

[Position paper]

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON WATER 2026

PROPOSITION ON THE PRIORITY THEMES AND ON THE PROCESS OF THE CONFERENCE

FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE CO-CHAIRS, THE REPUBLIC OF SENEGAL AND THE
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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I BACKGROUND AND MAIN CHALLENGES

1. BACKGROUND

The United Nations Water Conference 2026 marks a crucial step towards strengthening global water governance and accelerating the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 and the commitments made in 2023. It takes place against the backdrop of a worsening water and sanitation crisis, exacerbated by declining public international funding and the growing impact of climate change.

The preparatory process, including the high-level preparatory meeting in Dakar in December 2025, will be a strategic opportunity to structure the objectives of the conference, ensure follow-up to the commitments made in 2023, and reinforce the multi-stakeholder dynamics, notably guaranteeing the effective participation of civil society.

As co-chairs of the conference, Senegal and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have a critical responsibility to build on the achievements of previous conferences, ensuring continuous progress toward achieving SDG6, while also safeguarding the goal of universal access to drinking water and sanitation remains a priority beyond 2030. At the same time, the organizers and the UN Member States must aim to improve upon past efforts, prioritizing action over non-binding commitments.

2. MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR THE 2026 CONFERENCE

- Ensure political and institutional recognition of the global water and sanitation crisis, and the adoption of measures commensurate with the stakes involved
- Promote high-level political mobilization among UN member states, and strengthen international and diplomatic cooperation on water
- Strengthen governance, accountability and commitment monitoring mechanisms
- Mobilize sustainable, targeted funding for the water sector, in a context of global decline in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and humanitarian funding, and more recently within the context of the suspension of US funding
- Ensure the active participation of civil society organizations and NGOs (as explicitly provided for by the resolution on the modalities of the Conference) throughout the preparatory process, at the Conference and afterwards

3. VISION AND LEADERSHIP FOR THE 2026 CONFERENCE: KEY QUESTIONS TO THE CO-CHAIRS

- **Senegal:** As a key water diplomacy leader in Africa and worldwide, and the host of the 9th World Water Forum (Dakar 2022), but also one of the countries behind the United Nations General Assembly resolution [A/RES/78/327](#), Senegal has a strong track record of advocating for water as a driver for peace and sustainable development.
 - *How does Senegal envision translating the Dakar Forum’s commitments into tangible outcomes for 2026?*
 - *What role does Senegal see for African regional cooperation and financing mechanisms in the 2026 agenda?*
- **UAE:** With its leadership in climate action (host of COP28, focus on water resilience), the UAE has placed water security at the heart of sustainable development.
 - *How can the UAE integrate water more strongly into the climate agenda, especially leading up to the COP30 and beyond?*
 - *What strategies does the UAE propose for scaling up climate engagement within the UN 2026 Water Conference?*

II RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE CONFERENCE PROCESS AND OBJECTIVES

1. SUSTAIN PROGRESS IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

- a. Ensure dedicated resources for the UN Special Envoy for Water, to effectively fulfill her mandate
 - b. Encourage some Member States to take the lead in the adoption of a UN General Assembly resolution to anchor in a UN document the results and commitments made during the Conference
 - c. Engage States in establishing a regular intergovernmental conference after 2028, with international negotiations leading to binding agreements.
- *Key question:*
- *How do Senegal and UAE see the role of the UN Special Envoy on Water in 2026?*

2. ESTABLISH AN ACCOUNTABILITY AND MONITORING FRAMEWORK

- a. Create a mechanism for monitoring commitments (from the Water Action Agenda or official declarations) of the 2023 Conference to the 2026 and 2028 Conferences.
 - b. Establish clear progress indicators to measure the impact of the commitments made.
- *Key question:*
- *How can we ensure strong follow-up mechanisms post-2026 (e.g., a UN General Assembly resolution, a permanent global water dialogue, intergovernmental negotiations for global commitments?)*

3. SECURE MEANINGFUL CIVIL SOCIETY INCLUSION AND INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

- a. Guarantee a structured space for dialogue and exchanges with civil society and youth before and after the 2026 Conference
 - b. Organize regular consultations with NGOs, including via an advisory group to the Special Envoy
 - c. Facilitate the logistical mobilization of civil society at the Conference (accreditations, visas, funding, etc)
 - d. Open up the Conference to NGOs/CSOs and youth contributions (plenary sessions, interactive dialogues)
- *Key questions :*
- *Can Senegal and UAE commit to securing formal consultation mechanisms with civil society and marginalized groups?*

- *How will the co-hosts ensure financial support and facilitate visa procedures for diverse stakeholders to attend?*

4. DEMONSTRATE THE STRONG DIPLOMATIC COMMITMENT OF SENEGAL AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES FOR THE CONFERENCE

- a. Build on the successful organization of the 9th World Water Forum and of COP28 to strengthen Senegal and EAU's position on the international water agenda
- b. Ensure high-level political representation at the Conference (Heads of States) and invite other member states to do the same
- c. Prepare ambitious positions, announcements and commitments, and mobilize the African Union and Middle Eastern states in this direction too

5. BREAK SILOS AND MOBILIZE BROADLY AROUND THE CONFERENCE

- a. Engage a broad range of stakeholders, including political decision-makers from water-related sectors such as oceans, industry, agriculture and health
- b. Align the Conference 2026 process and outcomes with other major international processes (including COP Climate, COP Biodiversity, COP Desertification, UN Conference on Oceans... among others), ensuring that water remains a priority on the global agenda
- c. To effectively mobilize the international community, a comprehensive communication strategy will be crucial in making water a central priority for public awareness worldwide.

III THEMATIC PRIORITIES

For the Water Coalition, the following themes must be considered as priorities at the Conference, in the interactive dialogues, in speeches and commitments of member states and stakeholders, and more broadly in the general agenda:

1. WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE (WASH) HUMANITARIAN CRISES

- a. Increase funding for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in contexts of fragility, crises and conflict, at a time when emergency aid funding is in sharp decline, and ensure that this funding reaches the most vulnerable populations in a timely and efficient manner
- b. Ensure that humanitarian settings are discussed in interactive dialogues and plenary sessions

2. HUMAN RIGHTS TO DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION

- a. Reaffirm access to drinking water and sanitation as fundamental human rights and encourage States to fully enshrine them in their domestic law
- b. Ensure that hygiene and sanitation issues are taken into consideration in the same way as water in the Conference agenda and in the commitments
- c. Commit to fighting inequalities, by guaranteeing access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services for all people living in precarious situations and by adopting measures guaranteeing affordable access to water and sanitation services
- d. Align the commitments at the Conference with a Human rights-based approach.

3. WATER ADAPTATION IN CLIMATE POLICIES

- a. Position water as an absolute priority in financing mechanisms for adaptation to climate change
- b. Integrate nature-based solutions to strengthen territorial water resilience, valuing local knowledge
- c. Promote a quantitative and qualitative increase in climate change adaptation funding for sustainable and equitable water resource management and drinking water supply

- d. Integrate the outcomes of the Climate COPs into the 2026 Conference and, conversely, promote the United Nations Water Conference in the COPs and UNFCCC discussions

4. INTERNATIONAL WATER COOPERATION AND FINANCING FOR WATER

- a. Ensure a greater international funding against a backdrop of declining ODA overall
- b. Prioritize international solidarity funding for fragile or crisis-affected countries, and for all countries, for the fight against inequalities in access to drinking water and sanitation
- c. Encourage South-South and North-South cooperation, and promote a regional approach to effective cross-border water management
- d. Enhance the transparency of government commitments through funding monitoring mechanisms, with clear indicators and improved traceability of funds
- e. Promote a structured financing framework within the Conference to guarantee support for players in the field

5. INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE AND A COMMONS-BASED APPROACH

- a. Recognize the importance of a commons-based approach to ensure effective local governance of water resources
- b. Strengthen the involvement of local communities, women, youth and indigenous peoples in water management
- c. Promote mechanisms for citizen participation and co-decision at local level

IV CONCLUSION

The United Nations Water Conference in 2026 represents a unique opportunity to strengthen global water governance and accelerate the implementation of concrete solutions to the water and sanitation crises. Senegal and the United Arab Emirates, with their strong involvement in these issues, have a key role to play, both in terms of diplomatic leadership and financial and political commitment.

The opportunity for Senegal and the UAE as co-Chairs offers a transformative platform to solidify their legacy in global water governance. By leading an ambitious, action-driven, and inclusive process, both countries can set a powerful example of commitment and collaboration in addressing water-related challenges worldwide. Furthermore, advocating for regular intergovernmental meetings on water at the UN level post-2026 will be crucial for maintaining momentum and fostering long-term commitments that deliver lasting impact for future generations.

Let's ensure together that the 2026 Conference is a truly decisive step towards effective and inclusive global governance of this vital resource.

The Water Coalition (« Coalition Eau » in French) gathers the main French NGOs working in the water and sanitation sector.

Coalition Eau's members : ACAD · Action against Hunger · Better With Water · Bleu Versant · BlueEnergy · CRID · 4D · Dédale · Dynam'eau · EAST · Eau Sans Frontières International · Experts Solidaires · GRDR · GRET · Guinée 44 · Hamap Humanitaire · Human Dignity · Hydraulique Sans Frontières · Initiative Développement · Kynarou · Le Partenariat · Morija · Première Urgence Internationale · Secours Catholique – Caritas France · Secours Islamique France · SEVES · Sillages · Solidarity Water Europe · Solidarités International · WECF · Wikiwater

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