



World Water Day 2026 | Water and Gender Equality

Where water flows, equality grows

ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations Headquarters, New York | 19 March 2026

In Observance of World Water Day and World Glaciers Day

Concept Note

Water is central to the 2030 Agenda, yet progress on SDG 6 remains off track. Billions of people still lack access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services, while water stress is increasing and climate change is intensifying vulnerabilities. These trends highlight the need for inclusive, participatory and gender-responsive water management. The 2023 UN Water Conference, co-hosted by Tajikistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, renewed political momentum through more than 800 commitments in the Water Action Agenda. The 2026 UN Water Conference in Abu Dhabi, co-hosted by the United Arab Emirates and Senegal, which will bring a dedicated focus to accelerating the implementation of SDG6 together with the 2028 Water Conference in Tajikistan will reinforce accountability and accelerate implementation.

World Water Day 2026 will place gender equality at the center of water action. Structural inequalities shape access to water, the burden of water scarcity and unequal participation in decision-making. Without addressing these disparities, water investments without a gender lens risk reinforcing exclusion. Gender-responsive policies, leadership and financing are essential to ensure equitable, efficient and sustainable outcomes.

The 2026 theme, *Water and Gender Equality*, underscores the link between equitable access to water and sustainable development. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by inadequate services yet remain underrepresented in governance. The observance will feature the launch of the *United Nations World Water Development Report 2026: Water for All People: Equal Rights and Opportunities*, coordinated by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water, providing evidence and policy guidance at all levels.

The observance will also contribute to the broader intergovernmental water agenda, including preparations toward the 2026 UN Water Conference in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, the 2028 UN Water Conference in Dushanbe and ongoing follow-up within the framework of the Dushanbe Water Process.

Held on 19 March 2026 during the 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70), the event will strengthen linkages between water, gender equality and sustainable development, bringing together actors across water, climate, peace and development communities.

The observance will also coincide with World Glaciers Day on 21 March. Glaciers, which regulate freshwater availability, are shrinking at unprecedented rates—600 gigatonnes of freshwater were lost in 2023 alone.

Building on the momentum of the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation 2025 and advancing scientific cooperation under the Decade of Action for Cryospheric Sciences (2025–2034), the observance will highlight the interconnectedness of glacier preservation, water availability and inclusive, gender-responsive water management.

Glaciers decline increases floods, droughts and long-term water insecurity. These impacts are not gender-neutral: in glacier-fed regions, women play central roles in water management and agriculture, and heightened variability deepens existing inequalities. Climate-resilient and gender-responsive water management is therefore essential.

The event will contribute to key global milestones, including the (1) 4th High-Level International Conference on the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” (2018–2028), (2) the 2026 High-Level Political Forum reviewing SDG 6, and (3) the 2026 UN Water Conference.

A concise summary capturing key policy messages and recommendations will be prepared and shared with relevant intergovernmental processes, including the Dushanbe Water Process, the 2026 High Level Political Forum and preparations for the 2026 and 2028 UN Water Conferences.

World Water Day 2026 will affirm that water and gender equality are mutually reinforcing priorities, advancing sustainable development, cooperation and shared prosperity.

World Water Day 2026

Location: ECOSOC Chamber, UN HQ, New York

Date: March 19, 2026

Time: 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

Sponsors: Nepal, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Pakistan, Senegal, Switzerland, Tajikistan, United Arab Emirates, UN DESA, UN Women, UN-Habitat, UN-Water, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNU-INWEH, IUCN and Pan-African Intergovernmental Agency for Water and Sanitation for Africa.

Format: In-person and livestreamed

AGENDA

10:00 am

High-level Segment

Opening:

H.E. Ms. Annalena Baerbock
*President of the 80th session of
the General Assembly*

H.E. Mr. Lok Bahadur Thapa
President of ECOSOC

H.E. Mr. Sirojiddin Muhridin
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan

H.E. Mr. Li Junhua
*Under-Secretary-General
for Economic and Social Affairs*

Ms. Catherine M. Russell
Executive Director, UNICEF

Moderator

H.E. Mr. Jonibek
Hikmat, Permanent
Representative,
Republic of Tajikistan

1) 10:25 am

High-level Panel

H.E. Mr. Sjoerd Sjoerdsma
*Minister of Foreign Trade and Development
Cooperation of the Netherlands (VIDEO)*

H.E. Mr. Musadik Malik
*Minister for Climate Change and
Environmental Coordination of Pakistan
(VIDEO)*

H.E. Mr. Mohamed Issa Abushahab
*Permanent Representative of United Arab
Emirates to the UN (on behalf of co-hosts of
2026 UN Water Conference)*

Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris
*Assistant Secretary-General for Human
Rights, OHCHR*

H.E. Dr Nabhit Kapur
*Permanent Representative of WSA to
United Nations*
Mr. Remy SIETCHIPING
*Deputy Director, New York Liaison
Office, UN-Habitat*

10:45 am
Keynote messages

Ms. Retno LP Marsudi
*UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on
Water (VIDEO)*

Mr. Alvaro Lario
*UN-Water Chair and President of the
International Fund for Agricultural
Development (VIDEO)*

10:55 am
**Official Launch of
the United Nations
World Water
Development Report
2026: Water for All
People: Equal Rights
and Opportunities**

Mr. Bhanu Neupane
*Process Coordinator for the UNESCO
- Presentation of the UN WWDR 2026*

Toribia Alicia López López
Mayan Community Leader

Ginette Azcona
*Gender Expert and Professor, New
School*

Elizabeth A. Koch
*Principal, Bridging Waters Advisory,
Process Support Team Lead, Women in
Water Diplomacy Network*

Video The Struggle for Mother Water

Moderator

Ms. Stephanie
Rambler
Senior Sustainable
Development Officer
DESA

11:45

Interventions from the floor

12:55
Closing remarks

Ms. Sima Bahous
Executive Director, UN Women