

Statement of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

High Level Event on Water, Sanitation, and Climate Change, 29 May 2020

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Mr Mahmadaminov, thank you for the kind introduction.

In the midst of this health crisis, it seems almost an eternity ago that UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced the Decade of Action at the UNGA.

But of course it's not even been a year. And if the current crisis does anything, it's reinforce the Secretary-General's main message: much still remains to be done, and it must be done urgently.

COVID-19 has focused global efforts on a single goal: eradicating the virus. But mitigating the secondary impacts of the crisis is just as important. Mounting poverty and socioeconomic distress will exacerbate the current crisis. It will

impede, and may even reverse, the progress we have seen on development in recent decades.

Of course we need to overcome this pandemic, but we must not forget that it's an *additional* crisis.

It compounds all the challenges we were facing before. None of which have gone away.

These multiple crises are connected in numerous, and often surprising ways. Health, economic and climate crises interact. They don't respect borders, and their effects are felt worldwide. In the words of former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, they're 'problems without passports'. Water is at the heart of most of these challenges. Already, over 2 billion people live in countries experiencing high water stress. It's estimated that by 2040, one in four of the world's children – some 600 million in all – will be living in areas of *extremely* high water stress. Access to water is unequal, and the impact of climate change will lead to reduced supply in several developing countries, especially in Africa. Such problems can't be addressed locally, or in isolation. They're interconnected.

That's why the SDGs are a universal agenda. These problems require interconnected and intelligent solutions.

Today's session is an excellent example of this. One of the most effective tools for stopping the spread of COVID-19 is surprisingly simple: washing your hands regularly. Clearly, this is impossible when you don't have money for soap, or lack access to clean water and basic sanitation – as a staggering 4.2 billion people still do.

This crisis hits the vulnerable far harder than most of us.

However, if access to water and sanitation improves, that's a great step forward towards preventing the next global health crisis. A focus on WASH during this pandemic has the added benefit of preventing other diseases, like diarrhoea, and of improving maternal and child mortality rates in developing countries.

Prevention is the best cure.

It's a surprisingly simple answer to a set of complex problems.

That's why I've signed the World Leaders' Call to Action on COVID-19. And why I recently allocated an additional 7.5 million dollars to WASH activities in Africa.

We must emphasise water, sanitation and hygiene in our crisis response. And we must continue to do this even once a vaccine enables victory in the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There *will* be future epidemics, but they may not be our chief concern. We face a century of global warming and climate disaster. Another problem with water at its heart.

Climate change means that numerous places will either have no water, erratic access to water, or far too much water. These considerations should be decisive for what we do next.

Because the choices we make now present a unique opportunity to create a more resilient and sustainable future.

The international community is currently mobilising enormous economic stimulus packages, representing 17 per cent of global GDP. These are the largest public sector investments we've seen in decades. How they are spent can mean either an enormous boost to achieving the SDGs and the goals set out in the Paris Agreement, or they can set us back decades and make the '1.5 degree world' a pipe dream.

I choose to see them as a momentous opportunity.

If this support is targeted in the right way – in line with ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions – invested in the green economy, and used to support the most vulnerable communities...

...this crisis can actually help prepare us for the next one.

To achieve this, we need bold and intelligent solutions.

We need to create new, green business opportunities.

And we need to achieve these through transparent, participatory and accountable community-driven solutions.

In short, we need to put our money where our future is.

That's how we can truly use this decade to achieve our collective goals, as defined by the SDGs and the Paris Agreement.

Thank you.