

22 March 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the High-level Dialogue on Water Cooperation Issues**

Mr. Secretary-General,
Esteemed Prime Minister,
Respected Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to wish you a warm welcome to this High-Level Interactive Dialogue on Water Cooperation.

At the onset of my remarks, allow me to pay tribute to the Secretary-General's leadership on this important issue. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to Prime Minister Okilov and Ministers Bin Fahad, Zamora, and Belem-Ouedraogo, State Secretary Federico Ramos de Armas, as well as to our invited speakers and participants, for their commitment to advancing water cooperation efforts.

As we speak, another High-Level meeting is taking place in The Hague, commemorating World Water Day. In about 45 minutes, a video-link will be established with participants in that event, who will inform us about its main outcomes.

Excellencies,

Water covers over 70 percent of the Earth's surface, and is vital for all known forms of life on our planet.

Fundamental to mankind's very existence, its transcendent value is recognized in the holy books of the world's great religions. The Bible states that "the earth was formed out of water and by water;" the Quran affirms that "living things are made of water;" and the Hindu Sama Veda declares: "Hail, Water, ye bring health and bliss: ye help us to energy."

As we launch the International Year of Water Cooperation, let us be guided by these sacred words, which remind us of the indispensability of this great resource.

The slogan for our activities in the 12 months to come was chosen in a competition from thousands of submissions from across the globe: "Water, water everywhere, only if we share" was the winning entry.

The message from 23-year old Megha Kumar of India is simple: the world needs to come together and agree on how to strengthen water cooperation.

Fresh water supplies are finite, making up less than four percent of the planet's supply. We need to find ways to apportion it more equitably. Today, however, this precious resource is being put under increasing pressure by rising populations, unsustainable forms of economic development, and climate change.

Excellencies,

Achieving the broad spectrum of Millennium Development Goals including most importantly, alleviating poverty is impossible without clean water and proper sanitation.

This should be one of our most urgent priorities, for the 2015 deadline is fast approaching. We hear predictions that a number of countries will not achieve the prescribed targets. I believe, however, that by redoubling our efforts, they can still be largely met.

I therefore attach great importance to the preparations for the Special Event to Follow-up on Efforts towards Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which will be held in September during the High-level Segment of the General Debate of the 68th Session.

It will be the final occasion for world leaders to decide on actions to be taken to complete the MDG process, and for them to provide guidance to the Secretariat and other stakeholders on the priorities they will need to focus on in the period before us. The Special Event will also provide Member States with a unique opportunity to set the framework for a smooth transition from the MDGs to the SDGs.

I believe its outcome should be as substantive as possible, feeding into the deliberations of the various work-streams tasked with conceptualizing the entire post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

Excellencies,

The Rio+20 concluding document tasked the General Assembly with adopting the SDGs. The Open Working Group established to propose them to the plenary by the third quarter of 2014 has recently begun its deliberations. I believe that coherently addressing all three dimensions of water-related matters namely economic, social, and environmental should be one of the Group's foremost priorities. As the document itself states, "water is at the core of sustainable development as it is closely linked to a number of key global challenges."

The plenary has been mandated to oversee two other critical elements of the post-2015 agenda: the Intergovernmental Process to Propose Options for an Effective Sustainable Development Financing Strategy, and the High-level Political Forum to Follow-up on the Implementation of Sustainable Development.

I expect that the facilitators I have appointed to help advance these two processes will place many of the topics we have come to discuss high on their respective agendas.

In a few days, I will attend the fourth meeting of the Secretary-General's 27-member High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, which will take place in Bali, Indonesia. There, I will also stress the need to promote the sustainable management of water.

Excellencies,

In the weeks and months to come, the General Assembly will play host to a number of thematic debates, one of which is directly related to the issues we have gathered here to talk about.

I have chosen May 16th as the date for addressing the topic of "Sustainable Development and Climate Change: Practical Solutions in the Energy-Water Nexus." It is being organized in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates and the newly established United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network spearheaded by the Director of its Secretariat, Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University.

Climate change, growing populations, increasing consumption needs are putting increasing stress on water supplies and energy production, which are becoming more interrelated. In the time ahead, this 'nexus' will need to be managed in a more sustainable way, urgently requiring practical and cost-effective solutions, which this thematic debate will seek to promote.

The invitations for it were sent out to Member States yesterday afternoon. I take this opportunity to invite them to participate at the highest possible level. This would not only support efforts to promote the International Year of Water Cooperation, but could also help provide important inputs to the various post-2015 work-streams that must ultimately converge into a single, fully cohesive sustainable development framework.

As President of the General Assembly, I stand ready to help ensure we are well on our way to fulfilling the tasks set out by world leaders last June in Rio de Janeiro.

Excellencies,

"The challenge of securing safe and plentiful water for all is one of the most daunting challenges faced by the world today." Those are the words of the Secretary-General, spoken at the World Economic Forum in Davos five years ago.

More than ever before, water stands at the center of a complex and interdependent set of challenges, which will stretch the imagination, resourcefulness and fortitude of Member States and the United Nations System for decades to come.

Today's High-level dialogue should identify specific areas of enhanced collaboration, as well as the appropriate mechanisms for follow up action.

This will undoubtedly involve the General Assembly, and I want you to know that you can count on my full support.

I wish you a productive and successful discussion.

Thank you.