

# WATER AND CLIMATE LEADERS

2021-2023



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# Synopsis

The [Water and Climate Leaders](#) have for the past three years pursued and advocated for an integrated global approach to water and climate issues. They have expressed the key messages that water needs to be seen as part of the climate solution rather than just as part of the problem, by reducing climate-induced disaster risks, enhancing climate change resilience and security, and reducing emissions. Leaders have called on governments to ‘wake up to water’ in their national climate policies and their global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and stabilize the climate.

The Leaders contributed to key intergovernmental and policy processes as follows:

The UN 2023 Water Conference Summary of Proceedings by the President of the General Assembly highlights the need for: Integrated water and climate policy at national and global levels by 2030; Operational Global Water Information System to support water, climate and land management for socioeconomic resilience, ecological sustainability and social inclusion by 2030; and Early Warnings for All to help safeguard lives and property by 2027.

The final declaration of COP 27 recognizes “the critical role of protecting, conserving and restoring water and water-related ecosystems in delivering climate adaptation benefits and co-benefits, while ensuring social and environmental safeguards”. This was the first time water was included in a COP cover decision. The Action for Water Adaptation and Resilience (AWARe) initiative was also launched at COP27, as a pivotal initiative for addressing the challenges of climate change through effective water management solutions.

The 77th session of the UN General Assembly unanimously declared 2025 as the International Year of Glaciers’ Preservation and proclaimed 21 March of each year the World Day of Glaciers, to be starting in 2025 – an initiative called for by the Water and Climate Leaders.

Leaders also formulated in their [Action Plan for Integrated Water-Climate Agenda](#) six concrete data-driven solutions to ensure the transition from awareness to action. The six solutions described in the Action Plan are: a set of global water information services, a water and climate stocktake, a cryosphere information mechanism, a new financing rationale, local engagement and regional cooperation for early warning systems. Leaders are collaborating with partners to implement these solutions.

The Water and Climate Leaders work has culminated in a final call to action at COP 28 in the United Arab Emirates in which they challenge countries to work together to achieve alignment of water and climate policies, provide mutual support through sharing of data, experience and ideas and mainstream water into all current and relevant UNFCCC work programs across scales, and at the country level in nationally determined contributions. The Water and Climate Leaders will remain committed to championing an integrated agenda in their respective capacities and will continue collaborating to collectively realize their vision.

# Introduction

Considering water in the context of climate change is an imperative to better anticipate and prepare for potential risks and ensure adaptation and mitigation measures are in place. For the past decades, the world has witnessed drastic changes in the water cycle. Disrupted precipitation patterns led to more frequent and severe droughts, floods, and changes in water availability. Many regions around the world are facing water stress, with over 50% of global catchment areas and reservoirs displaying deviations from typically normal conditions in 2022 (WMO, 2023). With the exacerbation of climate change, these issues are likely to worsen. An integrated water and climate approach will achieve better coherence between various policies, and support comprehensive strategies that account for both water and climate considerations.

The Water and Climate Leaders were invited by the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, Professor Petteri Taalas, and the UN-Water Chair, Mr. Gilbert Houngbo, to set and pursue an integrated global water and climate agenda in support of sustainable development and national mitigation and adaptation actions. This was in response to the call by the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Antonio Guterres, to accelerate the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6 of the 2030 Agenda, as a multi-stakeholder initiative under the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework and in support of the 'Water Action Decade' (International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development") 2018-2028. As eminent representatives of governments, UN entities, civil society, and the private sector, the Leaders would focus on catalyzing action through leadership and example.

The Water and Climate Leaders advocated for the inclusion of water in global climate change processes. They called for an integrated global water and climate agenda, including a global water information system at the UN 2023 Water Conference. To achieve this, they engaged at high political levels, garnered support from relevant partners, and put forward practical measures to improve the integration of water and climate-related decision making. At the same time the Water and Climate Coalition was established to support broader UN and stakeholder commitment to these same objectives.

The Water and Climate Leaders mandate was for three-years concluding at the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference - COP28. This report provides a summary of their achievements.

# Membership

The Water and Climate Leaders comprised current and former Heads of State and Government, Ministers, heads of UN entities and other international organizations, as well as representatives of the private sector and youth at the highest possible level.

At the end of their mandate the Panel comprised of the following membership:



Membership and composition of the panel changed as official roles of the Leaders evolved and successors to join the panel on their behalf were suggested. Since the launch of the panel in March 2021, the Panel comprised also of the following membership:

- H.E. Dr. Mohamed Abdel Aty, Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation of Egypt
- H.E. Mrs. Barbara Visser, Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
- H.E. Mrs. Cora van Nieuwenhuizen, Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
- H.E. Mrs. Haydée Rodríguez, Vice-Minister for Water and the Ocean of Costa Rica
- Mr. Howard Bamsey, Chair of GWP
- Mr. Ernest Gibson, youth climate advocate from Fiji

More information about the Water and Climate Leaders membership and composition can be found on <https://www.water-climate-coalition.org/leaders/>.

# Water and Climate Leaders Activities

The Water and Climate Leaders held their first meeting on 3 March 2021, to exchange views and expectations and discuss their next steps, at a crucial moment, in the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, and when the UN President of the General Assembly was convening a high-level moment on Water in New York (18 March 2021), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC COP) was paving the way for climate action and preparations were in train for the UN 2023 Water Conference. The Water and Climate Leaders, as part of the [Water and Climate Coalition](#), aimed to set the tone for an integrated policy on water and climate to support the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

At the [UNFCCC COP26](#) held in Glasgow, UK from 1-12 November 2021, the Water and Climate Leaders provided [strategic guidance](#) on



integrating the climate and water agendas, as well as maximizing synergies in designing and implementing actions to ensure effective climate action for adaptation and resilience. They highlighted the need for integrated water-climate management, with a focus on increased data and information, to help determine when, where and how much water can be supplied today and in the future. At COP 26, more than 125 countries agreed to share weather data as a public good. This followed a milestone decision, where the World Meteorological Organization's Executive Council endorsed a [unified policy](#) on the international exchange of

Earth system data to help its Members meet the increasing demand for weather, climate and water services as the world grapples with the dual challenges of climate change and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events. Now it was time to act on water data and information.

At the [9th World Water Forum](#) in Dakar, Senegal in March 2022, the Leaders launched their Call for Action entitled “[Leaders for Integrated Water and Climate Action](#)”, at the event “[Water and Climate Leaders – Recipe for Successful Adaptation](#)”. WCL provided strategic guidance on integrating the water and climate-related agendas: the UN 2030 Agenda, the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement and Africa’s 2063 Agenda. They sought to maximize synergies in designing and implementing actions to achieve SDG 6 and 13. The WCL message called for more urgent and united action “to protect our people and future generations” in the face of alarming new scientific evidence from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of growing global threats to water availability and from water-related hazards.

## The Leaders set out the following urgent actions:

- An integrated water and climate approach — recognizing the role of water for informed decision-making in climate change mitigation and adaptation action.
- International support to improve water data and information for a climate ready world — to operationalize global water information services that provides status, assessment, and outlook for smart climate and water-related decisions.
- Partners to join them in the implementation — with solutions for sound decision making: a water and climate stocktake, a cryosphere information mechanism, a new financing rationale, local engagement, and river basin cooperation.
- Recognizing the need to protect glaciers — understanding the role of glaciers as one of the most critical sources of freshwater and uniting forces in preserving these resources through an International Year of Glacier Preservation 2025.

In the lead-up of the Dushanbe Water Conference in June 2022, WCL endorsed their [Action Plan for Integrated Water-Climate Agenda](#). The Action Plan contains six data-driven solutions to ensure the transition from awareness to action. The six solutions described in the Action Plan are: a set of global water information services, a water and climate stocktake, a cryosphere information mechanism, a new financing rationale, local engagement and regional cooperation for early warning systems.

This Action Plan was presented in July at the [SDG 6 Special Event](#) during the [High-Level Political Forum](#) for Sustainable Development in New York, as well as in October at the President of the UN General Assembly [preparatory meeting](#) for the UN 2023 Water Conference and the [High-level Expert and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters](#)-WCL breakfast session on “Connecting the Issues of

Water, Disasters, and Climate Change”. The Action Plan was also submitted to governments of all UN member States.

On 24 and 25 October 2022, the UN President of the General Assembly convened a Stakeholder consultation and Preparatory meeting for the UN 2023 Water Conference at the UN Headquarters in New York to discuss game changing ideas related to water and sustainability and to agree on the five main themes of the interactive dialogues for the Conference. At this event, the Water and Climate Leaders advocated for water to be prominently discussed in the context of climate change during the Conference and introduced the proposed global water information system as a Conference ‘gamechanger’.

At COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh the Water and Climate Leaders released a statement titled “The Water Imperative for Climate Action: Message to National and Global Leaders Attending COP27” that urged heads of state and government to take more integrated water and climate action to replace the existing fragmented approach where water is often seen as a problem rather than being “part of the solution” to achieve the Paris Agreement goals. The statement presented three compelling climate benefits of improved water resources management: reducing the impacts of climate-induced disasters, enhancing resilience to climate change, and lowering GHG emissions. A press briefing was held by Leaders.

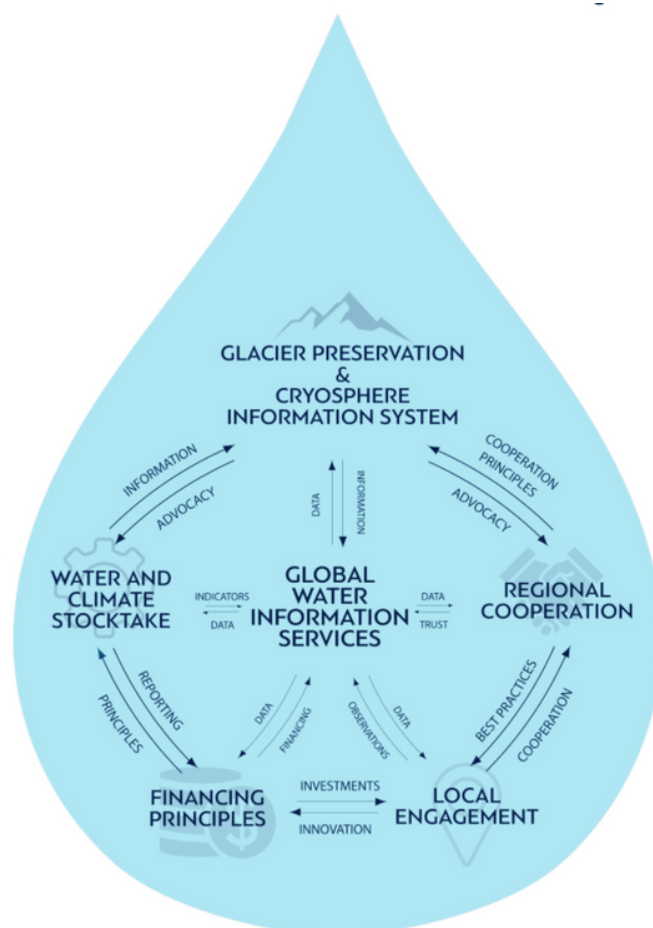


Figure 1. Waterdrop: The six data-driven solutions from the Water and Climate Leaders Action Plan

In the lead up to the UN 2023 Water Conference of March 2023, the Water and Climate Leaders published an Op-ed titled “Wake up to Water”, drawing attention to the interlinkages of water and climate change mitigation actions. They described water as a “blind spot” in climate discussions highlighting the cross-cutting need for water in climate change mitigation and adaptation actions. It emphasized the urgency for the international community to take action to address this challenge. The UN 2023 Water Conference dedicated one of its five interactive dialogues to the theme “Water for Climate, Resilience and Ecosystems.” Leaders called on the international community to not lose this historic opportunity.



At the [UN 2023 Water Conference](#), which took place from 22-24 March in New York and was co-hosted by Water and Climate Leader H.E. Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of Tajikistan, and His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of The Netherlands, both countries represented on the Leaders group. Under the Co-Chairmanship of Water and Climate Leader H.E. Mr. Hani Sewilam, Minister of Water and Irrigation of Egypt, and Japan, the interactive dialogue on “Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment” had sought to strengthen an integrated water and climate change agenda. The [report of the Conference](#) included three key calls from the Leaders: Integrated water and climate policy at national and global levels by 2030; Operational Global Water Information System to support water, climate and land management for socioeconomic resilience, ecological sustainability and social inclusion by 2030; and Early Warnings for All to help safeguard lives and property by 2027.

At [COP28](#) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates from 30 November until 12 December 2023, Water and Climate Leaders held their last meeting where they launched their final call which sets out key principles to integrate water for climate solutions. Water and Climate Leaders stressed water as a ‘super-power’ for responding to global warming; for emission reductions, adaptation and resilience. The call was presented and supported at the COP28 Presidency Event “Watering the clean energy transition”, where water was stressed as key for achieving net-zero sustainable development.

# Moving Forward

Water and Climate Leaders throughout their mandate succeeded in bringing the water and climate agendas closer to each other. Their messages for an integrated water and climate approach were included in outcome documents of key intergovernmental processes, such as the UN 2023 Water Conference, COP27, and COP28. The Panel clearly demonstrated their political power and impact at the highest levels. They showed that with political leadership and commitment integrated water and climate solutions can be a powerful tool towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including climate change adaptation and mitigation goals.

At COP28, Parties looked for new ways to reduce emissions more quickly, to adapt to climate change and understand loss and damage from emissions. In all these fields, water is imperative. Governments, businesses, and individuals need to wake up to water for its central role in both adaptation and mitigation. The final call made by the Water and Climate Leaders set out a path for continued integration of water and climate agendas. Their vision is clear, national water and climate policies and actions need to work in unison to achieve global climate and water goals and objectives at all levels. National governments, with the support of the international community, need to take the following three actions:

## 01 Policy alignment

aligning the sustainable management of water resources and climate actions to support achieving agreed national climate and water-related objectives

Countries choosing to respond to this call and to take these proposed actions, along with supportive institutions, may consider strengthening their collaboration in the future, to enable collective sharing and learning of implementation experience and the collaborative further development of the actions in this call.

## 02 Mutual support

sharing data, experience and ideas on policy and practice and jointly preparing agreed principles and guidance materials

There is now room for complacency, the need to address climate change in an integrated way considering water resources has never been more urgent before. The Water and Climate Leaders remain committed to championing the fulfilment of this call in their respective capacities. They will collaborate with partners who share their passion to collectively realize their vision.

## 03 Mainstreaming

working together for water to be embodied into all current and relevant UNFCCC work programs across scales, and at the country level in nationally determined contributions



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