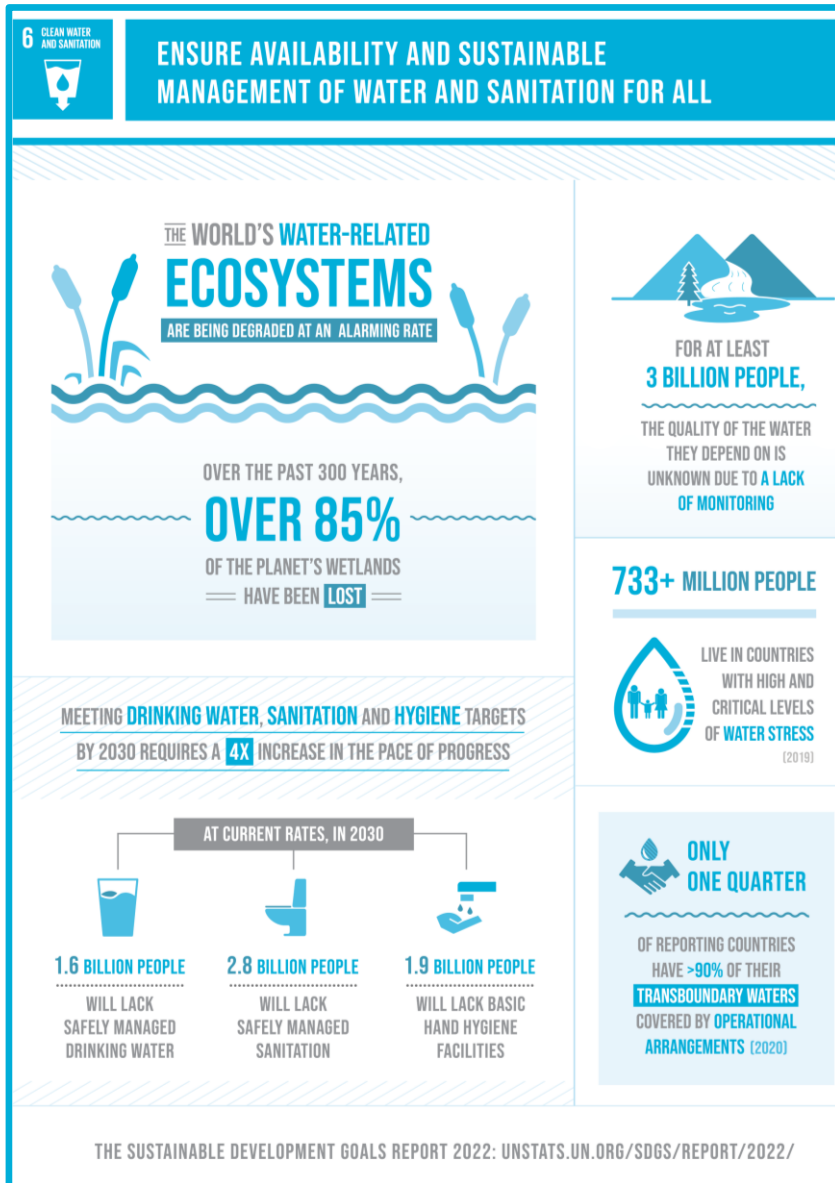




# MAIN MESSAGES

Some of the main messages that I got out of the conference and that were reiterated at the plenary, the interactive dialogues, the special events and side events, were:

- We are not on track to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 on water and sanitation for all by 2030.



- The imbalance that has been created in the global water cycle is a root cause of water insecurity.
- Water is not **A** resource, it is **THE** source, the soul of existence and life.
- Water is not a commodity; it is a basic human right. Water-related actions need to be based on a human rights approach.
- Collective action and shared responsibility are essential – everyone needs to be part of the Water Action Agenda.
- The world's approach to water management should be more holistic, given water's connection with energy, climate, food, gender equality and national security. Action on water is at the heart of climate action, linking nature, water, human and climate resilience.

- The important voices of women, indigenous people and youth regarding their concerns and needs, and the value of their traditional knowledge, must be recognized and taken into account by policy makers and water managers.
- Innovative finance, including public-private partnerships, is a requirement for successful implementation of water-related goals and targets.

- The private sector plays an important role in solving the water crisis. While private companies need not be involved directly in water supply to the public, large corporations consume a huge amount of water and need to be involved with conservation and stewardship of the watershed, in cooperation with the public sector and other stakeholders.

- See *Business Leaders' Open Call to Accelerate Action on Water*, at right
- Read more at [www.wateractionnow.org](http://www.wateractionnow.org)

- Sanitation is key to health, dignity and women's equality. A staggering 80% of wastewater is still being released into the environment without being treated or reused; we will never meet water demand without addressing sanitation and wastewater.

- Shared real time data and Early Warning Systems were essential to reduce conflict over water and build resilience to climate change.

- About 90% of climate impacts are related to water – too much, too little or too dirty, yet only 3% of climate finance is currently dedicated to the world's water systems. To reduce water-related conflicts and disasters, climate finance needs to be directed to water-related climate impacts.

- Subsidies to agriculture and large water consumers (\$US 700 billion) need to be phased out and rechanneled to sustainable solutions that determine where best to grow food.

## Business Leaders' Open Call to Accelerate Action on Water

*We, leaders of the business community, are deeply concerned about the global water crisis, intensifying due to climate change. Businesses can—and must—play a critical role in turning the tide.*

Together, coinciding with the historic UN 2023 Water Conference, we commit our businesses to take bold action on water. We call on the global business community to join us. We commit to building water resilience across our global operations and supply chains, and to join hands to achieve collective positive water impact: in at least 100 vulnerable prioritized water basins by 2030.

### Acknowledging the Severity of the Water Crisis

*We must translate concern into rapid action.* Water insecurity is one of the most pressing sustainability challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, presenting humanitarian, environmental, and economic concerns. More than 2 billion people lack safe drinking water; a 40 percent water deficit is projected by 2030<sup>1</sup>; and water-protecting ecosystems have experienced rapid destruction<sup>2</sup>. Climate change continues to significantly intensify these risks, adding further urgency to act.

### Business Imperative on Water

*Our businesses can—and must—be pivotal levers of change.* Businesses are significant users of water thereby impacting water resources. As global private operators, business must also manage water resources. Water challenges pose business continuity, regulatory, climate, and employee health risks. These impacts on our own businesses, however, are not—and cannot be—the sole reasons to act. Resilient water systems are vital to address the dual climate and nature crises. They also profoundly underpin society's ability to achieve multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for food security, human health, biodiversity, gender equality, and other priorities. While many businesses have invested in water stewardship solutions, more businesses must join the effort—and we must speed our progress.

### Business Leaders' Open Call to Accelerate Global Action

*To achieve off-track SDG 6 targets, we must rapidly accelerate action on water and businesses must do their part by prioritizing individual business actions and uniting in collective action with other businesses, civil society, and governments. Our commitment is clear:*

1. We will work to improve water resilience across our companies in basins where we operate. In our direct operations, we will seek to scale leading climate-resilient water management approaches by setting actionable water resilience targets and applying resilience and mitigation planning.
2. Within our supply chains, we will work to implement strategies to scale leading practice and encourage our suppliers to adopt resilient water practices across water quantity, quality, and accessibility.
3. We also will join hands to have a collective positive water impact in at least 100 vulnerable global water basins by 2030, focusing on the most stressed basins in each company's operations and supply chains. We plan to measure positive water annually based on improvements in basin-wide conditions for water availability, quality, and accessibility.
  - a) We will work to make tailored investments in nature-based and other equitable, climate-resilient solutions that strengthen local water resilience.
  - b) We will seek to work collaboratively with other businesses, governments, and civil society actors, using a human rights-based approach, to engage with local and under-represented communities, advance co-financing mechanisms to close the financing gap, and apply our businesses' expertise to innovate solutions.
  - c) We will work to amplify our shared voices to support policies, practices, and regulations supporting quantifiable corporate water stewardship practices.
  - d) We will seek to support the elevation of water on the global agenda, including the climate and nature agendas, through the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), UN 2023 Water Conference, and other platforms.

### Historic Turning Point for Water

*This must be a turning point.* We commit to acting, and seek to join with business leaders, governments, and civil society actors to directly call upon business leaders to decisively accelerate action on water resilience—across our own businesses, in the communities we serve, and in water-stressed basins around the world.

**Now is the time for water action.**

[www.wateractionnow.org](http://www.wateractionnow.org)

# MAIN OUTCOMES

- The Water Action Agenda, which is composed of voluntary commitments from UN Member States and stakeholders, garnered 700 pledges and commitments amounting to over \$300 billion. These came from governments, NGOs, the private sector, women's groups, multilateral organizations and many more. These pledges address a broad set of themes aimed at creating partnerships and cooperation towards shared urgent, immediate, and accelerated action, and to establish a strong international mechanism to prevent the global water crisis from spiraling out of control.
- As the first UN Water Conference since 1977, the international water community, including governments, UN Agencies and stakeholders, were energized with new ideas. Over 190 statements were made in plenary, showing the pent-up interest in water issues. Heads of state, ministers and leaders of major water organizations were engaged and enthusiastic.
- A Special UN Envoy for Water will be appointed by the UN Secretary-General.
- It was agreed that water must be considered as a global common good, and that water-related actions must include a human rights-based approach. Thus, we needed to radically change the way we value water, and thus how we manage water.
- Examples of innovative finance included the pledges by CEOs of large water-using companies to reduce water consumption throughout their supply chains. 35 of them signed on to the Water Resilience Coalition, under the UN Global Compact's CEO Water Mandate, with a 2030 roadmap and 2050 goal. They aim to achieve positive results in 100 water-stressed basins that support 3 billion people by 2030 and achieve net positive water impact in 150 water-stressed basins by 2050, pledging finance and capacity building support to protect watersheds basin by basin.

# 700

PLEDGES

# \$300B

COMMITMENTS

# 190

STATEMENTS

# 150

BASINS

# 3B

PEOPLE





- The voices of youth, women, girls, and indigenous communities are being represented perhaps more than ever before.
- Partnership on the Lower Colorado River - 15 private sector companies collaborating with indigenous groups, government and foundations to invest more than \$ 11 billion USD in innovation over five years, including engagement with youth, starting with Lake Mead and the Colorado River as priority basins.
- Many new actors signed on to the global Multi-stakeholder Coalition to accelerate gender equality [in the water domain](#) that was launched in 2021 with a global Call for Action





# SELECT (OUTSTANDING) SESSION SUMMARIES

March 22: On World Day for Water, UNESCO and the Water Museums Global Network (WAMU-NET) launched the **Walk of Water** down the corridor linking the GA Hall to the UN secretariat. The photos and narratives of the past, present and future of water were inspiring. As I partly represented the Catskill water Discovery Center, we were among the supporters of the exhibit. We met colleagues from, UNESCO, the Hangzhou Water Museum in China and many others. Learn more about the exhibit and the photos below here: <https://walkofwater.org/>





## Special event: **Radical Collaboration for Water resilience**

This event featured an excellent series of panels on inspiration, enabling conditions, collaboration and best practices to build water resilience, featuring a diverse group of practitioners with a wide range of experience. The session was opened with remarks from Deb Holland, US Secretary of the Interior, who mentioned her background as a native American from Pueblo Laguna, SW US, where each person is considered a steward of water. She announced that the US had pledged \$49 billions in funding to leverage people all over the US to address long-term solutions to the climate crisis, including collaborative land and water conservation projects.

We were inspired by Mina Guli, who had arrived in New York finishing her 200<sup>th</sup> marathon this year (Run Blue) to raise awareness of the water crisis. The UN is featuring an exhibit of her runs in extreme climate locations around the world along the wall of the Visitors Entrance.



Running 200 marathons towards a global water solution

Among other observations:

- Farmers need to get a sustainable return on investment in order to be stewards of the land, and thus are now collaborating with watershed protectors.
- Indigenous plants can protect land and riverbanks; let's reduce non-indigenous species.
- Crop diversification and shared responsibility by communities are essential to protecting the watershed and biodiversity and reducing waste and pollution.
- Women, indigenous people and youth must be present in decision-making roles and in negotiations.
- Water funds can be collected from downstream users to protect the watershed (examples from the Nature Conservancy).

## **March 23<sup>rd</sup>: Special event: Reducing Inequalities – Implementing Human Rights**

This event focused on the voices of women, indigenous people and youth and featured a very inspiring series of panels that provided valuable information on solutions by these groups of stakeholders.

The Secretary-General had called on a renewed social contract anchored in Human Rights, noting that the most vulnerable people should be at the center of national plans and policies. Francisco Carli, Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights, stressed that indigenous people are often excluded from water management, even though they protect 80% of the biodiversity on earth.

Representatives of Indigenous groups emphasized that they are not asking for extra rights, just the same rights as other citizens of their nations – survival, water, food – and the recognition of the spiritual importance of water. Others emphasized the major role of indigenous women in protecting water.

Women and indigenous people presented many of their solutions to the water crisis, including tools for vulnerable groups, and community management of water. Youth representatives noted that their age group consists of 50% of the population of many countries of the South, and that they have received knowledge from the ancestors.

### Main messages:

- Women, indigenous people and youth must be included in decisions on water management. Without these voices, the loss of biodiversity and degradation of watersheds will continue.
- Partnerships that recognize the knowledge and practices of these groups reduce inequalities and empower local communities.



The Right  
to Water





### Side event: **Placing water at the heart of climate action through locally-led adaptation**

The session was sponsored by the UN Office of Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the Government of the Netherlands. It stressed that most (90%) disasters are water related – floods, storms and droughts, and weather-related natural disasters affect lives and livelihoods. We need to improve resilience.

The Minister from the Netherlands introduced a partnership on Water at the Heart of Climate Action. The partnership led by the Netherlands now focuses on four countries: Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan; over the next five years it will focus on many other vulnerable countries. The program is easily replicable and requires collective action. At the heart of the early warning programs are the UNDRR, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

They work at the local level to help communities adapt by using an integrated approach known as “from satellite to sandbags”. Early warning systems must be in place and working. The local perspective is discussed at country workshops aimed at long-term resilience. The early warning systems are codesigned with local communities and involve women, children and refugees.

Solutions presented emphasized data sharing, early warning systems and involving the local community as first responders. With the huge increase in natural disasters affecting every part of the world, these programs are extremely needed and valuable.



# 64,240 gallons

HOW MUCH WATER THE AVERAGE AMERICAN USES IN A YEAR

Source: WATER.ORG

# \$4.8 trillion

NEEDS TO BE INVESTED IN WATER INFRASTRUCTURE OVER THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS TO MAINTAIN A STATE OF GOOD REPAIR

Source: AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CIVIL ENGINEERS

# 68,873

THE NUMBER OF DRINKING WATER AND WASTEWATER SYSTEMS IN THE U.S.

Source: EPA

## Special Event: **The Economics of Water: “Turning the Tide – a call to collective action”**

The Report of the Global Commission on the Economics of Water was the focus of the session. It contains an excellent summary of the current situation and how to address the imbalances in the water cycle through better management and economic measures. The report is available at:

<https://turningthetide.watercommission.org/>.

Many of the authors were in the session and provided good information on its contents.

The report stresses the challenges of too much water, too little water or water that is polluted. These reduce the availability of water for human consumption. Potentially 1.4 billion people are facing food insecurity. The global water cycle of green and blue water means that the water situation in a city in Africa affects precipitation in Northern Europe. All the SDGs depend on water; thus, water needs to be addressed first. All voices must be heard – indigenous communities, the private sector, and local and national governments. Blue water is what we see, liquid water, 40% of total freshwater and source of precipitation. Green water is 60 % of all water in the air and soil, biomass, food and water. Both contribute to evaporation and the global water cycle. Everyone must agree to share our limited resources, blue and green water. Now our soils lack green water, and restoring soil and biodiversity is the responsibility of everyone.

We have been underpricing water. Putting a value on water is NOT privatization. Put numbers on its value and conditionalities on water wasted. The goal is to protect the water we have and make more available by reducing pollution and waste. Behavior needs to change at the local level, so every human being values water. Subsidies to agriculture and large water consumers have led to overconsumption; we need to phase out and rechannel \$US 700 billion in subsidies and make better decisions on the best places to grow certain types of food.





Taqsem A Khan, CEO of the Dacca Water Supply and Sewerage Authority, says his utility serves 22 million people, and that water supply issues have to be resolved locally. Even though the top priority is to supply water for human consumption, that use accounts for less than 10% of water use. More attention should be given to public water utilities, which have been underperforming, because they lack access to Investment. Banks may want to invest, but the projects are not bankable. There has to be collective effort by the public and private sector to attract investment and improve water management. The UN and development banks can improve capacity and management at water utilities in order to attract investment. The commons have to be bankable.

The private corporation Bayer presented its program on “health for all, hunger for none”, which has made a commitment to reduce water use around rice cropping, which covers 160 million ha and involves 150 million smallholder farmers. India and China are big producers, accounting for 40% of global irrigation withdrawals and 20% of global emissions. To improve water use per kg of rice, they need dry rice farming, public and private sectors, young people, energy and creativity.

An indigenous surgeon from Nicaragua called on the local Mayan water spirit. She stated that traditional practices can combat pollution, for example by filtering water from mining through roots. A fund for indigenous people in Latin America is needed to link human rights with water.

Main messages:

- 70% of water is used in agriculture; thus, we need to focus on farmers – they can help to move toward sustainable actions. Subsidies should go to sustainable solutions, not factory farms.
- Cities can do a lot together by sharing knowledge, such as traditional methods to save water. Rotterdam hosts managers from Jakarta and other cities.
- The cost to supply water in many villages is quite low, and it can free up those hundreds of people.
- We have been underpricing water. Putting a value on water is NOT privatization.



## Side event: “Supporting gender equality in the water domain with multi-stakeholder collaboration”

The event was co-sponsored by the Government of Guatemala, UNESCO World Water Assessment Program (WWAP), the Women for Water Partnership and many others. It focused on the Multi-stakeholder Coalition to accelerate gender equality [in the water domain](#) that was launched by UNESCO and others in 2021 with a global Call for Action. H.E. Tanja Fajon, Slovenia’s Deputy PM and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, stated that women should be at the peace table and at high leadership positions, as they are water managers on the ground and are disproportionately affected by the water crisis. She called on stakeholders to sign up for the coalition and indicated ways to contribute. Political will is needed to get anything done; we need to move from talk to action.

Michaela Miletto of the World Water Assessment Program (WWAP) noted the importance of disaggregating data by sex, so that we can get a better idea of where programs for women might be most useful. Allison Woodruff, Asian Development Bank, stated clearly that we cannot achieve SDG 6 without women. Regarding sanitation issues, women are very underrepresented.

ADB made a number of commitments on sex-disaggregated data, gender inclusion in good practices, and promoting investments in gender equality. Phil Duncan, the first indigenous person to lead the Murray Darling River Basin Authority, said that women’s leadership was crucial and that indigenous women’s knowledge must be included in change. He has appointed the first woman to lead the basin authority as his replacement. Women know how to collaborate; they demonstrate strong leadership with action.



Mariet Verhoef-Cohen, President of the Women for Water Partnership, has been a major supporter of this coalition, which was created under UNESCO-WWAP. She was gratified to see all the new stakeholders in the coalition. She urged them to talk to their governments and get others to become part of the coalition here: [Gender coalition](#).



### **Accelerating gender equality in the water domain: a Call For Action**

An advocacy initiative from  
the UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme  
and the convened Global Multi-Stakeholder Coalition



## March 24: Side event held outside the UN: “Water, War and Peace”

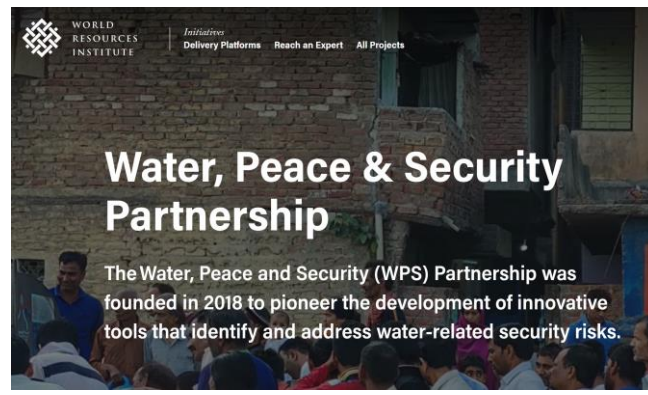
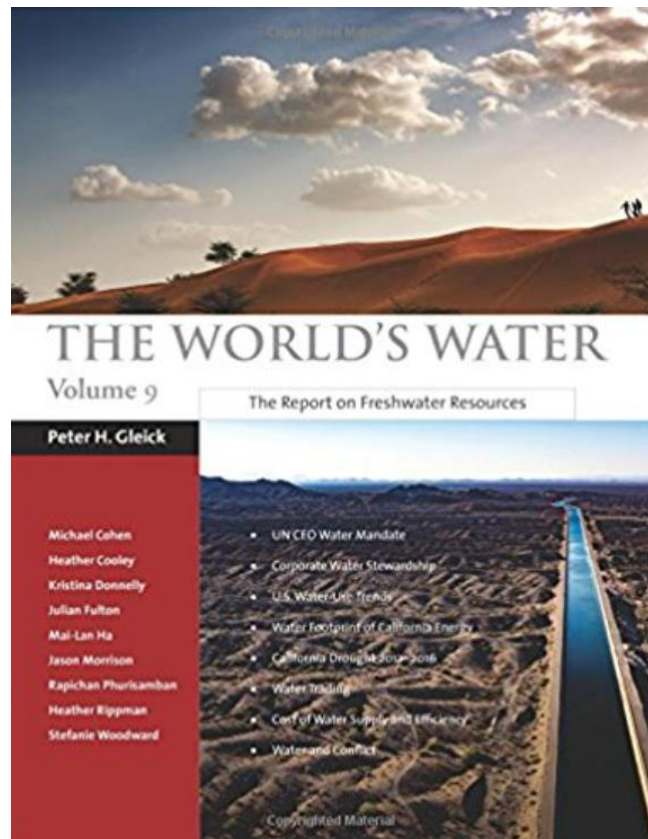
Experts from the frontlines of global water security discussed the links between water and security, and the essential strategies to reduce the risk of water-related violence and to find paths to peace. It was great for me to reconnect with presenters Peter Gleick, Senior Fellow at the Pacific Institute and J. Carl Ganter, founder of Circle of Blue, both of whom contributed to the water agenda at the UN, and to find out about their latest groundbreaking work. It was also inspiring to hear from Liz Saccoccia at the World Resources Institute and Irina Patrauhau, the Hague Center for Strategic Studies.

The panel covered current water-related conflicts, the long history of "water wars," and water peacemaking. It drew from the Pacific Institute's longstanding work on water conflict, including the Water Conflict Chronology ([www.worldwater.org](http://www.worldwater.org)) that includes conflicts going back 4,000 years, with 1300 entries. He stressed the growing competition for water and the causes of conflict, and remarked that the conflicts are often about more than water. The panel outlined solutions for reducing water conflict, and noted that water can also be a source of peace and cooperation.

Several transboundary water treaties govern cooperation on international water ways, but many of the conflicts are very local, such as between farmers and pastoralists. Liz Saccoccia highlighted the Water, Peace and Security (WPS) partnership with the Netherlands and WRI (<https://www.waterpeacesecurity.org/>) and discussed tools such as the WPS Global Early Warning Tool and demonstrated how it works.



circle of blue<sup>®</sup>  
where water speaks





Joakim Harlin, Chief of the Freshwater Ecosystem Unit for UN Environment and Vice-Chair of UN-Water

## Side Event: **Public dialogue on the UN Water SDG-6 Synthesis Report 2023**

The synthesis report, marking the mid-point of the Water for Action Decade, 2018-2028, is to be issued in late June 2023 for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development in July and the SDG Summit in September. This was the only session that I attended that was organized and led by UN Water. The moderator was Joakim Harlin, who is now Chief of the Freshwater Ecosystem Unit for UN Environment and Vice-Chair of UN-Water, and a former colleague of mine. UN Water wants to make sure the report includes major messages from stakeholders about the acceleration of the water action agenda. It must be a blueprint for action on water as a powerful single endeavor by all of us. Some of the suggestions made were:

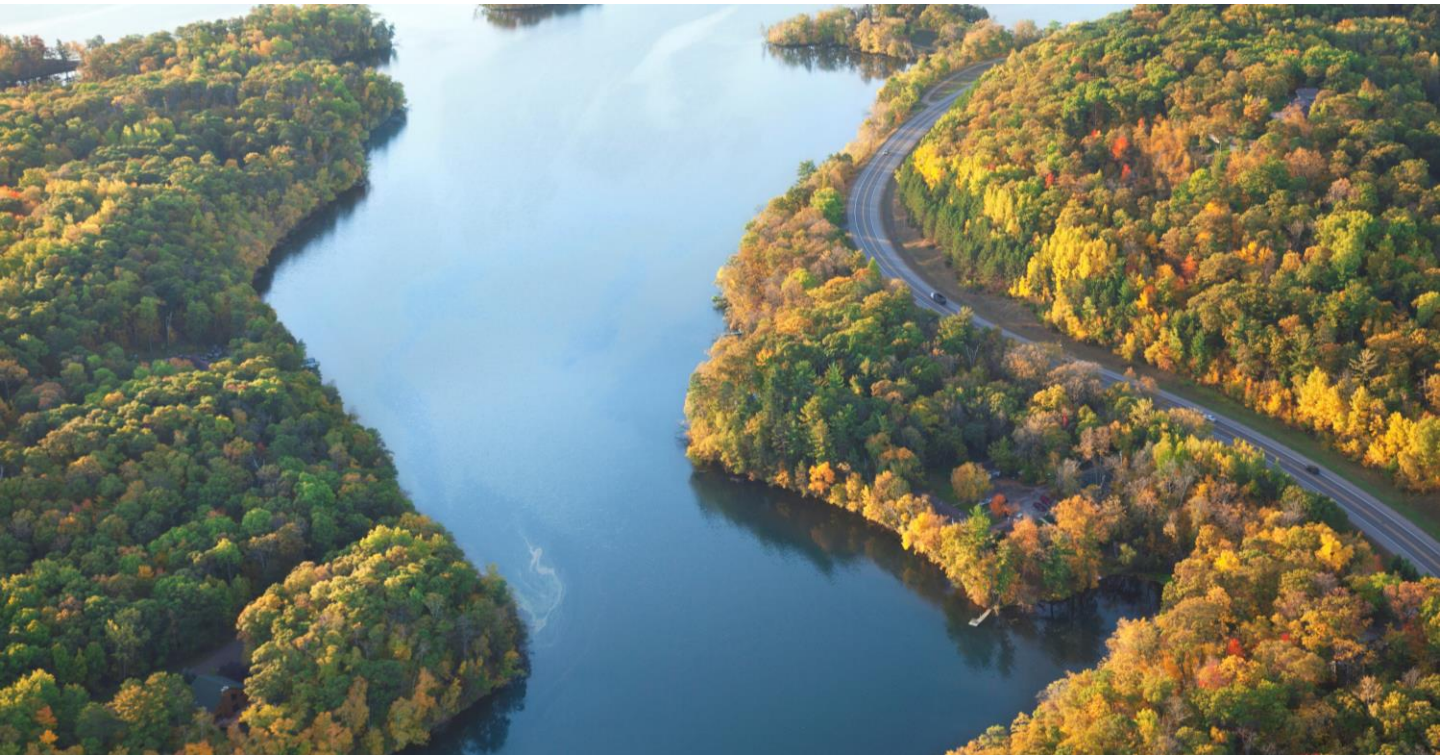
- Biodiversity depends on water-related ecosystems. The targets for biodiversity include protection of 30% of land, water and seas by 2030, and the restoration of 30% of inland waters by 2030. Green infrastructure can help meet the SDG #6 targets. Actions are needed from all sectors of society; we need transformative change in the way we manage our economies.
- The report and our actions require a gender-sensitive approach!! Two billion people lack access to clean drinking water; cross-sectoral partnerships need to address the profound inequality, disenfranchised and marginalized people.
- There is need for a strong evidence/science-based report, including traditional knowledge and local solutions. The Global Commission on the Economics of Water has good data on the value of water, required investments and budgets.
- New governance arrangements are needed, including the UN Water Envoy, serious monitoring and follow up to the outcomes/commitments from the UNWC.
- Women, indigenous people and youth need to be empowered in decision making.
- High tech solutions are not enough; innovative local solutions are needed that include diverse stakeholders
- The examples should inspire people with solutions that work, such as recharging aquifers, satellite data to predict drought, building on natural capital of wetlands, etc.





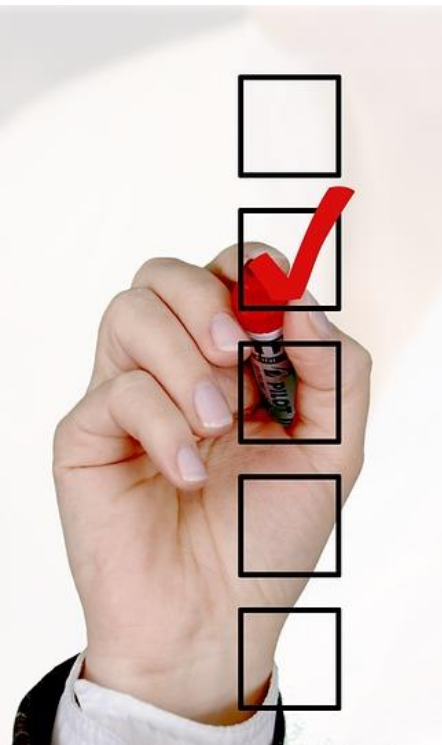
# CLOSING AND THE PATH AHEAD

The closing plenary consisted of messages from high-level UN officials and summaries of all the Interactive Dialogues. Secretary-General António Guterres thanked all who attended for their commitment to water for people and planet now and in the future. As humanity's most precious common good, water is about peace, sustainable development, fighting poverty, human rights and gender equality. In closing the historic summit, he urged everyone to turn the pledges into action. "All of humanity's hopes for the future depend, in some way, on charting a new course to sustainably manage and conserve water ... it needs to be at the center of the political agenda."



As a fundamental human right, access to water and sanitation require broader decision-making and smart policies, global information systems, and resilient infrastructure. As a follow up to the conference, he would appoint a Special Envoy on Water in advance of the September conference to consider progress on SDG #6. Water advocates at this conference have the full support of the UN System all along the way. We must recommit to our common future; the pledges to the water action agenda are at the core of that future.

President of the General Assembly Csaba Kőrösi noted that for 47 years, we have not focused on water – water, our planet and people. As the global water cycle is finally considered a global commons, we must acknowledge the value of water and not waste it for future generations and the planet. We must move away from irresponsible overexploitation now, so that ecosystems will not be further degraded. The Action Agenda has resulted in pledges of \$300 billion that could unlock over \$1 trillion in investments in water and sanitation. Civil society and the private sector are the key to success.



A more peaceful world is in our hands. We are game changers who can live up to the promise, based on:

- 1. Integrated water and climate policy**
- 2. Global information systems for water and climate**
- 3. Early warning systems for all**
- 4. Overcoming dependence on meeting rising water demands**
- 5. Redesigning financing – new economics of water**
- 6. Global water education network**
- 7. Inclusive comprehensive transboundary convention**
- 8. Institutional architecture under the UN: a water envoy and reformed UN-Water**

We must start the new transformation together; it is a watershed moment.

Talks at the UN Water Conference ended with a broad agreement that water should be treated as a global common good and a fundamental human right, and that the world's approach to water management should be more holistic, given its connection with energy, climate, food, gender equality and national security.

The important voices of indigenous people, women and youth, in addition to governments, the private sector and civil society organizations need to be recognized.





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