

The Third UN Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters  
Draft Chair's Summary

July 20th, 2017

United Nations Headquarters

The Third UN Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters was held on July 20th, 2017 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The meeting was organized by Dr. Han Seung-soo, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and Water, and the High-level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters (HELP), and was co-organized by UN-WB High Level Panel on Water (HLPW).

The Opening Plenary of the session was attended by H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the 71<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. János Áder, President of Hungary, H.E. Mrs. Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, President of the Republic of Mauritius, H.E. Mr. Henry Van Thio, Vice President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, H.E. Mr. Toshihiro Nikai, Secretary General of Liberal Democratic Party and representative of Prime Minister of Japan, and a video keynote lecture by His Imperial Highness Crown Prince of Japan was delivered.

The opening plenary was followed by the High Level Panel Discussion chaired by H.E. Ms. Melanie Schultz van Haegen, Minister of Infrastructure and Environment, Kingdom of the Netherlands and Vice Chair of HELP, and the Special Session on Science and Technology, and the Panel Discussion on “Connecting Ocean, Water and Disasters”. The session was attended by ministers and high-level representatives of member states, executives of intergovernmental organizations, experts and staff members of the member missions, observers, and invited experts from academia, civil society and other stakeholders to discuss and determine priority actions needed to address the issue of “water and disasters” and provide a concrete step forward towards implementation of globally agreed agendas.

**Experiences, Lessons and Challenges**

Recognizing that addressing the issue of “water and disasters” is critical element and the core of achieving sustainable development, the participants of the Special Thematic

Session shared the following recognitions and understanding.

- Water-related disasters account for 90% of all natural disasters around the world. Water-related disasters are increasing in both frequency and severity, and water-related disaster losses are expected to increase with a changing climate, increased population and development. These changes are already taking place and the world is ill-prepared to respond to these increasing risks.
- Water-related disasters are often impacting those countries least equipped to deal with them, and are affecting food production, deteriorating environment, causing health problems, and triggering conflicts and migration.
- Without effectively addressing the issue of water and disasters, years of development can be undone in a day, and without sustainably managed access to water resources, the development goals are put in great jeopardy. The world needs to proceed beyond emergency response. Urgent and scaled-up preventative action against water-related disaster risk is needed.
- Investing in water and disasters not only prevents human and economic losses when a disaster strikes, but also stimulates economic activities, increases productivity, and ensures fiscal stability. It can become a driver for innovation. Investment in water and disasters pays off, and should be considered as an investment for our future.

### **Recommendations and Commitments**

The participants of the session made the following recommendations and commitments.

1. Considering the current and expected trend of increasing economic losses and impacts on societies due to water-related disasters, financing and investment in water-related disaster risk reduction should be doubled within the next 5 years, in order to:

- prevent recurrently occurring water-related disaster damages and build back better
- catch up with increasing water-related disasters risks due to climate change, urbanization and environmental degradation
- build disaster-free cities and countries as a foundation of sustainable economic and social development

2. Increased water resilience stimulates economic activities, increases productivity, and ensures fiscal stability. It makes a significant difference in achieving the national and

international goals of ending poverty and ensuring sustainable and equitable growth for all. Governance system, financing mechanisms, and capacities of member states to address water-related disasters should be enhanced.

3. Science community plays a pivotal role in bridging knowledge gaps among divergent actors, and in providing information and tools to facilitate timely decisions by decision makers. Science and technology on water-related disaster risk reduction should be advanced through promoting global cooperation among relevant entities and alliances, and should be made available for application to field practices around the world.

4. Ocean plays a vital role in the water cycle and the climate system. Water management also significantly impacts the ocean, its ecology and marine resources. The issues of ocean, water and disasters should be more closely connected, particularly in the context of exacerbating climate change.

5. Focused discussion on the issue of “water and disasters” like this Special Thematic Session should continue in the future in order to maintain high level of awareness, to facilitate sharing of good practices, and to give member states the opportunity to learn from history and improve their policies, governance and activities on disaster risk reduction. Discussion on water and disasters should be regularized by organizing STSWD on regular basis.

6. Action plan on water and disasters should be incorporated into the Implementation Plan for the Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” to be produced by UN Secretary General in order to contribute towards successful implementation of the decade.

7. Water-related SDGs require moving on from targets and ambitions to implementation and action. More coherent approach to water-related issues should be enabled by creating a forum for intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder interventions, which could ensure more integrated and coordinated interventions and serve as a water hub to the High Level Political Forum.



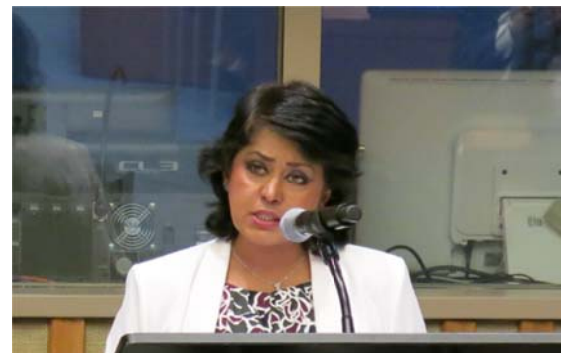
Dr. Han Seung-soo  
Chair of the Session, UN Special Envoy for Disaster  
Risk Reduction and Water, Former Prime Minister of  
the Republic of Korea



H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson  
President of the 71<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Assembly



H.E. Mr. János Áder  
President of Hungary



H.E. Mrs. Ameenah Gurib-Fakim  
President of the Republic of Mauritius



H.E. Mr. Henry Van Thio  
Vice President of the Republic of the Union of  
Myanmar



H.E. Mr. Toshihiro Nikai  
Secretary General of Liberal Democratic Party, Japan,  
representative of Prime Minister



Keynote Lecture by His Imperial Highness Naruhito  
the Crown Prince of Japan



Mr. Wu Hongbo  
Under Secretary-General



Opening Plenary



Opening Plenary



High Level Panel Discussion



Special Session on Science and Technology



Panel Discussion "Connecting Ocean, Water, and Disasters"



Wrap-up and Closing

### **Opening Plenary**

The chair, Dr. Han Seung-soo, opened the session by highlighting that investing in water and disasters not only prevents human and economic losses when a disaster strikes, but also stimulates economic activities, increases productivity, and ensures fiscal stability, thereby making a significant difference in achieving the national and international goals of ending poverty and ensuring sustainable and equitable growth for all. He stressed that investment in water and disasters pays off, and should be considered as an investment for our future. Dr. Han called for doubling global investment and financing for water-related disaster risk reduction within the next 5 years, in line with a call by HLPW to double overall financing for water, and asked the participants to discuss this proposal further in the session.

H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the UN General Assembly, reminded the participants that water related disasters often affect the most those countries least equipped to deal with them, and that ferocity of these events is increasing in both frequency and severity. He said it is clear that urgent and scaled-up preventative action is needed, and the Special Thematic Session is pivotal in that context. He highlighted the need to pursue integrated approaches to addressing water-related disasters, and to be sincere and take practical action in forming strategic partnerships among stakeholders, and provide adequate financing. He concluded by stressing that without effectively addressing water and disasters, years of development can be undone in a day, and without sustainably managed access to water resources, our development goals are put in great jeopardy.

H.E. Mr. János Áder, President of Hungary and Member of HLPW, said that floods and droughts are affecting food production, deteriorating environment, causing health problems, and triggering conflicts and migration, and are making global water crisis a reality. Mr. Áder joined Dr. Han in making several proposals, including the need to pay more attention to what scientists have to say, promoting active participation of sub-sovereign entities in the Paris Agreement and its implementation, and doubling investment in water in the next 5 years with at 1/3 of funds to be spent on water related resilience. He also highlighted the needs for appointing a central responsible organ for water related issues within the UN, and creating a forum for intergovernmental coordination to ensure more integrated and coordinated interventions, and bridging political decision making and actions on water-related challenges.

H.E. Mrs. Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, President of the Republic of Mauritius and Co-Chair of HLPW, highlighted that the quality of water infrastructure for flood defense and water shortage is becoming important especially in developing countries, and that solidarity among nations to learn, anticipate and prepare for disasters is a moral way forward. She stressed that investment is vital in addressing

the issue of water and water related disasters, and highlighted the need for the finance ministers and those responsible for economic planning to recognize the urgent need. She said that in every challenge, there is opportunity, and disaster risk reduction can become a driver of innovation.

H.E. Mr. Henry Van Thio, Vice President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, stressed that continuation of a global dialogue to effectively address the issue of water and disasters is vital. Mr. Van Thio introduced some of the recent efforts and progress undertaken by the government of Myanmar in addressing water and disaster related challenges, and highlighted the importance of all states to do their best in addressing on-going trends of climate and environmental changes. He stressed we must proceed beyond emergency response, and highlighted the need for financing resilience infrastructure, advancing capacity building of local communities and investing in preventive measures and in science and technology, which are a must for our better future.

H.E. Mr. Toshihiro Nikai, Secretary General of Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, representative of Prime Minister, stated that resilience against water related disasters is an urgent issue for human beings. Although we are seeing increasing number of disasters of unimaginable scale, politics should not be powerless. He stressed that we need to constantly self-examine and face the nature in humble attitude, and contemplate if we are doing enough. He further pledged to continue sharing Japan's experiences with the world, and to make every effort in working with people in the world to prevent further losses of lives due to water-related disasters and building stability and peace.

Keynote addresses were followed by the Keynote Lecture by His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Naruhito of Japan, which was delivered through video message. In his lecture titled "Working with Water", HIH Crown Prince Naruhito focused on how people have historically worked with water in order to reap benefits of water while reducing its threat, introducing examples from Japan, China, Oman, Mexico, and Malaysia. He highlighted the importance of observing water and nature around us, and harmonizing water, nature and human beings while learning and making use of experiences, lessons and science and technology.

Mr. Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, said that integrated implementation of water related SDGs is critical, and that world needs to transform the way it manages water resources. He said that the recent global agreements all call for addressing water related extreme events and climate change adaptation in more concerted and integrated way, and the newly adopted International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028" will help layout our roadmap for the coming years for advancing water related SDGs and targets.

### **High Level Panel Discussion**

The Panel Discussion was chaired by H.E. Ms. Melanie Schultz van Haegen, Minister of Infrastructure and Environment, Kingdom of the Netherlands and Vice Chair of HELP.

First, H.E. Mr. Nematullo Hikmatullozoda, Minister of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan, delivered his speech by introducing Tajikistan's experience in tackling the issue of water and disasters. He highlighted the importance of financing and investment for disaster risk reduction and furthering of science and technology, and called for creation of regional and international funds for disaster risk reduction and organization of comprehensive research studies that would benefit all countries. He stated that the new international decade for action also considers the issue of interrelation between water and natural disasters as one of the important components of sustainable water resources management, and that the outcome of this session will contribute to the promotion of the objectives of the international decade.

H.E. Ms. Melanie Schultz van Haegen drew particular attention to the theme of migration, and stated that lack of water security is becoming one of the main triggers for migration in the world, and also magnifies issues and intensifies conflicts. She highlighted the importance of moving on from targets and ambitions to implementation and action, and stressed the need for a more coherent approach to water-related SDGs and proposed setting up an intergovernmental multi-stakeholder UN water platform, which could become a water hub to the High Level Political Forum. She also highlighted the needs for making sure that water management and climate adaptation remain high on the international agenda, and filling the gap between government funding available and total funding required.

H.E. Dr. Win Myat Aye, Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and Vice Chairperson of the National Disaster Management Committee, Republic of the Union of Myanmar touched upon Myanmar's experience in water-related disasters, and its effort and progress including the establishment of national disaster management committee and national water resources management committee, as well as national action plan on DRR. He stated that Myanmar has boosted its investment in DRR and social protection sector together with development partners and private foundations, and is promoting integrated effort and resource mobilization. He emphasized the importance of ensuring community leadership and active engagement and cooperation of stakeholders, and highlighted the need for developing countries to build back better with support from international donors.

H.E. Mr. Mustafa Kamal, Honorable Planning Minister, People's Republic of Bangladesh,



introduced the efforts of Bangladesh in establishing robust framework and policy to fight against water-related disasters, and mainstreaming disaster risk management and embedding build back better concept in the infrastructure development. He said, given the magnitude of the climate risks of his country, particularly in the front of water related disasters, they require investments by global community in adaptation and mitigation efforts through all available windows, and urged the science community to create networks of ideas, knowledge and best practices for the benefit of the world.

H.E. Dr. Masafumi Mori, Vice Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT), Japan, introduced Japan's new policy "Re-building Flood-Conscious Society", which aims to create society-wide disaster preparedness for flood, and stressed that it is a vital mission of the central government to learn from the experience from a disaster and institutionalize the lesson to make the whole country more resilient. He also distributed the discussion paper for the "Principle of Investment and Financing for Water-related Disaster Risk Reduction" which is currently being considered as part of the flagship initiatives of HELP. He also proposed that the issue of "water and disasters" be discussed as part of the new water decade, and stated that Japan is ready to share its experiences and disaster preparedness culture with other disaster vulnerable countries and international community.

Lt. Gen. Todd T. Semonite, Commanding General of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), stated that a renewed focus on sustainability, resilience, and a much greater reliance on systems thinking and alternative financing has emerged in the recent years, introduced USACE's strategic planning framework, where sustainability and resilience is embedded in every planning, design, construction, operations & maintenance, and research & development activity. He said that USACE's holistic approach coupled with integrated water resources management could serve as a model for others. He also stated that although some challenges must be addressed for broader adoption, alternative financing including public private partnership is an area that merits further research. He concluded by highlighting that we all play a pivotal role in strengthening our respective nation's aging infrastructure and ensuring that our citizens are properly equipped to meet current and future emergencies.

Dr. Oyun Sanjaasuren, Chair of Global Water Partnership, stated that water is becoming a top risk and a main barrier for sustainable development, and we need to present robust solutions, not only in the water sector but also in other sectors including multi-stakeholders. She said that although we know that water-related disasters pose great risks and cause immense losses, we shouldn't assume that the whole world knows about it, and this type of high level panel has significance. She highlighted the importance of good water resources management, and introduced some of the

ongoing initiatives of GWP, including the flood and drought help desk. With respect to investment for water-related disaster risk reduction, she stressed the importance of understanding the cost of inaction.

Mr. Rolf Alter, Director of Governance and Regional Development of OECD, focused on the actions that need to be taken to address the issue of water and disasters. He said that delivery takes place mostly at non-central levels of the government, and suggested that these levels be given more attention. He also highlighted the importance of the evidence needed to ensure right decisions, and stressed the importance of good practices. He further stated that investment will be made where the conditions are right, and emphasized the need for reliable government as a partner. He called for more focus on learning from rich set of experiences of countries with particular focus on policy implementation.

H.E. Ms. Melanie Schultz van Haegen concluded the panel discussion by stating that despite diverse situations and different local country settings, there are common findings where we can learn from each other. She said that the outcome of the panel discussion will be submitted to the work of HELP, and will be discussed during the World Water Week to be held in Stockholm in August.

### **Special Session on Science and Technology**

The session was co-chaired by Professor Toshio Koike, Director, International Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management (ICHARM), and Prof. Gretchen Kalonji, Dean of Institute of Disaster Management and Reconstruction (IDMR), Sichuan University.

Firstly, Co-Chair Prof. Toshio Koike, Director, ICHARM, introduced what has been discussed so far on Science and Technology, and highlighted the three key directions identified in the Second UN Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters and the new strategy of International Flood Initiative (IFI). He further introduced the concept of the Platform on Water and Disaster, which is intended to promote integrated efforts in data archiving and risk assessment to contribute to policy-making and community of practice. The work is currently ongoing in four countries.

Professor Gretchen Kalonji, Dean, IDMR, Sichuan University, introduced the concept of Alliance of Alliances on Water and Disasters. The goal of this alliance would be to more effectively promote research and educational collaborations on the important topic of water and disasters, building on the strengths of existing networks and institutions.

Prof. Xie Heping, President, Sichuan University, People's Republic of China, made a keynote

presentation about following three points: scientific wisdom of Dujiangyan irrigation system constructed 2000 years ago, problems and challenges in water and disaster control, particularly in the mountainous settings of China, and Sichuan University's broad experience in water control and disaster response, including disaster-related health sciences.

Prof. Naoyuki Yoshino, Dean of the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), presented a new method of analyzing the impact of water-related disasters on regional economy. He indicated how to estimate the spill over impact of a disaster by using regional GDP data. He presented a case study of a flood disaster in Japan and showed that the same disaster impacts communities in different ways depending on the socio-economic activities of the communities. He also proposed two methods of financing disaster; forward looking finance and ex-post finance, which would help countries prepare for disasters.

Dr. Jose Antonio Marengo, Senior Member, the Brazilian Academy of Sciences, introduced water-related natural disasters in Brazil, and introduced the National System for Natural Disasters Prevention, which is basically composed of integrated actions developed in two centers of the federal government: National Centre for Monitoring and Early Warning of Natural Disasters (CEMADEN), and National Centre for Disaster and Risk Management (CENAD). He explained how CEMADEN is undertaking its monitoring, early warning and research activities to cope with multi-hazard disaster risk.

Dr. Johannes Cullmann, Director, Climate and Water Department, WMO, firstly introduced the overview of the impacts of hydro meteorological and climatic extreme events worldwide, and showed that the human damage is declining while economic damages are increasing significantly. He also introduced WMO's regional partnership projects, and pointed out the three key areas where actions need to be taken; free and unrestricted access to data; improving warning & management; connecting the actors and connecting the finances.

Dr. Blanca Jimenez-Cisneros, Director, Division of Water Sciences, Secretary of IHP, UNESCO, explained that most disasters are weather-related, and indicated that disasters affect people differently depending on the income level. In order to reduce disaster risk, she emphasized the importance of sharing data. She introduced UNESCO's information network system "WINS", which works as geolocalized data platform, platform for interdisciplinary collaboration, and water expert network.

Prof. Koike, Director, ICHARM, wrapped up the session and called for further cooperation within

the science and technology community to contribute further to the reduction of water-related disaster risks.

### **Panel Discussion “Connecting Ocean, Water and Disasters”**

The discussion was moderated by Dr. Jerome Delli Priscoli, Chair of the Global Water Partnership Technical Committee. Dr. Delli Priscoli outlined the goals of the discussion as finding links between various water related SDGs. The panel discussion was attended by six speakers. During a five-minute speech, each participant raised important points concerning the interlinkages between rivers, oceans, water and disasters in the context of disaster risk reduction from the perspective of their respective countries and organizations.

Prof. Atsushi Sunami, Vice President, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), Japan, introduced an integrated coastal management program. Based on his experience of implementing the program in various Japanese cities he shared his recommendations concerning the integrated coastal management with the participants.

- Mountains, rivers and the coast need to be managed in a holistic way.
- Disaster prevention plan and action need to be prepared with public participation.
- DRR techniques need to be adapted with local community.
- Science based information need to be shared with various stakeholders to prepare for long-term unknown disasters.

H.E. Mr. Luke Daunivalu, Chargé d’Affaires and Deputy Permanent Representative of Fiji to the UN, introduced the major water-related issues Fiji and other island states are facing. The primary issues being marine pollution, ocean acidification and loss of marine resources which all greatly affect the populations of many countries. He further mentioned the lack of appropriate scientific capabilities to maximize returns from the ocean and stressed the importance of achieving all the targets set under the SDG14 in order to address the reliance of island states on the ocean.

H.E. Ms. Farzana Zahir, Chargé d’Affaires and Deputy Permanent Representative of Maldives to the UN, explained that natural disasters, water and sanitation, ocean and climate change are priorities for small island states. Ms. Zahir stated that for island states, the interlinkages between oceans, water and natural disasters are very clear and need to be addressed by investing in infrastructure and disaster risk reduction in order to achieve the goals set in the 2030 Agenda. She also explained that remoteness and limited human resources of small island states are making disaster risk reduction more difficult.

Mr. Ricardo B. Jalad, Administrator of the Office of Civil Defense, the Philippines, introduced Philippines' approach to disaster risk management through National DRRM Council. Mr. Jalad also briefed members on the efforts of his country in terms of "Build-Back-Better" Approach, commitments of Philippines under the Paris Agreement, solid waste management and coastal cleanup efforts. Finally, he stressed the importance of water as the essential element of national, regional and global sustainability.

Dr. Gil-Hong Kim, Senior Director, Chief Sector Officer, Sector Advisory Service Cluster, ADB, stressed that the improper development of cities increases exposure and vulnerability to natural hazards. He also explained that climate change is further increasing disaster risk. Dr. Kim then outlined the future direction of ADB in order to strengthen disaster resilience. The main focus of ADB will be as below.

- Systematic screening and assessment of all investment projects for disaster and climate risk
- Increasing investments aiming to reduce disaster and climate risk
- Supporting countries in financial preparedness for disasters
- Increasing the use of technology to facilitate informed decision-making
- Generating knowledge to link science, policy and practice

Dr. Ursula Schaefer-Preuss, Advisor, HELP, raised the importance of addressing the targets outlined in the Paris Agreement, Sendai Resolution and the 2030 Agenda in a concerted way. She mentioned a need for coordination between various initiatives currently tracking progress on the SDGs. Dr. Schaefer-Preuss also stressed the importance of disaster preparedness not only for societies but for the private sector as well.

The participants discussed the necessary efforts and actions for further connecting ocean, water and disasters, particularly from the perspective of data collection and sharing. Suggestions by the panelists included utilization of satellite data, more integration of socioeconomic data with scientific data, more disaggregated database, and coordination of various initiatives that are currently ongoing. Moreover, the need for collection and accumulation of consistent long-term data especially by developed countries was suggested so as to provide further evidence base for investment decisions.

### **Closing**

Minister Judith Arrieta of the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the UN, provided remarks on behalf of Ambassador Juan José Gómez-Camacho, Permanent Representative of Mexico. Mexico, as Co-Chair of HLPW and the host of 5<sup>th</sup> Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction held in Cancun in May, presented some outcomes of the platform. She shared some key messages with regards to

water and disasters from the chair's summary as well as the high level communique adopted at the platform, including practical measures including disaster risk assessment of existing critical infrastructure by 2019.

Finally, Dr. Han Seung-soo, chair of the session, wrapped up the session by thanking all speakers and participants for their inspiring and thoughtful inputs, and asked all participants to join again in the next Special Thematic Session to be held in two years.