

Thank you Your Excellency Mr Mahmadaminov for the kind introduction.

Ambassadors, Delegates, Colleagues. It is an immense honour and a privilege to have an opportunity to be here with you today.

In the last 2 years, I have run across 7 Deserts on 7 Continents, and run 40 Marathons in 40 days on 6 continents down 6 of the world's great rivers. And as you have just seen, I'm preparing to run 100 marathons in 100 days later this year. Not because I love to run, but because I want to raise awareness of the water crisis, and inspire all of us to believe we too can make a difference.

Along my journey, I have met incredible people who have born witness to our water crisis – enlightening me, terrifying me, and inspiring me with their courage and determination to persevere despite the odds.

In the Simpson Desert in Australia, as I ran along sandy dry riverbeds, beneath towering gum trees, I met an Aboriginal woman painting a map of her billabongs and waterholes. It was beautiful, not only visually, but for what it represented. As she described the painting, she said to me "Mina. Water is my Life".

Since then I've heard that from many others. From the farmers along the banks of the Nile River, to the Bedouins in the Arabian Desert in Jordan, looking every day in the cracks of the rocks to see if by chance water had appeared in the small containers they left there.

For the 1 in 10 people on the planet who lack even the most basic drinking water service, and the 4 in 10 children in Sub-Saharan Africa who are affected by diarrhoea and malnutrition and restricted from attending school, water isn't only life, it is their future.

For women and girls, that future is particularly challenging. In many communities, social expectations dictate they are the principal providers of food, fuel and water. They carry heavy loads over long distances, affecting their ability to attend school, and often jeopardising their own safety.

And they're not the only ones. Around the world, water inequalities aren't just restricted to gender. They exist based on socio-economic, culture, geography and political stability.

Water is also about our economies. It powers economic development. It provides jobs and enhances livelihoods. It drives the turbines that power our homes, our meeting rooms, our medical services and our electronic devices. It's about the water needed to grow the crops we eat, and produce the fibres we use to make our clothing.

Putting this into perspective, most of you are wearing smart shirts, suits, shoes. You'll probably have picked up a cup of coffee somewhere during the day, and many of you are probably meat eaters.

The water that went into what you're wearing today took more water to make than all the water you drank before the age of 40. Just what you are wearing right now.

And its in our food too. The water it takes to grow the food that is lost every year to wastage equates to three times the entire water consumption of the United States.

Water connects us in ways most of us don't fully recognise. Water scarcity in one place will not just affect the jobs and economic growth of that local community, it will impact manufacturers, businesses, investors, financing institutions and consumers around the world.

If water were plentiful, this wouldn't be a problem.

But it's not. Our planet's water resources are under extreme stress.

Around the world, our generation is witness to drops in water levels. We have seen the Aral Sea, dramatically disappearing before our eyes.

And rivers like the Orange that runs through one of the most biodiverse deserts on the planet – the Richtersveld – and marks the border between South Africa and Namibia. A river that for years has created a healthy economy of tourism and agriculture. And now, as the local river guides told me, pointing at the river bank towering above us, the river has dropped to stunning low levels.

There are parts of the world that are running dry.

Lakes and rivers rarely exist in isolation. They are part of a broader ecosystem and those are suffering too. From aquifer contamination to the deforestation of river basins like the Amazon.

Our water supplies are under stress from other places too - changing weather patterns are causing rainfall in areas not equipped to capture and use it, contamination and pollution are flowing into our waterways, underground water supplies are already overused, clean water is wasted due to aging and leaky infrastructure.

In places like Hong Kong, rains deluge the city, but the dams lie only half full.

On the Thames, the Thames River Authority regularly fishes out plastic straws, bags and wet-wipes from the water.

And River Keepers around the world like those on the Yangtze literally fish boatloads of trash from the waterways.

Water knows no geographic boundaries. It does not discriminate between people or communities based on our religion or the colour of our skin. And when it is scarce, it can be used as an element of war or peace.

We can't continue like this. We owe the next generation a better planet.

One where our demand for water is less than the supplies available. One where we are protecting and restoring our ecosystems. Where we have eliminated dumping, and minimized the release of hazardous chemicals into our precious waterways. Where we are developing low or zero water use products, and where we are recycling and reusing water and working together to protect our catchments.

The signs of stress are already there. 40% of people around the world right now live in places suffering from water shortages. And over half the world's population experiences water scarcity at least one month per year.

Water scarcity is a problem, a growing problem, and unless we in this room can find ways to increase our water use efficiency and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater, it's not just going to be SDG 6 that we have trouble achieving, but all the other SDGs as well.

For the real truth is that to truly create systemic change, we need to show the children of today the importance of following your dreams and working together to accomplish the seemingly impossible.

We need to act, and we need to do so now. The solutions are there.

On the clifftops of the Atacama Desert, high above the ocean, Hugo uses giant black fishing nets to capture moisture from the air and use it to grow fish and vegetables. Several thousand miles to his north, Vidal, the 24-year old tattooed farmer who learnt to farm from the internet, has worked out how to recycle and reuse water so that he can grow organic vegetables on a small slice of the desert in California.

Nature-based solutions are integral to enhancing overall system resilience. Working in harmony with nature, and mimicking natural processes enables us to enhance water security and increase resource productivity.

But, what we also need are people-based solutions. Innovators like Hugo and Vidal, and policy makers like all of you in this room.

People who can help to develop and deploy integrated water resources management.

People who can help to ensure appropriate monitoring and measurement systems that can provide positive reinforcement to deployed solutions.

People who can partner and work together across boundaries to develop solutions that are transparent, inclusive and coordinated across sectors.

People who can create enabling environments that incentivize and encourage the deployment and commercialization of water saving technology, and can bring to bear the assets of the fourth industrial revolution to help solve our water crisis.

But perhaps most importantly of all, we need public awareness and support for the various measures we need to take. Consumers, voters, investors, stakeholders who will positively reward action on water.

We need to make saving water popular. Famous. We need to make it the trend that everyone gets rewarded for.

For the sake of the next generation, for our planet, for the future.

Because saving water is not just the right thing.

It's the only thing.

The time to act is now.

Thank you.