

**Statement of the High Level Panel on Water
Addressing the Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Challenge**

Water and sanitation are human rights, and the SDGs call for no-one to be without them. In our Action Plan launched in September 2016, the High Level Panel on Water (HLPW) has committed itself to a range of initiatives to spur progress on SDG 6, one of which is dedicated to ensuring universal access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for the growing world population, estimated to reach 10 billion people by 2050.

We acknowledge the enormous progress made in providing WASH services to people during the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) period. Nevertheless, the world missed the sanitation target by almost 700 million people. There continues to be many gaps in coverage and significant inequalities, especially when it comes to women and girls and those in vulnerable situations. The SDGs represent a step change in ambition for the WASH sector: that all people should use water that is free of contamination and available when needed, and sanitation facilities that result in safe disposal of excreta. However, the SDG baselines prepared by the WHO-UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) showed that in 2015, 2.1 billion people lacked water services reaching the new standards, including 159 million who still drank untreated water directly from surface water sources. Almost 4.5 billion people did not use a sanitation facility that safely disposed of excreta, and 892 million people – mostly in rural areas – still practiced open defecation.

Low quality of drinking water, sanitation and hygiene leads to poor health, poor nutritional outcomes for children, low labour force productivity, and gender inequality due to the drudgery of water collection, the indignity and insecurity of open defecation, and barriers to education and employment when schools and workplaces do not have safe, private toilets. Lack of drinking water, sanitation and hygiene threatens human dignity. The Panel is seized of the fact that the SDGs relating to health, gender equality, education and poverty, are not achievable without improvements in WASH. Likewise, success in reaching the WASH targets within SDG 6 depends on achieving those that relate to water resources, water quality, water use efficiency and ecosystems, as all are connected within the overall water cycle.

Despite its great need and potentially enormous benefits, WASH as a sector faces major challenges. Accelerated progress requires WASH – as part of the achievement of SDG 6 as a whole- to be higher on the political agenda, and WASH needs to be mainstreamed into national, sub-national and community-level planning. The sector requires predictable and sufficient finance that reaches the countries and people that need it the most. Robust planning should be supported by reliable evidence, data and analysis to inform decision-making and to track progress. Greater mutual accountability is needed: between developing countries and donors, and between developing country governments and their citizens.

The Panel recognises the importance of the efforts of the global WASH community and encourages all existing partnerships to share their knowledge and experience in order to effectively implement the SDG targets. The Panel welcomes the contribution of the Sanitation and Water for All partnership, which complements the work of the HLPW. The Panel encourages governments that are in a position to do so to join this partnership. The Panel further acknowledges that SWA has developed a Framework for Action that includes both *what* needs to be done in the WASH sector, and *how* to do it, based on strong government leadership, working through country systems and policies.

The HLPW calls on governments, as part of their transformational efforts to achieve a water secure world, to mainstream drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in national, sub-national and community-level planning, to establish a transparent and multi-stakeholder sector review process, to take an integrated approach to the implementation of all the water related SDG targets and to work towards innovative and sustainable financing strategies that will ensure universal access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.