

I wish to thank the President of the General Assembly and the organizers for the today's meeting that promises a creative and transformative debate.

I'd like to draw your attention to a risk we all face with global water governance.

Yes, we all agree, there are *still* far too many people suffering without basic access to water. This concern is not new. But the world and the challenges we face collectively today are *very* different than the past. The risk is that we tackle today's challenges with yesterday's mindset.

This is the time for a **game-changing shift of mindsets**: for all of us all to *Spare Water* and to *Share Water* – for **peace**.

Peace of course is not just the absence of conflict, it is the conditions under which people can thrive and innovate, with pride and justice. As the Global High Level Panel of Water and Peace elaborated in its *A Matter of Survival* report in 2017: water must be recognized as a “fundamental condition of human survival and dignity.”

For this level of aspiration, the case I will make is that we need to:

- Provide better protection to water,
- Ensure *equitable* water sharing;
- Strengthen existing architecture; and
- Champion the message to spare and share water – for peace –at every turn.

#### SPARING WATER FOR PEACE

*Sparing water* is about doing something for all those who, quite frankly, we *have* left behind – including that huge group of people who *live under protracted armed conflict* and sanctions. The situations are painfully familiar and are repeating themselves in most contemporary armed conflicts: Attacks on basic infrastructure, and on water resources, create reverberating effects: Power goes out, water and wastewater plants degrade, sewage mixes with water and water borne diseases spread like wildfire causing death, in particular among children. The trapped civilian populations suffer immensely.

If we are serious about the Human Right to Water applying to everyone, we've got to make sure it applies to people living in these situations, too. What this means is that **water systems and water resources must have the same level of protection as health facilities, and schools.**

## SHARING WATER FOR PEACE

The second shift in minds we have to ensure, if March 2023 is to be genuinely progressive, is all about *sharing water*.

With stress on water driven by intensifying agriculture, unchecked consumption, unregulated pumping, and, importantly, by the changes in the global hydrological cycle, the stakes are rising. What becomes a pumping 'race to the bottom' within the borders of a country takes a dangerously competitive turn, when the aquifer or river crosses borders.

"Token" cooperation is not good enough in these situations. Of course, we need to cooperate to *survive*; but to *thrive*, to have peace, we need to team up and think of others beyond our borders. Meaning **national projects, such as dam-building, match with global (or regional) commons.** .

## ARCHITECTURE

How do we do all this? Well, we have to strengthen those pillars of existing architecture which are effective, and push for implementation. The states and international institutions have to use the instruments of international water law effectively. Action on **sparing and sharing water for peace must be nestled in regional economic commissions**, of the United Nations to support the work of local, regional and river basin level institutions.

To Spare water from war, states must implement the Laws of Armed Conflict and the progressive vehicles taking it forward, notably the Geneva Principles on the Protection of Infrastructure, UN Security Council 2573, the Protection of the Environment in Relations to Armed Conflicts, and so on. We will have to encourage their implementation based on listening to the voices of the first concerned populations, the victims of armed conflicts.

The principles of international water law may not be perfect for sharing water in all situations, but are a useful guide. Without a guide, the outcome of the tensions is predictably tense and short-sighted; the goal becomes token cooperation. But for, obliging cooperation and crystallizing dialogue, the water conventions get our vote as functioning institutions that all states and diplomats should commit to.

Additional instruments should be developed as well. The Global Water Information System, for example, will certainly help here, too, by making it all more transparent and better understood.

## CHAMPIONS / CONCLUSION

We hope the UN Special Envoy for Water will be appointed soon, and will take all of this

to heart.

This is because **we need Water and Peace champions. Some of them work at the regional level**, like Hummat al Dijlah along the Tigris, or Pole Eau Dakar along the Senegal. We need *more* thematic and regional Observatories pushing the ideas through – just like the Global Observatory on Water and Peace. In time, we may need to revive the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace. And we need these institutions speaking and institutionalized in other global architecture.

Ladies and gentlemen, it falls on us to shift our mindsets towards these fundamental issues of dignity and survival. I'll just finish by repeating that, we must

- give water the same status as schools and hospital during war
- think beyond our borders equitable water sharing;
- strengthen existing architecture; and
- make 'water for peace' a contagious idea, through champions – like all of you in this room, and all *outside* the water sector, too.