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Sweden's proposals for themes of the interactive dialogues of the UN Conference on Water 2023

1. Background

As part of the preparatory work on the background note, UNDESA officially invited Sweden along with other UN Member States to provide inputs and submit proposals on themes for the five interactive dialogues of the Conference, which will be held in parallel with the plenary meetings.

We understand that such proposals will be included in a background note by the Secretary-General of the Conference, prepared in consultation with Member States, with the support of UN-Water and relevant United Nations entities. The themes of the interactive dialogues will be finalized during a one-day preparatory meeting convened by the President of the General Assembly in November 2022 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

We acknowledge, and reiterate, that the five Dialogue areas should support the objectives of the Conference as defined in OP4 of resolution A/RES/75/212. That is: *Assess progress of the Water Action Decade; Identify challenges and opportunities; Develop actions and initiatives to accelerate Agenda 2030 progress; Enhance means of implementation and partnerships; Share best practices; Involve all stakeholders; Announcement of voluntary commitments; and Contribute to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.*

We note that the co-hosts of the Conference, Tajikistan, and the Netherlands, requested the development of a zero draft non-paper on the possible themes of the interactive dialogues. The UN-Water Task Force (TF) on Water Action Decade Implementation – co-coordinated by UNDESA and UNU – was tasked to develop such draft.

Moreover, the Conference envisages that the Dialogues will be:

- a) **Inclusive**, meaning to build on relevant prep meetings and documents to create space for a wide range of stakeholders for meaningful engagement, and to keep in mind different levels of water management in different countries and invite the right people¹.
- b) **Action-oriented**, meaning to focus on “doing” and less “talking”. The dialogue themes should be seen as "enablers", and 1-3 key messages per Dialogue areas can be developed ahead of time, so that the main message can be adopted in the final plenary statement and linkages are ensured between the Dialogues and the plenary.
- c) **Cross-sector**, meaning to bring in actors from outside the water sector and beyond the SDG 6 target bubbles, to build understanding of how water can be a solution in their sectors; and not only focus on the SDG framework but be more cross-cutting in design.

The overall theme of the Conference is “Acceleration of SDG 2030 implementation”, and the Dialogue areas need to be framed in this perspective. Even though SDG 6 on Water and Sanitation for All (targets 6.1-6.6 and 6.a-6.b) is the natural focus, it is important that the meetings integrate the important perspective of water cutting across all SDGs. Water is a *connector* that can increase international ambitions and accelerate implementation.

In addition, the Conference should include the need to deliver on all relevant global agenda such as the Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction. It is therefore required that any selected Dialogue structure also includes water perspectives of climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as disaster risk reduction. Strengthened climate change adaptation is crucial as water is the primary medium through which climate change influences the Earth’s ecosystems and in turn people’s livelihoods, well-being and resilience.

¹ According to section OP4(f) A/RES 75/212, the Conference shall:

(f) Involve all relevant stakeholders, bringing together Governments, the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, other interested international bodies, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions, the scientific community, the private sector, philanthropic organizations and other actors to assess challenges and opportunities relating to, as well as support further action to implement, the objectives of the Decade and the water-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

The success of this Conference depends on achieving actionable outcomes that are well anchored among a wide range of stakeholders inside and outside of the water sector.

In the preparation work of these proposed Dialogue themes, Sweden has consulted the Global Water Partnership (GWP) and Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI). Both GWP and SIWI are internationally recognized water organizations and have extensive knowledge and experience from working with the water sector. In addition, both organizations are UN-Water Partners and have participated in the extensive exercise to formulate four options on how to organize the five interactive dialogues of the UN 2023 conference in a very thoughtful and deliberate way.

2. Theme proposals for the interactive dialogues and Cross-cutting issues

Based on the above, here follows Sweden's proposals for the five interactive Dialogue areas. These are framed under the broader scope of ***addressing major water challenges across sectors***, and we propose that these five interactive Dialogue areas are built around SDG 6 targets, linking those to other SDGs as follows:

- 1. Social development (health, education, gender, economic development)** (SDG 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 17)
- 2. Agriculture and food security** (SDG 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and SDGs 2, 12)
- 3. Environment and biodiversity** (SDG 6.3, 6.6 and SDGs 14, 15)
- 4. Climate, energy, and disaster risk management** (SDGs 6.5, 7, 11.5, 13, Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework)
- 5. Peace and security** (SDG 6.5, 6.b and SDG 16)

2.1. Cross-cutting issues need to be embedded in each Dialogue area

We propose that **cross-cutting issues for acceleration** to be highlighted and firmly embedded in each Dialogue area of the Conference. These includes:

- **Financing**
- **Data and information**
- **Capacity building**
- **Innovation**
- **Governance**

This approach will systematically integrate the important cross-cutting perspectives throughout the overarching themes.

3. Concluding remarks

These five themes can be related to a group of important water development issues to achieve water security – e.g., water for human and economic development (including water and sanitation), water for peace, transboundary water, water for ecosystems – and to key associated sectors like energy, agriculture, industry etc. Substantial biodiversity benefits can be achieved through improved water governance. Nature-based solutions, IWRM, Source-to-Sea and cross-sectoral approaches, integrated coastal zone management, etc. are of high relevance which have also been underlined in the EU Council Conclusions on Water (2021).

In our view, this approach will provide a clear link to other SDGs and fits the objectives of the Water Action Decade, which go beyond SDG 6 to include other “water-related” targets.

We would like to highlight the need for these five themes to go beyond the water focus and introduce a human-centric approach that gives voice to the voiceless and promotes water alignment across sectors and regions. This human centric approach should take into consideration water as a tool to prevent conflicts and foster peace building, as well as water as an equalizer in terms of prosperity, job creation, and poverty reduction. All of this embedded in the concepts of dignity, inclusion, and diversity that considers the viewpoints of youth, women, indigenous groups, migrants and displaced, minorities, marginalized and traditionally excluded groups. Applying a Human Rights Based Approach in the management of freshwater ecosystems, its ecosystem services and biodiversity, is essential to safeguard all water-related human rights and to ensure that no one is left behind.

We note that there are many ways to slice the pie, but in our view, a combination of options 2 and 4 in the zero draft paper coordinated by UN water, UNDESA and others, is a useful and constructive way to successfully move the Dialogues forward. The above proposed Dialogue areas are well aligned to this thinking.

Sweden looks forward to a successful and fruitful conference with a broad participation from all relevant stakeholders.