

Position paper

ONE WATER SUMMIT 2024

PROPOSALS FROM THE WATER COALITION

25/01/2024

At COP28, the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, and the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, announced the organisation of a "One Water Summit" in September 2024, on the sidelines of the high-level session of the 79th General Assembly of the United Nations. The French NGOs members of the Water Coalition are delighted that this event is being organised. Indeed, faced with the global water crisis – which is affecting the whole world – the international community must go into action and find solutions. Halfway through the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations has noted that there is an alarming delay in achieving the international goals for water and sanitation. Water is a major social, economic and environmental issue for the 21st century.

This position paper sets out the Water Coalition's expectations for the One Water Summit and identifies 5 priority challenges that should be on top of the Summit's agenda.

Water in figures :

- **2.2 billion people** do not have access to safely managed drinking water services at home. (WHO/UNICEF 2023)
- **More than 80% of the wastewater** generated by society worldwide is returned to the environment without being treated or reused. (UN-Water 2020)
- By 2050, more than **half the world's population** will be living in water-stressed conditions (UN-Water 2020).
- **170 billion dollars - almost 5% of GDP** - are lost each year by sub-Saharan Africa due to insufficient water resources, water contamination and lack of sanitation. (SWA, 2023)
- Each dollar invested in water and sanitation generates a return on investment of around **7 dollars**. (SWA, 2023)

I OUR EXPECTATIONS FOR THE SUMMIT

1. HIGH-LEVEL, LARGE-SCALE POLITICAL MOBILISATION

In many countries, the lack of political will is one of the main reasons for inaction concerning water and sanitation. Numerous reports have highlighted that these vital issues suffer from a real lack of political leadership. Internationally, while many thematic events are organised¹, few events dedicated to water have a significant political impact. This is why France and Kazakhstan must contribute to the emergence of strong worldwide political leadership for water and encourage a major mobilisation of Heads of State and Government at the OWS, by mobilising States and their Permanent Representations to the UN as of now.

2. LINKS WITH UNITED NATIONS PROCESSES AND THE PREPARATION FOR FUTURE DECISIONS ON WATER

The United Nations has defined a framework for collective action through the adoption of the Agenda 2030, including SDG 6, which aims to achieve universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation and good management of water resources by 2030. Although there is no intergovernmental follow-up to this SDG, the United Nations organised a historic conference on water in March 2023, and a new intergovernmental meeting is planned for 2026, the outlines of which will be defined this year. In addition, the OWS will be held at the same time as the Summit of the Future, which is supposed to revitalise the multilateral system, and a few months after the adoption of a new water strategy by the United Nations system. The OWS political process must therefore fit in with this international agenda and mobilise the international community around the water challenges. It can also enable States to agree on language on water that will help to advance some topics in future diplomatic negotiations within the UN framework.

3. A SUMMARY OF THE SUMMIT DISCUSSIONS

It is desirable that a document will be published by the co-organisers at the end of the Summit, to summarise the discussions and bring out the main messages from the Summit, incorporating proposals from the various stakeholders, including NGOs/CSOs. This will leave a legacy of the Summit and prepare future discussions between States (*see point 2 above*). This summary could especially be presented as part of the Summit of the Future and forthcoming United Nations discussions in preparation for the 2026 Water Conference.

4. WATER ON THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA AND THE ACCELERATION OF MULTILATERAL COMMITMENTS AND INITIATIVES

The OWS organisation is an opportunity to highlight certain key water and sanitation challenges to the international community (*see our suggestions for priority issues in the next section*). The summit is also an opportunity to accelerate efforts through concrete commitments by governments to implement international and national goals.

The OWS also aims to "promote ambitious initiatives and the implementation of concrete projects". While the organisation of the OWS may have a knock-on effect on the participants involved, the process will have to provide added value in relation to existing initiatives. The question about the link with the Water Action Agenda of the March 2023 Conference needs to be asked in particular: a number of commitments have been made by a variety of states, coalitions and players in this context. It should be noted, however, that these voluntary commitments, which are disparate and insufficient, in no way constitute the collective and holistic response needed to face the global water crisis. This is why these

¹ Like World Water Week, the World Water Forum, etc.

multi-stakeholder initiatives must not absolve governments of the need to make efforts and adapt their public policies to meet international goals. Finally, concrete mechanisms for monitoring the commitments made must be put in place, whether they be those of the Water Action Agenda, the One Water Summit or other initiatives.

5. INCLUSION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The NGOs/CSOs participation in international events, particularly from developing countries, generally comes up against numerous obstacles (travel costs, visas, complexity of participation procedures, etc.). However, it is crucial to include civil society in the summit discussions, so that its initiatives and messages are taken into account. This is why the OWS must guarantee the inclusion of NGOs/CSOs from all regions, by opening up the preparatory processes and providing funding to cover travel costs.

II FIVE PRIORITY ISSUES FOR THE SUMMIT AGENDA

1. ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

→ SDGS 6.1, 6.2

The human rights to drinking water and sanitation have been recognised by the United Nations since 2010. States have reiterated their commitment to universal access by adopting SDG 6. However, several billion people do not have access to water and sanitation, with dramatic health and socio-economic consequences. Women and girls are disproportionately affected. In France, it is estimated that more than a million people do not have adequate access to drinking water and sanitation (informal or unhealthy housing, costs that are too high for people in precarious situations, low rates of access and water cuts in the overseas territories, etc.).

In practical terms, the OWS could make it possible to :

- *Reaffirm the human rights to drinking water and sanitation, inseparable from the right to a healthy environment, as a priority for action by the international community;*
- *Encourage the launch or strengthening of national and multilateral initiatives to improve access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH);*
- *Highlight initiatives that promote the respect and implementation of human rights and guarantee the active, free, and meaningful participation of "rights-holders" in water policies, particularly women.*

2. EQUITABLE SHARING AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER, OUR COMMON GOOD

→ SDGs 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.b

Proper management of water resources is at the heart of the United Nations' SDG 6, and is closely linked to other diplomatic commitments such as those on climate, the environment and biodiversity. However, water resources around the world are under threat : shortages, flooding, pollution, climate crisis impacts, loss of aquatic ecosystems, etc. While conflicts over water resources are becoming increasingly frequent, the fair and sustainable sharing of water is a priority issue. In several countries, financial water markets have even been created, opening the way to speculation on water prices and favouring the most powerful economic players. The United Nations Water Conference in March 2023 was marked by collective recognition of the "global water crisis". The perception of the water cycle as a "global common good" was also very much in evidence, although the concept was not clarified.

In practical terms, the OWS could make it possible to :

- *Encourage the international community to officially recognise water as a common good and open a dialogue (including civil society) to define this concept, taking care to describe the principles of water governance and protection that result from it;*
- *Promote the launch or strengthening of national and multilateral initiatives to accelerate progress towards achieving SDG 6 and the water-related targets in the 2030 Agenda;*
- *Encourage the continued integration of water into the global climate agenda at the level of UNFCCC initiatives;*
- *Launch an appeal to oppose the financialisation of water resources and outlaw the listing of water on the stock exchange.*

3. IMPROVEMENT IN THE MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK FOR WATER AND SANITATION

→ SDG 6.a, SDG 17, conventions on transboundary waters

While local players have a major role to play in water management, water is also a global issue. The water cycle transcends the administrative borders of individual states. Water is a major geopolitical issue for countries that share rivers and aquifers, and it is also directly linked to global challenges such as the climate crisis, food security, environmental degradation and changes in our production and consumption patterns. However, internationally, the lack of governance in the sector is holding back the pace of progress. Unlike other sectors, water management is not the subject of any "binding" international policy, apart from two conventions on transboundary waters (which have only been ratified by a third of countries). There are no United Nations funds, programmes or agencies specifically dedicated to water. The United Nations Conference in March 2023 marked the first intergovernmental meeting on water after 46 years of nothing. Although a new UN conference has been announced for 2026, no negotiated political agreement is planned.

In practical terms, the OWS could make it possible to :

- *Re-launch the momentum around certain conclusions of the 2023 United Nations Water Conference that have not yet been implemented: appointment of a United Nations Special Envoy for Water and Sanitation, creation of a global scientific mechanism on water.*
- *Gather the support of States so that future United Nations Conferences are organised on a regular basis (every 2 or 3 years) and result in the adoption of decisions negotiated at multilateral level;*
- *Gather new accessions of States to the Conventions on transboundary waters;*
- *Call for water "segments" to be systematically included on the agendas of international conferences in related areas such as health, food, climate change, oceans, the environment, etc. to strengthen synergies between these sectors and promote a cross-sectoral approach to global issues.*

4. FUNDING FOR WATER AND SANITATION

→ SDG 6.a, SDG 17

The water sector is largely under-financed: annual investment would have to quadruple by 2030 to achieve universal coverage of drinking water and sanitation. The global cost of achieving SDG 6 is estimated at \$1,000 billion, or 1.21% of global GDP². Existing funding is often misdirected, failing to reach the most vulnerable populations and areas. Wastewater treatment, an essential corollary to progress on water - whether freshwater or saltwater -, is largely overlooked by national and international public investment. The lack of robust water governance systems is also a brake on the absorption of existing budgets and a favourable environment for investment. Furthermore, according to the Water

² Strong et al, 2020 in *Financing tomorrow's water security*, OECD, 2022

Integrity Network (WIN), corruption leads to a loss of 20 to 40% of funding for the water sector. The chronic under-funding of the WASH sector also affects humanitarian funding (*see point 5 below*).

In practical terms, the OWS could make it possible to :

- *Announce new financial commitments from governments (national budgets, development aid, etc.) for water and sanitation programmes in developing countries, including initial investments as well as sustainable financing of services and water governance mechanisms;*
- *Call on international climate funds to provide more funding for adaptation projects in the water sector.*

5. WATER, HUMANITARIAN CRISES AND PEACE

→ SDG 6, SDG 16

In 2023, humanitarian crises affected 173 million people (including almost 110 million children) in 155 countries³. While water is vital for all of us, it is even more so in humanitarian contexts, where it is also a public health issue. Emergencies, conflicts, and natural disasters destroy water distribution and sanitation systems and lead to large-scale displacement of populations. These humanitarian situations are often exacerbated by the climate crisis. For these vulnerable populations, maintaining access to water and sanitation is crucial. In precarious and overcrowded conditions, the risk of disease and epidemics is increased, and can lead to large numbers of deaths. Furthermore, in armed conflicts, the use of water as a weapon of war (denial of access to drinking water, destruction of infrastructure or services, restriction of humanitarian access) is a violation of international humanitarian law. Finally, funding for the water sector in humanitarian contexts is largely insufficient: only 37.3% of the necessary funding was received in 2023⁴.

This is why the One Water Summit must consider the specificities of contexts of conflict and fragility in order to propose and support initiatives that are essential to the humanitarian response, and not leave out the people living in these areas to achieve SDG 6.

In practical terms, the OWS could make it possible to :

- *Strongly condemn the use of water as a weapon of war and any violation of International Humanitarian Law, in particular regarding access to humanitarian zones, and support existing diplomatic initiatives in this area;*
- *Support and promote a coordinated and proportionate international response to the growing number of humanitarian emergencies;*
- *Encourage an increase in humanitarian aid;*
- *Encourage greater inclusion of the WASH sector in humanitarian response plan budgets;*
- *Promote funding that complements the existing ones, in the form of mixed multi-annual development/humanitarian funds that are flexible in areas where humanitarian crises are superimposed on a structural deficit in access to water, sanitation and hygiene;*
- *Promote or launch additional funding mechanism(s) involving conventional and non-conventional donors (private sector, foundations, etc.) specifically earmarked for the humanitarian response in the water, hygiene and sanitation sector;*
- *Promote the signature by States of the "Call to Action for Survival and Resilient WASH"⁵ already supported by France.*

³ UNICEF, 2024

⁴ OCHA tracking service 2023 <https://fts.unocha.org/global-sectors/11/summary/2023>

⁵ www.washroadmap.org/calltoaction.htm

The Water Coalition brings together the main French NGOs committed to the human rights to water and sanitation and to water as a common good.

The following NGOs are members of the Water Coalition : ACAD · Action contre la Faim · BlueEnergy · CRID · 4D · Dédale · Dynam'eau · EAST · Eau et Vie · Eau Sans Frontières International · Experts Solidaires · GRDR · GRET · Guinée 44 · Hamap Humanitaire · Human Dignity · Hydraulique Sans Frontières · Initiative Développement · Kynarou · Ligue des Droits de l'Homme · Morija · Première Urgence Internationale · Secours Catholique - Caritas France · Secours Islamique France · SEVES · Sillages · Solidarité Eau Europe · Solidarités International · WECF · Wikewater