

The Symposium to Commemorate the UN 2023 Water Conference

Draft Concept Paper

1. Background and Objectives

Billions of people worldwide still live without safely managed drinking water and sanitation, even though access to both services has long been defined as a human right. Many water sources are becoming more polluted, and ecosystems that provide water are disappearing. Climate change is disrupting the water cycle, causing droughts and floods. In addition, many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are falling off track towards achievement due to the impact of the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). All the SDGs are interlinked and SDG 6 for safe drinking water and sanitation is essential for achieving other SDGs, particularly health, food, gender equality, education, livelihoods, industry, climate, and environment.

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly, with the Governments of the Netherlands and Tajikistan as co-hosts, organized the UN 2023 Water Conference in New York from 22 to 24 March 2023. The primary aim of the conference was to raise awareness of the global water crisis and decide on concerted action, the "Water Action Agenda," to achieve the internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, and was held as a mid-term review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018–2028. It was the first intergovernmental meeting on water since the 1977 UN Conference on Water in Mar del Plata, Argentina, and brought together more than 7,000 representatives of UN Member States around the world and various stakeholders working on water issues.

The conference featured inclusive and cross-sectoral discussions in plenary sessions and five interactive dialogues. The follow-up to the Water Action Agenda is expected to drive action towards achieving water-related goals and targets in the latter half of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development".

Japan also faces serious water problems, such as frequent water-related disasters and water shortages, and the situation has been exacerbated by climate change, and actions that reflect global discussions and lessons learned are essential to address these issues. Therefore, the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), in cooperation with the Government of Japan, the Government of the Netherlands, the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC), and the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), will organize a commemorative symposium on 12 June 2023 in Tokyo, Japan to share the main discussions and outcomes of the UN 2023 Water Conference. In addition to sharing the discussions and outcomes of the conference, the symposium will feature a panel discussion on "Water and Local SDGs: Actions for Achieving Sustainable Cities." The panel will highlight various initiatives to achieve the SDGs at the local level, such as cities and regions in Japan. These initiatives will include the actions and efforts to promote sound water cycle, address water-related disasters with a focus on preparedness, and achieve sustainable urban development through smart cities and innovative solutions based on ICT and data. It is also expected that the discussion will touch upon the roles of various stakeholders in disseminating and replicating these initiatives globally, and that the outcomes of the discussion will provide guidelines for Japan's future water diplomacy and the building of various partnerships.

2. Outline of the Symposium

Date and Time: 12 June 2023, 14:00-17:00 (15-minute break in the middle)

Place: Elizabeth Rose International Conference Hall (5th Floor), United Nations University
(5-53-70 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-8925, Japan)

Organizer: United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD)

Co-organizers: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Government of Japan, Government of the Netherlands, United Nations Information Centre (UNIC)

Speakers and Participants: Officials and experts from national and local governments and UN agencies, as well as representatives of the private sectors, academia, CSOs and any other stakeholders working on the SDGs in Japan

Language: Japanese-English (simultaneous interpretation to be provided)

Format: Hybrid format (in-person and also delivered by Zoom)

3. Provisional Programme

14:00-14:15 Opening

- Mr. Li Junhu, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations (UN DESA)
- Mr. Peter van der Vliet, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan
- Mr. Keiichi Hara, Deputy Director-General/Deputy Assistant Minister for Global Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Japan
- Ms. Kaoru Nemoto, Director, United Nations Information Centre in Tokyo

14:15-15:00 Discussion and outcomes of the UN 2023 Water Conference

- Introduction of the General Overview of the Conference
Ms. Taeko Yokota, Facilitator of the Symposium / Programme Expert on DRR and Water, UNCRD
- Speakers
 - Interactive Dialogue 3: “Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment”
H.E. Ms. Yoko Kamikawa, Special Envoy of Prime Minister of Japan (tbc)
 - “Water Action Agenda” and future follow-up
Mr. Niels Vlaanderen, Coordinator of International Water Affairs, Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, Government of the Netherlands
 - Municipal showcase
Mr. Kazufumi Onishi, Mayor of Kumamoto, Japan
 - Kumamoto Initiative for Water
Mr. Toshikazu Tokioka, Director for International Coordination of River Engineering, Water and Disaster Management Bureau, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Government of Japan

15:00-15:15 Coffee break

15:15-16:45 Panel discussion “Water and Local SDGs: Actions for Achieving Sustainable Cities”

The panel discussion will focus on various water issues such as access to safe water and sanitation, water-related disasters, climate change, and other global challenges, with an emphasis on local and regional activities (e.g., preparedness, smart cities projects) as solutions to these problems, with representatives from governments, local authorities, UN agencies, civil society groups, and private sectors introducing their activities and discussing future prospects.

- Moderator: Prof. Kenzo Hiroki, Professor, National Graduate Institute of Policy Studies (GRIPS)/Coordinator, High-level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters (HELP)

- Panelists
 - Dr. Riko Oki, Director, Earth Observation Research Center (EORC), Space Technology Directorate I, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA)
 - Mr. Atsushi Kato, Chairman, Japan Toilet Labo.
 - Mr. Hiroyuki Sougawa, General Manager, International Sales & Marketing Department, International Business Division METAWATER Co. Ltd.; and Leader, the Task Force for International Water Infrastructure Development by the Japan Machinery Center for Trade and Investment
 - Dr. Reita Furusawa, Associate Professor, Chubu University; and RCE Chubu Secretary General
 - Dr. Tomohito Yamada, Professor, Faculty of Engineering, Division of Field Engineering for the Environment, Hokkaido University

16:45-16:55 From the UN 2023 Water Conference to the 10th World Water Forum

- H.E. Mr. Heri Akhmadi, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Indonesia to Japan

16:55-17:00 Closing remarks

- Mr. Kazushige Endo, Director, UNCRD