

Water Leaders' Action Declaration 2023

The Korea International Water Week 2023 was convened in Daegu, Republic of Korea on December 6, 2023. The Water Leaders' Roundtable, a pivotal component of the Korea International Water Week, aims to establish a high-level consensus for adopting priorities and implementing joint actions in response to prevailing water challenges.

During the Korea International Water Week 2022, the Water Leaders' Roundtable, a confluence of global water leaders, endorsed the five priorities to address the water challenges that the international community confronts as a whole; prioritize water-related action plans when developing climate change policies, commit to efforts and implementation to provide safe drinking water and sanitation, strengthen international partnerships for the integrated water resource management system (IWRM) and implementation to build a sustainable water environment, cooperate in creating financing to minimize the impact of climate change in the water sector, recommend a global technology partnership mechanism for collective action to address water crisis and looking for solutions.

Water is a unique and irreplaceable resource that links present and future generations together. There is an urgent need for the international community to enhance bilateral and multilateral exchanges and cooperation to ensure sustainable water management for human livelihoods.

The world is currently grappling with extreme weather events, including severe droughts, floods, rising sea levels, glacier melting, and the proliferation of blue-green algae. With the number of people estimated to be affected by floods surpassing 1.6 billion by 2050, the UN-water projected 3.6 billion people experienced water scarcity for over a month as of 2022, which will further escalate to 5 billion by 2050. The severity of these challenges demands decisive actions more than ever, given the impending water crises and disasters facing humanity.

To this end, we declare our commitment to participate in the mid-term assessment and accelerated implementation of the United Nations Water Conference's key agenda set forth in the "International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development (2018-2028)," commonly known as the "Water Action Decade," which was adopted in March of 2023, marking the first re-selection since 1977.

To delve further into these issues, we collectively endorse the following common and share actions, with representatives from the water sector in attendance from all nations:

Immediate and robust measures for climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction are imperative to proactively address the severe water challenges and damages resulting from the current climate crisis.

Climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies can be broadly categorized into two groups: structural responses and policy responses. Structural measures include increasing water storage capacity, constructing infrastructure to withstand climate change, and enhancing crop resilience through the introduction of flood- and drought-resistant crop varieties. Policy measures encompass flood and drought insurance, early warning systems, land use planning, and capacity-building initiatives such as education and awareness.

In this context, we are committed to taking the following action plans to confront the global water challenges:

Explore ways to build water security systems

We reaffirm our regional and global cooperation to create an enabling environment for access to sufficient water to sustain safe water supply and sanitation and the integrity of human life and the environment in an era of climate change. We are committed to diversify partnerships and collaborations to ensure water security through water disaster response and water stress reduction through integrated urban water management.

Protect the human right to water and sanitation

We are committed to protect the human right to water and sanitation. In particular, we support efforts for the progressive realization of the human right and universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation. We further advocate progress in ensuring that all individuals and communities, including women, children, and marginalized groups, to have the right to access safe drinking water and sanitation, and scale up safe water supplies to uphold and safeguard the human right to water and sanitation. We urge the international community not to use water as a means of threat.

Put water issues on the main political agenda

We affirm our support for the integration of the water sector goals in development plans, as highlighted since 2015. Emphasizing the central role of water management in sustainable development, we further advocate for the effective management of the water sector. We ensure that water issues are prioritized on the political and policy agenda in all countries, with due consideration for social equity.

Build transnational governance for water and climate change action

We stress the importance of developing countries considering water issues as central to their climate change policies. We emphasize sustainable management of the water sector, efficient use of water technologies, and building transnational cooperation to prepare for water-related disasters. The legal basis and financing arrangements for establishing institutions supporting governance operations should be established, and the resolution of water issues should be strengthened at the transboundary level. This governance will play a pivotal role in minimizing the damage and impacts of climate change and preventing climate change-induced water sector disasters.

Enhancing soft power to address water challenges

We are committed to providing a forum for all stakeholders in each country to interact and share knowledge and information on various water issues threatening water resources. Through a wide range of exchanges and cooperation among various stakeholders, we aim to minimize conflicts over water issues and support cooperation in various aspects of water issues occurring around the world. This means establishing cooperative mechanisms for sustainable water management practices, efficient use of water technologies, and responses to climate-induced water-related disasters.

Strengthen cooperation between developed and developing countries for water management and environmental protection

We acknowledge that developed countries should support this process and provide financial assistance to countries through appropriate policy and financial mechanism. This will enable them to protect and utilize their environmental resources to promote environmentally sustainable development. Through strengthening cooperation between developed and developing countries, we endeavor to establish a sustainable and harmonious relationship between water and the environment, making efforts to conserve ecosystems.

Strengthen water disaster prevention management and global technical partnership mechanism

We emphasize the safety of water management by developing effective methods and response strategies to reduce the risk of water-related disasters. This will lead to more immediate preparedness and enhanced prevention and response measures to floods, droughts, and climate change-induced water disasters. Furthermore, we recommend active global technical partnership mechanism for the water crisis solutions.

At the KIWW Water Leaders' Roundtable in 2023, bringing together national and international water leaders under the theme "Sustainable Water Management for People and Nature," we call on the global water community to work together towards the common goal of creating a climate-resilient water environment.

We express gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Korea for hosting and organizing the Water Leaders' Roundtable.

KIWW 2023