



## 22nd Meeting of the Group of Friends on Water and Peace

### *Water Bankruptcy and its Implications for Cooperation and Peace*

The **22nd Meeting of the Group of Friends on Water and Peace** will focus on the implications of the flagship report *Global Water Bankruptcy: Living Beyond Our Hydrological Means in the Post-Crisis Era*, published by UNU-INWEH in January 2026. The report states that the world has entered the era of “**water bankruptcy**”, a persistent post-crisis condition in which long-term water use has exceeded renewable inflows and safe depletion limits, degrading water systems beyond realistic recovery. Decades of overuse, pollution, land degradation, and climate change have pushed many river basins and aquifers past their capacity to be restored without disproportionate social, economic, or environmental costs. Beyond technical challenges, water bankruptcy has profound **social, political, and peace-related implications**. As availability declines and ecosystems degrade, societies face difficult decisions on allocation, rights, and responsibilities. Without equitable governance, adjustment burdens often fall on smallholder farmers, rural and Indigenous communities, informal urban residents, women, youth, and downstream users, creating risks that can exacerbate fragility, displacement, and tensions. At the same time, water can be a **powerful entry point for cooperation and peacebuilding**, requiring inclusive governance, international cooperation, and collective action to balance human use with ecosystem limits.

The coming years present key **milestones for global water governance**. The 2026 and 2028 UN Water Conferences, the conclusion of the Water Action Decade (2018–2028), and the 2030 SDG deadline offer a timely opportunity to elevate water in international policy, strengthen its role as a driver of cooperation and peace, and link water governance with stability, climate resilience, food security, and sustainable development.

Against this backdrop, the meeting will introduce the concept of water bankruptcy to **International Geneva** and **explore its implications for peace, stability, and multilateral cooperation**. It will feature a presentation by **Prof. Kaveh Madani, Director of UNU-INWEH and lead author of the report**, followed by reflections from experts, UN representatives, and Member States.

#### **Guiding Questions:**

- What are the implications of “global water bankruptcy” for peace and stability, particularly in regions where water stress intersects with fragility and inequality?
- How can cooperation help address water bankruptcy while reducing tensions and supporting peace?
- How can upcoming milestones, such as the 2026 UN Water Conference, help elevate water as a driver of cooperation and peace in global policy processes?

