

SUMMARY OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY OPEN WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

WATER AND SANITATION (OWG Meeting of 24 May 2013)

KEYNOTE ADDRESS AND PANEL PRESENTATIONS:

On Thursday afternoon, the OWG began consideration of water and sanitation issues and heard a keynote address from Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General, World Meteorological Organization, and Chair of UN-Water, via videolink. Jarraud was joined by Rabi Mohtar, Executive Director of Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute, and Letitia Obeng, International Water Management Institute Board Member, as panelists to discuss these issues.

In his address, Jarraud reaffirmed the recognition in the Rio+20 outcome document that water is at the core of sustainable development. Stating that the MDG target for improved access to drinking water is expected to be achieved, he said the human rights dimension of this target and the target on access to sanitation are not yet realized. Jarraud highlighted issues of inequalities in access to sanitation and water sources and the need to reach the groups who suffer the most from lack of access, including women and girls. He said the benefits of water related investments have been shown to far outweigh the costs.

Proposing movement from a sectoral approach to water issues to a nexus approach, he presented two options for the SDGs, either one stand-alone goal on water or the inclusion of water targets under multiple thematic goals. Jarraud highlighted four points regarding the role of water in the SDGs: strong support for future action on water; actions must be bold and go beyond sectoral approaches; goals should be ambitious and inspired; and targets need to be realistic, achievable and measurable. He concluded his remarks stating “water issues should never be watered down.”

Jarraud responded to a question about the possible need for two sets of targets, one for unfinished business of the MDGs and one for new challenges, by agreeing that business is not finished in some areas and stressing that goals must be broadly focused. In response to a question on the availability of water, he said freshwater supplies in many areas come from glaciers, which are disappearing. He emphasized the impacts of climate change on patterns of rainfall, the hydrological cycle, and water availability. In response to a question on climate change and water scarcity, he said both mitigation and adaptation have impacts on water availability and management. However, the scientific information needed by governments to take informed decisions in these two areas is not currently available in most countries. To this end, he said the UN system is launching a major initiative to make this information available. Jarraud brought delegates’ attention to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) scientific report to be produced in September, which will prominently feature water issues and projections.

In response to a question about establishing intermediate targets, Jarraud said that such targets would help to keep track of progress. He also highlighted the need to include the environmental dimension of water issues in the discussion. Jarraud said, responding to a question on institutional arrangements, that UN-Water is addressing actions to be taken at the UN level and noted the “question of scale” in how government actions interact with actions by local communities. Several participants raised concerns regarding the use of the term “water security.” Jarraud said the term refers to ensuring, as a fundamental human right, access to safe drinking water and sanitation. He said UN-Water would learn from this discussion and work on a better formulation of the term.

In his presentation, Rabi Mohtar outlined the future “head-on crash” in which the world will require 40% more water and 40% additional energy by 2030, while facing reduced precipitation. He said the water-energy-food nexus can provide a solution and outlined his work on a “decision-support system” that allows policymakers to quantify the interconnected impacts of their decisions. His recommendations to the scientific community include: identify and quantify inter-linkages of the water-energy-food system; establish a Water Knowledge Hub to make data available; and establish “water value” as an economic, social and political good. He also made recommendations to policymakers, including that: there should be “no fuel from food;” the past is no longer a good indicator for the future, given climate change and “non-stationarity”; all stakeholders, including farmers, should be included in water discussions; intergovernmental structures for water management should be created; nexus friendly technologies should be promoted; and water trade must be regulated.

Mohtar responded to a comment on multi-scale issues in the water-energy-food nexus, saying it is important that individuals and the private sector have greater awareness and acceptability of the nexus. In response to criticisms about his statement that there should be “no fuel from food,” he said while he was proposing that no food be turned into fuel, he is not against biofuels in general. He suggested that working together to convert waste into energy is a better path for water conservation than turning food into energy.

In response to a question on future needs, he said a 40% increase in water will be necessary to satisfy food, industrial and domestic demands over the next 15 years. Mohtar agreed with one delegate’s statement on the importance of local issues and knowledge. He emphasized that many assumptions and predictions coming from scientific models are not completely reliable, and that policies should be created that are risk-robust and can manage future changes. In response to a question on his “decision-support system,” Mohtar said it has identified arable land availability as a bottleneck for food security in Qatar, meaning there is a need to reclaim more land before food security can be increased.

In response to a comment on the meaning of “water value,” Mohtar said privatizing water can be disastrous, and that the “delicate social, political and economic problem” of balancing pricing with accessibility must be solved at the local level. He said privatization of water has been disastrous in several situations and also stressed the importance of balancing pricing with accessibility, calling this a “delicate social, political and economic problem.” Mohtar’s final message was a call for better linkages and dialogue between the scientific community and policy-makers, so that important scientific knowledge can be made more relevant to policy.

In her presentation, Letitia Obeng highlighted three themes: learning lessons from the MDG experience; describing challenges the world is facing going forward; and recommendations for a stand-alone SDG on water. She described the health impacts of poor sanitation, including the stunting of children, stressing the integral nature of water as a basis for achieving other development goals. She noted missed opportunities in achieving the MDGs due to the “siloed” approach that was taken and continual “re-inventing of the wheel” to address issues, which could have been avoided through coordinated efforts and leadership. She discussed future challenges of a growing global population, increasing urbanization, climate change, and leadership in addressing the multiplicity of water-related demands. Obeng underscored the need for a stand-alone SDG with targets focusing on: sanitation, water supply and hygiene; pollution and wastewater management; integrated management of water resources across basins; and water-related disasters.

Responding to questions on the nature of “water security,” Obeng said the term refers to: human security ensuring health, livelihoods, sanitation with safe, sufficient and affordable drinking water; protecting ecosystems; water for socioeconomic development; and wastewater treatment and re-use. On whether water is solely a developing country issue, she said the sustainable management of water resources is an issue for all states, especially with regard to water pollution and supply. In response to a question on a possible stand-alone goal on sanitation, Obeng said it will not be practical long-term or from a broad water security perspective because sanitation will soon become more complicated than “just putting waste into a pit.” She agreed on the importance of pricing and other economic issues. Obeng said that the present discussion of SDGs with global indicators does not prescribe or preclude action at the global level or pose a challenge to national decision making.

Obeng expressed her happiness that a stand-alone goal for water with targets for sanitation was being considered. However, she emphasized that the achievement of such goals and targets will depend on leadership and political will and urged national governments to prioritize these issues.

Participants also raised questions on the commodification of water, the role of ecosystems for maintaining the quantity and quality of water, integrated water resource management (IWRM), implementing the right to water, means of implementation, women’s sanitation and hygiene, regional and inter-sectoral trade-offs, and the use of economic tools. Questions were also asked about translating the water-food-energy-health nexus into the goal system and linking them to poverty, good governance and security, and national planning processes. They also posed questions on searching for new water and energy sources, possible targets for “water security,” and addressing water-related disasters.

INTERACTIVE EXCHANGE OF VIEWS:

On Friday morning and afternoon, participants engaged in a general interactive exchange of views on water and sanitation.

Cape Verde, on behalf of the **African Group**, said that in addition to having a global goal on water for the SDG framework, it is important to consider water’s inter-linkages to other areas. He suggested including the

following issues in the formulation of the SDGs: water quantity, access, and quality; an improved governance framework for water; institutional capacity and financing; infrastructure and technology development; and coordination. Stressing the need to involve the private sector, he said investments in water and sanitation lack appropriate attention and that the SDG framework should rectify this shortcoming.

Benin, on behalf of **the LDCs**, said water and sanitation are basic human needs, but access to both in LDCs is well below global averages. He highlighted the need for better infrastructure for wastewater management, while stressing that future water demand will come from areas already suffering from water scarcity. He recommended, *inter alia*: aiming for the IPOA target of sanitation and water access for all by 2020; special development assistance for LDCs; investment targets for water and sanitation; technological support and transfer; South-South cooperation for management of water issues; and capacity building of local institutions for water service delivery.

Barbados, on behalf of **CARICOM**, said poverty reduction will not be possible without examining its interconnectivity with water and sanitation. In using water and sanitation to advance economic growth, she stressed the need for balance with non-degradation of the environment. As SIDS, she said, many members of her group face particular strains on water resources, which she attributed to climate change and associated sea-level rise, coastal tourism, and waste management.

The EU said it is open to either one goal on water and sanitation with several targets, or the integration of such targets into broader goals. He called for considering water and sanitation from three angles: access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for all; sustainable management of water resources; and equity, equality and justice. He noted the EU's commitment to the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, called for enhanced water cooperation across borders, and for creating an environment conducive to private sector investment.

Papua New Guinea, also on behalf of **Nauru, Palau and other PSIDS**, said the PSIDS as a group are not on track to meet many of the water and sanitation targets under the MDGs. The obstacles faced in these countries are increasingly a reality worldwide, he said, and serve as a stark reminder of the future. Papua New Guinea added that in PSIDS, water and sanitation are directly correlated to the health and productivity of the oceans. He said the SDGs should address the root causes of water insecurity through climate change mitigation and adaptation, technology transfer, good governance and rule of law, and sustainable consumption and production.

Finland, on behalf of the **Group of Friends of Water**, said an SDG on water must incorporate all aspects of sustainable development. He said we can no longer afford to focus only on aggregate outcomes, urging that goals, targets and indicators be framed to reduce inequalities and target the most disadvantaged. He added that the rights of women and children, who are most affected by water and sanitation issues, must be secured in the sustainable development agenda. He said data collection and monitoring will be crucial. Finland noted challenges with technology transfer, and said "we need a reality check" on the need for private sector involvement, as governments cannot solve these problems alone.

Benin, on behalf of the Economic Community of West African States (**ECOWAS**), said the water and sanitation situation remains alarming in West Africa. He argued that drinking water supply should be an SDG because while the number of people in Africa with access to improved drinking water has increased, it is not sufficient to achieve the MDG target. He also noted that water can be a source of life and income, as well as potential conflict.

Bulgaria, also on behalf of **Croatia**, stressed that water and sanitation are essential to sustainable development and deserve a separate SDG with targets. He discussed how water and sanitation issues are related to the economic, social development and environmental protection dimensions of sustainable development. Emphasizing the need for a rights-based approach, he said improving access to water and sanitation is needed to achieve health, education, poverty, hunger and maternal health goals. He urged an integrated approach and universal access to water and sanitation and strengthened resources management that respects the environment.

Germany stated that the achievement of water goals is integral to meeting development targets in all water-dependent sectors, and stressed that water and sanitation must be embedded in the SDGs. Noting that water cooperation contributes to peace and security, he recommended SDG targets aiming to achieve: equitable and universal access and respect for the human right to water and sanitation; an integrated approach that satisfies human needs while respecting ecosystem requirements; collection and treatment of all used water; and pollution

prevention. He said linkages between water and sanitation, poverty, good governance, health, energy, and the environment should be recognized in the SDG architecture, and cooperation and partnerships are necessary.

Italy, also on behalf of **Spain and Turkey**, said access to basic water and sanitation is essential for lasting peace and necessary for human survival. Noting that availability of and access to water and sanitation should be considered as basic human rights, he said a fragmented approach is not viable and that a holistic, integrated multidisciplinary effort is needed. He stressed the need for: urgent action to prevent floods and drought and to adapt to climate change; IWRM; planning of water infrastructures and IWRM for urban development; policy and management reforms for the sustainable use of water in agriculture; improved transboundary water management; and a water agenda that is broad, integrated and human-centered.

Slovenia, also on behalf of **Montenegro**, outlined water's importance as an environmental factor, an economic resource, an influence on human health and well-being, and an element of international cooperation. He said the SDGs must also address root causes of water stress, including overuse, pollution, poor management and climate change. Stressing the need to leave behind a "silo approach" to considering water, he proposed creating a comprehensive SDG on water and incorporating water into other SDGs as well.

Poland, also on behalf of **Romania**, highlighted the need to enhance water productivity, take an integrated approach to water resources, adopt sustainable consumption and production, improve global freshwater quality, and adopt coordinated policies at all levels in order to achieve poverty eradication and universal human development. She said an SDG on water issues should address the access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and its development and human needs dimensions.

Kazakhstan, also on behalf of **Indonesia and China**, said the SDGs should set in place mechanisms to ensure efficient water management at all levels, and innovative, inclusive, and sustainable financing. He stated that SDGs should focus on: targets for safe drinking water and sanitation; water resource management and water efficiency; targets for water quality; and means of implementation, including finance, technology transfer, and capacity building.

Nicaragua, also on behalf of **Brazil**, highlighted the human right to water and sanitation, along with respect for national sovereignty and international law. He urged identification of concrete measures to benefit vulnerable groups, and said gender inequality must be addressed. He noted agriculture and renewable energy as other areas where water is essential, stating that SDGs should stimulate the use of hydrological energy. He added that Nicaragua prefers the term "water cooperation" over "water security," which is not internationally agreed. Finally, he said developing countries need financing to achieve agreed goals.

The Netherlands recalled that this year's World Water Day and the High-level Consultation on Water in the Post-2015 Development Agenda had recommended an ambitious, self-standing goal on water security for all, with targets to address sanitation and other unfinished business, as well as future challenges. Illustrating the reality of scarce resources, she said if there is not enough water, then we do not have enough energy; and then there will not be enough growth and, in turn, we cannot eliminate poverty. She said we need to pursue equitable growth using less water.

Denmark proposed creating an ambitious goal and specific targets incorporating all three dimensions of sustainable development, with targets that are "SMART" (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely) and address gaps in the MDGs. He also called for more work on inter-linkages, said the future framework should strengthen rights, urged better involvement of women in planning and infrastructure, and suggested widening the scope of water beyond water and sanitation to also include water management, quality, pollution and other aspects.

United Arab Emirates, also on behalf of **Cyprus and Singapore**, suggested three areas for possible goals, targets or indicators: access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation; IWRM, including groundwater management; and improved water use. He also suggested using the water-energy-food nexus moving forward. He called for building on MDG 7 and taking it further as an "absolute minimum."

Bolivia, also on behalf of **Ecuador and Argentina**, said poor service coverage of potable water and sanitation has dangerous impacts on hunger and health. He said an SDG on "water security" would take away important content from water issues, and suggested the term "water sustainability" instead. He warned that privatization of water and sanitation services generate conflict and is not a solution to water access.

Colombia, also on behalf of **Guatemala**, advocated a modular approach to structuring the SDG goals and targets. She said this approach would strengthen inter-linkages by incorporating crosscutting targets under various relevant goals. She explained that in this way targets under one goal may be also slotted under other goals as well. Colombia also stressed the need for a cooperative and holistic approach to shared waters.

Canada stressed the need for holistic strategies and urged consideration of inter-linkages, causal relationships between issues, and the overarching themes arising from the OWG's discussions. Stating the need to prioritize issues, he suggested focusing on those with the greatest possible development impact. He also noted the need for better data and metrics, the importance of partnerships, and taking account of local and regional dimensions.

Japan said water is the core of sustainable development and noted the lag in achievement of the MDG sanitation target. Stating that the SDGs should not duplicate work being done in other UN fora, he highlighted the need to address IWRM, water quality and treatment and reuse, and sanitation. He endorsed the use of SMART indicators.

Bangladesh emphasized that "water is life" and noted the wide range of water issues and the misuse and mismanagement of water in the past. He described future water challenges, the need for a holistic approach, the importance of managing water sustainably and the need for universal access. He highlighted the role of joint river basin management for shared waters and the importance of addressing the ecological and economic aspects of water through IWRM and water-use efficiency measures.

Republic of Korea emphasized the need for targets addressing: universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene; improved IWRM and water use; and wastewater management and pollution prevention. He also stressed the need for addressing inequalities with concrete targets and the disaggregation of data, such as by gender.

Nepal said an integrated approach to goals and targets on water should take into account emerging and future challenges and uncertainties, while also allowing flexibility for regional and national contexts. He stressed that water quality and pollution, including the use of agricultural pesticides, should be addressed.

Egypt emphasized that the discussion on the SDGs should be guided by the scope given to water issues by the Rio+20 outcome document. He highlighted dangers of the commodification and pollution of water. Stressing that water related SDGs should focus on means of implementation, he also mentioned the importance of technology transfer and infrastructure creation to close gaps between countries.

France said water should be anchored in global commitments to human rights, combating climate change, gender issues, sustainable development, and combating natural disasters. On the concept of "water security," he said securing universal access to water is fully understandable and essential, and that water security and integrated basin management are important to increase productivity.

The Holy See called for recognition of the universal right to safe drinking water and sanitation, which countries have been slow to reaffirm over the past decade. Believing that a rights based approach is necessary to "meet our personal, political, and social obligations," he said water is not an unlimited resource and it constitutes a system that belongs to all.

Ethiopia stressed that linkages must be made between water and poverty eradication, agriculture, food security and nutrition, drought, health and access to energy. She advocated for water resource management and establishing long-term transboundary cooperation.

Palestine said a special goal on water is a "vital and important issue," and everyone should work together so this goal can be simple and achievable. He also emphasized the need to respect the permanent sovereignty of people over their natural resources.

The Business and Industry Major Group underscored that water is extremely important for business, noting that "without water there is no business and without business, communities will not function." Noting recent surveys indicating the high priority that business gives to water issues, he emphasized the need for a specific goal on water and sanitation.

The Local Authorities Major Group noted that the local dimension had been addressed often during the session, highlighting the role of local communities. She stressed the importance of integrated water planning in

cities, underlining the need to enhance the capacities of cities to do so, and emphasized both the need for data and standardized methodologies for collecting it.

Venezuela stated that water is a social good and warned against its commercialization. He said water is not an instrument for making money, but one for peace, life and cooperation.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

On Friday afternoon, Co-Chair Körösi presented a summary of the discussions during the session. Noting the active and informed engagement of participants, Körösi said the positive atmosphere during the session was encouraging, with participants exploring challenges, jointly identifying inter-linkages, collectively determining and prioritizing issues, and listening to one another. The Co-Chairs circulated a one-page summary of general points made at the meeting as an *aide-memoire*, and Körösi said that a more detailed summary of the meeting and a running list of proposals for goals, targets and indicators would be available soon. He emphasized that the running list would be a living document, issued in the Co-Chairs' name. Körösi stressed the need for a common vision going forward aiming for transformational change to address poverty eradication and human development for present and future generations. He remarked on the presence of a general feeling that the SDGs must be human-centered and transformative, and must build on and go beyond the MDGs.

Körösi summarized key points raised during the meeting. On food security and nutrition, sustainable agriculture and DLDD, he noted interventions recognizing the inter-linkages between food, land and water and also other development goals. He underlined calls to address nutrition needs, increased agricultural productivity and investment in agriculture. Körösi also noted interventions focusing on the need to support small-scale farmers, women, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, and fishers. He underscored calls for action to address food price volatility and the elimination of agricultural subsidies in developed countries. Körösi also recalled interventions about the causes of land degradation and the need for land restoration and a land degradation neutral world.

On water and sanitation issues, Körösi underlined calls for universal access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. He noted interventions on the use of a rights-based approach, as water and sanitation issues are generally recognized as fundamental human rights. He summarized findings on the inter-linkages and importance of water and sanitation for the attainment of many development goals, including health, child mortality, economic growth, and poverty eradication. He noted the need to address: water access, quality and quantity; improved water governance; better infrastructure and technology; and improved water efficiency. Körösi also highlighted calls for improved preparedness for natural disasters, the need for investment, access to appropriate technologies for water treatment, recycling and re-use, and the need for IWRM and consideration of environmental requirements.

In a concluding discussion following the presentation of the Co-Chairs' summary, delegates commented on the need for future discussion about: means of implementation, including in issue briefs and panel presentations; indicators, baselines, and data generation; goal universality and the responsibilities of developed countries; the issues of industrialization, science, and technology; and structural impediments to development. Nikhil Seth, Director, Division for Sustainable Development, DESA, urged delegates to become involved in the "myriad of activities" generated by the Rio+20 process, in addition to the OWG. One participant suggested that states send the Co-Chairs a list of their priorities regarding the selected themes before each session in order to shape discussions, and asked that panelists circulate their materials to participants beforehand, if their presentations differ from the TST's technical notes. One delegate asked that the TST include proposals related to means of implementation in their technical notes, and several delegates voiced the need for more panelists from developing countries.

Co-Chair Kamau offered his own reactions to delegates' calls for more discussion of means of implementation and financing issues, stressing that it is up to Member States to bring these topics into the debate. He called for specific proposals on how the SDGs can be funded and implemented, for example, through either taxation or market instruments, and said the challenge for Member States is to create a new model of implementation based on equity, universality, and common but differentiated responsibilities.