

The International Online Conference on
Water-related Disaster Risk Reduction under the COVID-19 Pandemic

Summary of Proceedings

1. Background and Objectives

The COVID-19 Pandemic has gravely affected the countries all over the world socially and economically. In the current COVID-19 environment, immediate attentions of the national leaders, governments and people in the world have been focused on mitigating COVID-19 infection and treating those who become ill. However, the threats of water-related disasters remain as imminent now as before COVID-19. Many people around the world have been affected and thousands of people lost their lives due to water-related disasters which are increasingly frequent with the impact of various global issues such as urbanization and climate change. Competition and complications among DRR emergency responses and COVID-19 health care responses could magnify negative impacts in some countries and cities.

Implementation of disaster risk reduction strategy with this global crisis in mind is essential to protect disaster-affected areas from becoming epicenter of pandemic explosion and swiftly recover from disasters; therefore, it is vital to raise awareness and share the experiences and good practices with practical guidance amongst leaders, DRR and COVID-19 managers, and all stakeholders to cope with these challenges by the co-occurring disasters and mitigate their impacts.

High-Level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters (HELP) launched the “Principles to Address Water-related Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) under the COVID-19 Pandemic” to tackle this emergent global situation. Water-related disasters could happen in countries and cities even under COVID-19 pandemic, and the urgent actions are needed. The Principles offer practical advice to political leaders, managers of DRR and COVID-19, and all stakeholders on how to prepare and respond to avoid magnified impacts due to co-occurring disasters.

In this virtual conference, leaders, government officials, representatives of international/UN organizations as well as civil society organizations, and experts on disaster risk reduction, water and health will discuss effective ways to address water-related disaster risk reduction under the COVID-19 Pandemic. The outcome documents, including the Chair’s summary and the proceedings, will be shared widely amongst all stakeholders in the world to expedite necessary actions and partnerships to tackle this global challenge.

2. Program

Date: 20 August 2020, 3:30pm – 6:00 pm, KST/JST/UTC+9

Venue: Web meeting

Co-organizers: High-Level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters (HELP)
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD)
Asian Development Bank (ADB)
Japan National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS)

Language: English

3. Agenda

- (1) Opening Remarks by Dr. Han Seung-Soo, HELP Chair and Former Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea

The Chair welcomed the participants to the first high-level online meeting to address the issue of water and disasters under COVID-19 and also acknowledged the presence of Their Majesties, the Emperor and Empress of Japan. He outlined the devastating impacts of the pandemic thus far, highlighting the emerging twin challenge of addressing water-related disasters during the pandemic. He introduced the HELP publication on Principles to Address Water-related Disaster Risk Reduction under COVID-19, which was launched in May 2020. The document provides guidance for leaders, practitioners and stakeholders to help them take immediate actions to prevent the double impact of disasters and the pandemic and identifies priority actions based on key principles summarized below:

1. Provide clean water, sanitation, and hygiene sustainably before, during, and after disasters to prevent the spread of the virus. Specific attention must be paid to risks caused by droughts since water scarcity may affect the implementation of hand washing, waste management and other practices to contain COVID-19.
2. Protect medical resources and patients from the threat of disasters by, for example, dispatching DRR experts and prioritized provision of disaster protection materials and information to hospitals and medical bases.
3. Protect DRR officials and evacuees from the threat of COVID-19 by, for example, prioritized provision of personal protection equipment and medical information to DRR officials and evacuees.
4. Keep social distances and avoid 3Cs, that is, refrain from close contact among crowds in closed spaces or in shelters.
5. Finance DRR actions effectively under covid-19 to avoid economic catastrophe.

He noted that the document will continue to evolve and provide guidance for any type of disaster under any pandemic even after COVID-19 has subsided. He

The Chair also expressed his hope for the day's discussion to translate knowledge into effective actions and deliver practical ways to meet the twin challenges.

(2) Welcome Remarks:

- Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations (video message)

Mr. Zhenmin recalled that in the recent High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), UN member states also stressed the COVID-19 pandemic as a global crisis affecting all countries around the world socially and economically that has reversed progress and gains achieved in alleviating poverty and hunger, and placing even greater obstacles to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He welcomed the launch of the “Principles to Address Water-related Disaster Risk Reduction” by the HELP. He noted that the Principles offered much-needed practical advice to political leaders and stakeholders on how to prepare and respond to avoid magnified impacts due to co-occurring disasters. He then further expressed the UN’s support for countries’ implementation of the Principles through the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework which brings together the collective efforts of stakeholders from different sectors to overcome the water and sanitation crisis through a multilateral response. He reaffirmed the UN system’s commitment to help accelerate the transformational change needed to achieve water security and safely managed sanitation.

- Mr. Masatsugu Asakawa, President, ADB

Mr. Asakawa provided an overview of the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia and Pacific, which is also the region most affected by water-related disasters. He reported that ADB has provided its member countries with a \$20 billion comprehensive support package, of which \$9.6 billion has already been committed. He noted that the pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of water, sanitation and adequate hygiene services (WASH) as a primary line of defense against the spread of COVID-19 as well as water-borne and other diseases. Mr. Asakawa also recognized the twin challenges of water-related disasters and the pandemic, and informed that ADB has programmed \$6 billion from 2020 to 2022 to support WASH and wastewater measures and over \$2 billion for flood risk management together with tailored knowledge services that promote innovation and forge partnerships. He further discussed cross-sectoral collaborations, financial instruments and other innovative approaches that help build resilient infrastructure, institutions and capacities to respond to simultaneous challenges. He reported that the new update to the Asia Water Development Outlook series places water security at the core of water sector approaches. He renewed ADB’s commitment to working with the HELP to achieve its Principles to Address Water-related Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) under the COVID-19 Pandemic, especially Principles 9 on financing and 10 on global solidarity.

- Prof. Akihiko Tanaka, President, GRIPS

In his welcome remarks, Prof. Tanaka recalled recent recurrent heavy rains that hit Kumamoto and other parts of Japan where over a hundred lives were lost, and how the COVID-19 placed social and psychological pressure on the affected people, as well as hampered evacuation, relief and recovery activities. He also noted that business and life will not revert to how it was before. He emphasized the need to transform lives and livelihood into a more sustainable and

environment-conscious manner to increase society's resilience to new and sudden changes. This transformation should be done with the help of medical and natural science as well as social and political science. He also expressed his hope that the day's discussion will kick-off the discussion towards a more adaptive society that can cope with disasters, pandemics, and all changes that may happen in the future.

(3) Keynote Speeches

- Mr. Angel Gurría, Secretary-General of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): "Water, DRR, and Economics under COVID-19"

Mr. Gurría noted that COVID-19 had caused a global health crisis without precedent in living memory, and also triggered the century's most severe economic recession, damaging people's health, jobs, and well-being. He remarked that OECD's projected 6%-7.5% decline in global GDP for 2020 is the largest in OECD's history. He further noted that while the lockdown measures have slowed the spread of the virus, they have also frozen business activity, widened inequality, disrupted education and undermined confidence. To achieve a resilient, inclusive and sustainable recovery, Mr. Gurría urged action on three fronts: (i) build more resilient supply chains with larger stocks and encourage a greater diversification of sources, (ii) keep interest rates low and ensure public spending and taxation support economic activity, and (iii) focus on public finance investments on people's well-being, aimed at supporting the most vulnerable. He cautioned that the pandemic is only one of the many risks shared by the international community, with the most chronic global risk of lack of access to safe water and sanitation leading to a cycle of increased risks of infections and serious health outcomes along with poor living conditions. He noted OECD estimates water resources management and water conservation investment needs to range from US\$6.7 trillion by 2030 to US\$22.6 trillion by 2050. He also informed that OECD's recent work on water and climate change focuses on agriculture, cities, flood governance and adaptation strategies, with the Recommendation of the OECD Council on Water providing an overarching framework. Mr. Gurría remarked that the HELP can play a key role in linking COVID-19 recovery plans to a more prepared and resilient future. In particular, he cited the guidance provided by the HELP Principles to Address Water-related Disaster Risk Reduction under the COVID-19 Pandemic on (i) teleworking for staff in critical water sector facilities, and what functions are essential on-site to ensure business continuity, and (ii) highlighted innovations that have already helped to limit infections under disaster recovery conditions in 2020, such as the rapid rollout of telephone-based digital currency payment systems. In concluding, he reiterated OECD's message on the need to build back in a way that protects the environment, public health and safeguards people's well-being, and expressed commitment to continue working to help shape the post-COVID-19 world in an inclusive, sustainable and resilient manner.

- H.E. Dr. Danilo Türk, Former President of the Republic of Slovenia, Chair of the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace and Lead Political Advisor of the Geneva Water Hub: "Water and Peace under COVID-19"

His Excellency commended the HELP for taking the initiative to organize this timely online conference. He noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the precariousness and fragility of existing water situations with its adverse impacts on the functioning of socio-

economic systems also impacting water management systems. He cited increased challenges that humanitarian organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross encounters in securing safe drinking water for human consumption particularly in areas of armed conflict. He also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic also radicalized the questions of environmental security. Long periods of drought have contributed to movement of affected populations, social and political tensions and armed conflict while unsustainable use of water contribute to poverty, social and political tensions. He noted that the need to work on both socio-economic and political as well as environmental fronts have become more urgent.

His Excellency noted that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a catalytic effect on a variety of fundamental problems in this era and informed of the Geneva Water Hub's key recommendations for more adequate water management and international water cooperation: (i) strengthening the link between science and diplomacy to allow two-way relationship connecting the viability of human systems and environmental resilience, (ii) positioning water as an instrument of peace in fragile settings, (iii) strengthening the bottom-up approach and local voices so that international efforts can include local populations' needs and contribution to water management, (iv) innovative finance to increase investments in water infrastructure and disaster prevention for national and global economies negatively impacted by COVID-19 pandemic, and (v) focus on preventive approaches to strengthen resilience of societies by elevating water management, water infrastructure and preventing water-related disasters on national agendas. In concluding, His Excellency noted some recent good news amidst the bad, specifically how the collapse of a dam in Uzbekistan in April gave rise to renewed efforts to improve trans boundary water cooperation and to an improved regional cooperation. He cited this as the way forward where prevention of water disasters will become a priority in international water cooperation and in the general efforts for peace and development.

(4) Scientific Omnibus Presentation: "Roles of Science and Technology to Cope with Challenges on Water, Disaster, and COVID-19"

Coordinators

- Prof. Toshio Koike, Executive Director, International Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management (ICHARM)
- Prof. Gretchen Kalonji, Dean, Institute for Disaster Management and Reconstruction, Sichuan University

Speakers

- Prof. Masaru Kitsuregawa, Director General, The National Institute of Informatics

Omnibus Presentation

- Dr. Maki Koyama, Associate Professor, River Basin Research Center at Gifu University
- Prof. Sakiko Kanbara, Professor, Disaster Nursing Global Leadership Program at University of Kochi
- Dr. Miho Ohara, Senior Researcher, International Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management (ICHARM)
- Dr. Nuraini Rahma Hanifa, Lead U-INSPIRE Indonesia / Secretary-General U-INSPIRE Alliance

This session was co-chaired by Prof. Gretchen Kalonji, Dean of IDMR, Sichuan University, and Prof. Toshio Koike, Executive Director of ICHARM. It brought together 5 experts from the inter-related fields of informatics, engineering, nursing, hydrology, and geosciences. During the 20-minute omnibus presentation, they shared excellent examples of innovative approaches to science and technology for combating water-related disasters in the context of COVID-19.

Prof. Kalonji opened the session by emphasizing that our science and technology communities worldwide need to rise to the occasion of addressing the coupled challenges of water-related disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic by adopting new and creative approaches to all aspects of our work. She made three key points. Firstly, we need to further strengthen linkages between the medical sciences and public health communities, on the one hand with our engineering, and natural and social sciences communities on the other. Secondly, she stressed the urgent importance of enhancing international collaboration, in the context of a crisis which is affecting all countries everywhere, through strengthening global alliances and networks. Lastly, she focused on the importance of how our research and higher education institutions can do a better job in serving society, including helping to mobilize the contributions of youth and young professionals and their networks. In that respect, she called for enhanced efforts in the transformation of higher education, prioritizing new models of both education and research.

The first presentation of the Omnibus Session was given by Prof. Masaru Kitsuregawa, Director General of the National Institute of Informatics, Japan. Under the title of “Post-corona world transformed by IT”, Prof. Kitsuregawa suggested that values produced by research and their progresses be shared widely across communities through remote communications. He then added that the science community should also pursue the potential of e-learning as much as possible and then design and develop a hybrid education system by adopting the merits of face-to-face and remote approaches.

In the following joint presentation, entitled “Coping with Flood Disasters during the COVID-19 Pandemic”, Prof. Maki Koyama introduced “A Guideline for the Creation of Countermeasures against Flood Disasters during a Pandemic Situation (COVID-19)”, of which she is one of the authors. Reflecting on the recent heavy rain disaster in July 2020 in Japan, Prof. Koyama explained the importance of preparing countermeasures against natural disasters during the pandemic. She suggested using hazard maps and meteorological information to evacuate the public before a flood occurs.

Prof. Sakiko Kanbara built from the guidelines she co-authored with Prof. Koyama, by addressing the dilemma of “Three Cs” environment, which stands for “closed spaces, crowded places, and close contact settings”. Those characteristics are shared by most evacuation shelters while at the same time they can aggravate the spread of diseases like COVID-19. She then shared valuable experiences of evacuation amid the landslide in Kumamoto prefecture in 2020 and emphasized the importance of community resilience in response to multiple risks.

Dr. Miho Ohara introduced a leaflet entitled “Collection of Critical Situations during Flood Emergency Response” published by ICHARM. The leaflet consists of the main content, “local

government response,” and an appendix, “local government response under COVID-19.” It aims to improve the emergency response capacities of local governments for more effective management of flood disasters, which frequently occur across Japan in recent years.

The last presentation was given, on behalf of the U-INSPIRE Alliance, an alliance of youth and young professionals working in 12 countries to support Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), by its Secretary-General, Dr. N. Rahma Hanifa. Dr. Hanifa outlined the overall structure of U-INSPIRE activities, and shared some remarkable examples of the efforts of U-INSPIRE national chapters on tsunami evacuation and DRR responses to floods under COVID-19.

To close the session, Prof. Toshio Koike shared his insights on promoting risk-informed sustainable development and consilience. According to Prof. Koike, it is essential to construct an ecosystem for the unification of knowledge. He further added that the science community needs to develop “online synthesis” functions and train “facilitators” who lead problem-solving and provide professional advice to society.

In summary, the session was successful in providing the leaders worldwide the latest examples of addressing water-related disasters under the current COVID-19 pandemics. The omnibus presentation reflects a wide diversity in geographical, cultural, and disciplinary senses. The strategic, cooperative, and multidisciplinary approaches introduced by the speakers will offer important lessons for both leaders and local communities around the world and help them stay prepared for the future hazards and pandemics.

(5) High Level Panel Discussion: “Building the World Back Better by Addressing Water and DRR under COVID-19”

- Mr. Basuki Hadimuljono, Vice-Chair, HELP and Minister of Public Works and Housing, Republic of Indonesia

Mr. Hadimuljono recounted recent water-related disasters in Indonesia and the urgent response measures taken by the government to provide relief to affected populations. He noted that these disasters were driven, not only by climate change, but also by environmental degradation of critical watersheds aggravated by inadequate maintenance of water infrastructure. He informed that emergency measures helped to resume economic activity in communities where settlements and public infrastructure were damaged. Longer-term measures included improving flood early warning systems, better water infrastructure monitoring capacity, and data collection and analysis. He acknowledged the need to prepare for twin challenges of water-related disasters and pandemics by establishing standard operation procedures for emergency situations with strict health protocols. He discussed the government’s commitment in completing infrastructure development to maintain the sustainability of economic activities, including the Cash for Work Program to reduce unemployment and maintain people’s purchasing power. He also urged strengthening partnerships and cooperation on strategic efforts to improve preparedness and response to cope with co-occurring disasters and mitigate impacts.

- Ms. Cora van Nieuwenhuizen, Vice-Chair, HELP and Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management, Kingdom of the Netherlands

Ms. Nieuwenhuizen reminded that water is at the heart of many key challenges, as is the case with the COVID-19 pandemic that caused unparalleled global health and economic crisis and to which handwashing is the first line of defense. She noted that COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the inequities across the world, exacerbating socio-economic distress and potentially reversing progress made in recent decades. She also noted, however, that COVID-19 is an additional crisis because challenges from climate change and water-related disasters still exist. She emphasized that prevention of water-related disasters is at the heart of recovery and building resilience, contributing to the achievement of many SDGs. She discussed two key messages: (i) we must improve the resilience of our systems and incorporate water-related disaster risk reduction into the COVID-19 investments, and (ii) the Water Action Track of the Global Commission on Adaptation can help reach that goal. This involves collaboration with key stakeholders to make recovery projects sustainable, inclusive and more adaptive to climate change. Ms. Nieuwenhuizen also invited participation in the Climate Adaptation Summit to be held online on 25 January 2021, which will facilitate discussions among world leaders on solutions.

- Mr. Ilkka Salmi, Director for Disaster Preparedness and Prevention, DG ECHO, European Commission

Mr. Salmi discussed the European Union's (EU) efforts to implement a strong and sustainable response to the COVID-19 crisis, beginning with the EU Emergency Response Coordination Centre's RescEU Program that ensures equipment availability for its member states during crisis. He also discussed the Civil Protection Mechanism which mobilized medical personnel and supplies to EU citizens across the world during the pandemic. He noted that the pandemic has severely tested capacities to respond and the resilience of EU economies, and exposed limitations in national and international crisis management systems. He informed of the measures EU is implementing to establish disaster resilience goals and strengthen cross-sectoral and all-hazard disaster resilience planning, emergency response (RescEU Program), and operational coordination and monitoring. He observed that the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the strong and inevitable interconnectedness of the global community and sectoral policies. He therefore urged working together, investing across inter-related sectors and stronger international partnerships to help achieve shared results and objectives.

- Dr. Shinichi Kitaoka, President, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

Dr. Kitaoka discussed JICA's aim to realize Human Security through their vision of "Leading the World with Trust", that is, a world where everyone can live in dignity, free from fear and want. He provided an overview of JICA's response to COVID-19, noting that JICA has been working with partner countries through ongoing operations as well as emergency financial assistance, and has committed to expand its health programs to fight COVID-19. He recognized the vital role that clean water plays in preventing the spread of infections, and how raising awareness on handwashing can save lives. He then cited initiatives JICA implemented in Madagascar and Egypt to raise awareness. Dr. Kitaoka also talked about water-related disasters, Japan's long history in managing the impacts of such disasters, and key features of Japan's policy on disaster risk reduction (DRR). He noted that Japan focused on ex-ante investment rather than emergency response, thus dramatically increasing the number of

casualties, and also increasing resilience. He mentioned that JICA is continuing to promote the Sendai Framework for DRR, and has supported training of 110,000 individuals over the past 5 years. He also discussed support provided to the Philippines to establish its first technical institution dedicated to flood management which has produced local engineers able to implement flood management projects in Metro Manila. In conclusion, he reiterated JICA's commitment to provide support for DRR, including capacity development, to create resilient societies with inclusive countermeasures against all threats and where no one is left behind.

- Dr. Bambang Susantono, Vice President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development, Asian Development Bank

Dr. Susantono discussed how ADB is improving its operations by addressing water and disasters under COVID-19 and helping Asia and the Pacific build back better while embracing the HELP Principles. He discussed the Asian Water Development Outlook (AWDO) 2020, which ADB is finalizing with OECD and other partners, and how it includes an assessment of risk and resilience to water-related disasters in its framework to assess national water security. He also informed of ADB's swift actions to upscale its water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) operations, knowledge work, and partnerships, prioritizing health outcomes, and establishing an internal Water and Health Advisory Team to guide ADB's response. Dr. Susantono further informed of ADB's innovative financing instruments, including the Contingent Disaster Financing (CDF) mechanism which provides pre-approved financing immediately following a natural hazard and helps secure government commitment to enhance long-term resilience by securing up-front risk mitigation measures. As early as April 2020, ADB had expanded the CDF mechanism to support health emergencies and has already approved 8 CDFs for Pacific countries with additional CDFs worth \$1 billion under preparation. He further discussed ADB's approach to "building back better" through a sample project in Chennai, India which finances flood resilient WASH facilities, sanitary waste management, and gender-sensitive WASH education in low-income schools and health centers. The project also had increased surveillance capacity for COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, as well as community engagement to develop integrated flood-related disaster and epidemic response plans for future simultaneous disasters. He explained that the ongoing crisis of COVID-19 compounded by water-related disasters cannot be countered by a business-as-usual approach and requires reorienting knowledge, partnerships and operations to allow new designs for more integrated projects with an expanded view of resilience and immediate response. In conclusion, he reiterated that we are now faced with a new normal, and resources are stretched. Therefore, there is a need to maximize the impact of every instrument available to save lives and secure livelihoods. He also emphasized that the COVID-19 crisis can be used as an opportunity to accelerate change and transform the economy using 21st century tools, and invited all to build back better, differently, together.

- Ms. Kate Medicott, Team Lead for Sanitation and Wastewater, World Health Organization (WHO)

Ms. Medicott presented a summary of the WHO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which at that time had reached approximately 23 million infections and 800,000 deaths. She informed of two main guidance documents from the UN – the WUN-wide Plan and the WHO Strategic Response and Planning Guidelines, which include WASH as an integral pillar and

put forward 5 key WASH recommendations. She also discussed the hand hygiene initiative launched in June, which was co-led by WHO and UNICEF and ensures prevention not only of COVID-19 infections but also other infectious diseases. She remarked that the sanitation community had long neglected hand hygiene but that the pandemic has put a spotlight on the need for this and has provided an opportunity to promote better hand hygiene more widely. She shared the technical brief on COVID, available on the WHO website, and 5 key WASH-COVID takeaways, including hand hygiene, environmental hygiene, water and sanitation, WASH investments and co-benefits. Ms. Medicott discussed latest scientific findings on COVID-19 virus, including recent research on environmental surveillance. She informed that (i) the risk of transmission through faecal pathways is low, (ii) surface transmission prevention should consider the median half-life survival of the virus on surfaces of 1.2 hours, and (iii) wastewater surveillance experiments so far indicate the potential as an early warning system for a second wave but questions still remain about the methodologies and other scientific aspects.

- Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, Chief Executive Officer, Sanitation and Water for All

Ms. Albuquerque introduced Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) and its role in bringing together over 300 partners from all stakeholder groups, including 80 governments, acting as a catalyst for change while highlighting the importance of human rights, gender equality, integrity, transparency and mutual accountability. She shared SWA's belief that government-led, collaborative and multi-stakeholder decision-making leads to more effective and sustainable solutions. She noted that even before the pandemic, SWA partners have been collaborating to strengthen systems and build coalitions between actors that are working on water, sanitation and hygiene to make the case for increased political prioritization and funding to sanitation and water services for all always and everywhere. She discussed SWA's global leaders' Call to Action initiated during the early stages of the pandemic, which involved 85 global leaders, including 14 heads of state and numerous heads of UN agencies, development banks, private sector companies and civil society committing to prioritize water, sanitation and hygiene services to all without discrimination, ensuring that systems supporting them are resilient, and above all provide the financing necessary to do this in a sustainable way.

Ms. Albuquerque also emphasized the need to build forward better, planning for better services that take into account the inherent risks associated with climate change. She informed that SWA's partner, UNICEF, has created guidance document for risk-based planning that is being put into practice in Bolivia, Ecuador, Tanzania and Bangladesh and that climate considerations are now also being integrated into UNICEF's Bottleneck Analysis Tool for water and sanitation planning. In conclusion she also discussed the upcoming Regional Finance Ministers Meetings which will discuss how to increase investment and innovation, and how Covid-19 has affected the water and sanitation sector. She reiterated SWA's invitation to jointly pursue a visionary yet pragmatic process to plan for a carbon-neutral future where we are also better prepared to face global crises such as COVID-19 and climate change.

- Facilitator: Prof. Kenzo Hiroki, Professor, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), Japan and HELP Coordinator

Prof. Hiroki summarized the session by highlighting two key phrases. The first is "Be prepared." He cautioned that disasters will hit even harder and that we should face this fact squarely and

be prepared to address the co-occurring challenges of disasters and pandemics. He noted that the latest experiences, good practices and new ideas shared by speakers today should be used to be prepared for tomorrow. He also encouraged to use the HELP Principles to Address Water-related Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) under the COVID-19 Pandemic as a guide. The second phrase is “Build back better.” He echoed speakers’ sentiments that things will not go back to business as usual before the pandemic and stated that societies should be more resilient, adaptive, and sustainable to address climate, disasters, and other global changes. He recalled that speakers gave hints on how society should change, that science and technology, including information technology, will help to transform society. He emphasized the need for solidarity to overcome the crisis, and advance towards achievement of the SDGs, and creation of a better world with no one left behind.

4. Closing Remarks

The Chair expressed his profound gratitude to Their Majesties, Emperor and Empress of Japan for their kind attendance to the online conference, the first occasion for Their Majesties to attend a web-based conference. He also noted that much was learned during the day about global leaders’ challenges and efforts to address water-related disasters under the current pandemic. Effective ways and good practices to cover both water-related disasters and COVID-19 were shared.

He informed that the results of the two-day conference will be combined as the Chair’s Summary. It will be shared with the international community working on the issues of water, climate change, disaster risk reduction, and other relevant development issues. The HELP will also deliver findings and messages to the discussion venues of internationally agreed goals, including but not necessarily limited to the SDGs, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and Paris Climate Agreement. The Chair thanked Director General Angel Gurría and Daniel Turk for their inspirational speeches and all the speakers for the informative and interesting presentations. He also thanked all the participants of the video conference and formally concluded the conference.