



Statement by President Jacob Zuma on behalf of the High Level Panel on Water on the occasion of United Nations World Water Day 2017, Durban, South Africa

22 March 2017

The Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Mr Willies Mchunu,

Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers from South Africa and other member states,

The President of the African Development Bank,

Representatives of UN Water and Women for Water Partnership and all international agencies,

Members of the Diplomatic corps,

Esteemed delegates and guests,

It is my honour to address you today, on World Water Day, on behalf of the United Nations World Water Assessment Programme's High Level Panel on Water.

The High Level Panel is co-chaired by United Nations Secretary-General, Mr António Guterres and the President of the World Bank Group, Dr Jim Yong Kim.

The Panel seeks to inspire world leaders to provide political leadership and to galvanise support to accelerate the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, in particular, SDG 6 on Water and Sanitation.

Today is a special occasion, marking World Water Day 2017 and also the launch of the 2017 World Water Development Report.

This key report is aimed at drawing attention to the current dismal global status of water and sanitation and to inspire commitment to an urgent "Call for Action" by world leaders to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,



The bleak global picture presented in the 2017 World Water Development Report requires world leaders to urgently prioritise the improvement of access to essential water and sanitation services.

Thus far, one hundred and forty seven countries have met the SDG drinking water target. Ninety five countries have met the sanitation target and only seventy seven countries have met both.

These statistics do not do justice in conveying the development and health challenges faced by so many people, or in contextualising how unevenly these basic services are distributed around the world and within societies.

For example, it was reported that, in 2011, nearly 60 per cent of the world's one billion extremely poor people lived in just five countries.

It seems that little has changed since 2011.

Looking ahead, this unacceptable situation will only get worse, unless we join forces around the world to create equal chances for success at all levels in our race against time to secure the most precious resource of freshwater, for current and future generations.

The United Nations Commission on Population and Development estimates that the global population, which currently stands at about 7.3 billion people, may grow to 9.7 billion by the year 2050, with as many as 3.1 billion additional residents of urban areas.

The largest increase in population is expected to happen here in Africa, followed by Asia. |

These are already amongst the region's most adversely affected by water and sanitation problems.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,



Whilst vividly presenting the distressing situation the international community currently finds itself in with regard to water and sanitation, the Report and its Call for Action also sends a message of hope.

We have the potential to create a new and more positive economic and social developmental pathway through, amongst others, water infrastructure investments, valuing water, catalysing change, building partnerships and international cooperation, as well as creating better human settlements and data.

We have the United Nations 2030 Agenda to point the way. Here in Africa we have an even longer term and complementary sustainable development strategy in the form of the African Union's 2063 Agenda.

We also have practical examples on how to make progress towards achieving more equal societies, such as the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy in the Water Sector advanced by the African Ministers Council on Water. We also have the 2015 East London Gender Declaration that guides the regional sector decisions on Water and Women, as led by the Women for Water Partnership Network.

On behalf of the High-Level Panel, I would like to welcome and acknowledge these strategic interventions.

I also wish to further highlight the leadership role that Africans are playing in correctly contextualising access to water and sanitation as a basic developmental right.

Here in South Africa we have even enshrined the basic right of all to sufficient food and water in our Constitution.

Much more still remains to be done to fulfil this right, both here in South Africa and across the world, reinforcing the enduring relevance of our South African saying that "Water is Life, Sanitation is Dignity".

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The commitment of the members of the High-Level Panel to the implementation of Agenda 2030 and SDG 6 remains unwavering.

We believe in providing a platform that is a living example of global collaborative action for a new approach to water management.



The Panel provides leadership with an inclusive agenda that leaves no one behind, taking into account the cross cutting nature and inter-dependence of water with the other Sustainable Development Goals and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities on which action on the Agenda 2030 is premised.

The willingness of developed countries to honour their commitments on means of implementation support is a fundamental requirement to enable developing countries to achieve the SDGs.

The Panel therefore calls upon all leaders to contribute more and to build on what they are already doing in their respective countries, such as by advocating and championing activities and actions in support of the implementation of SDG-6.

This includes the launching of so-called “light house initiatives” as best practice and models and the hosting of international and regional conferences to share information.

One of the key initiatives by the Panel, which is being launched today, is the "Access to Water and Sanitation Services for 10 Billion People Initiative".

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to invite all political leaders to support the Political Declaration that we will all adopt today, on World Water Day 2017.

We should all commit to achieving the pledge of “Leaving No One Behind” globally and in our respective countries and communities in support of SDG-6 on Water and Sanitation.

On this important day, it is befitting to recall the words of the Twentieth Century poet W.H. Auden who said:

"Thousands have lived without love, not one without water".



If we are to go by these words of wisdom, let us all take action and spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to declare this summit open and to officially launch the 2017 World Water Development Report.

I thank you.

Issued The Presidency

Pretoria