

Draft Concept Note

The Seventh Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters “Water and Disasters for Cooperation and Partnerships” United Nations Headquarters, New York

8 July 2025

1. Background and Objective

The UN Special Thematic Sessions on Water and Disasters (STSWD) have been held biennially since 2013. The Seventh Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters (STSWD7) will take place on 8 July 2025 as part of the lead-up to the 2026 UN Water Conference. It will build on the discussions and outcomes of the 2023 UN Water Conference while continuing its mission to raise awareness, foster cooperation, and drive action on water and disaster-related issues within the broader development agenda.

Water is not a tool for conflict but a powerful catalyst for cooperation. Historically, water-related disasters have provided opportunities for neighboring countries to collaborate by sharing information and offering mutual support. Over the past fifty years, water has played a significant role in fostering peace, as evidenced by 1,200 diplomatic events—two-thirds of the 1,800 recorded water-related diplomatic engagements. Transboundary water cooperation remains a crucial pathway to peace and must be actively pursued. Protecting water resources is essential for the well-being of both people and the planet.

While water often unites, it can also be a source of tension. Floods, droughts, and pollution, especially when exacerbated by natural disasters, can lead to technological crises, waterborne disease outbreaks, and strained international relations. Inadequate disaster response can further destabilize affected regions. Poor water management and regional disputes may even result in transboundary disasters, such as dam failures, highlighting the critical need for joint basin management to prevent long-term conflicts.

However, as history has shown, water-related disasters also present unique opportunities for cooperation. By sharing critical information and providing mutual assistance in times of crisis, countries can strengthen trust and deepen partnerships. Turning these challenges into opportunities requires preparation, proactive measures, and sustained collaboration.

With this background, STSWD7 will build on previous sessions by maintaining high-level political engagement and advocating for concrete action to address the interlinked challenges of water and disaster risk reduction among UN member states. The outcomes of the session will feed into global dialogues such as the Dushanbe Process and the UN Water Conferences in 2026 and 2028. Together, these discussions will help forge stronger partnerships among water stakeholders, advancing the shared goal of peace and sustainable water management.

2. Expected outcome

- Message to the 2026 UN Water Conference
- Chair's Summary on the outcomes of the Sessions

3. Organizers/sponsors

- Permanent Missions to the United Nations of Egypt, Japan, Republic of Korea, Netherlands, Slovenia, Tajikistan and other UN Member States
- Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Government of Japan
- High-level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters (HELP)
- National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS) of Japan
- UN Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD)/UNDESA

4. Date and time

10 am to 1 pm / 3 pm to 4:40 pm on Tuesday, 8 July 2025

5. Venue

ECOSOC Chamber, UN Headquarters, New York

6. Provisional Agenda

(1) Opening Plenary (10:00-11:30)

1) Opening Remarks

H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo, Chair of HELP / former Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea

2) Keynote Message

His Majesty the Emperor of Japan (video)

3) Keynote Speeches

- H.E. Ms. Mia Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados (tbc)
- H.E. Professor Danilo Turk, former President of Slovenia / President of Club de Madrid
- H.E. Ms. Laura Chinchilla, former President of Costa Rica
- H.E. Ms. Retno Marsudi, United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Water / former Foreign Minister of the Republic of Indonesia

(2) High Level Panel Discussion “from the 2023 UN Water Conference to the 2026 UN Water Conference” (11:30-13:00)

Moderator: Ms. Meike van Ginneken, Water Envoy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands

- H.E. Mr. Dody Hanggodo, Minister of Public Works, Republic of Indonesia (tbc)
- H.E. Dr. Cheikh Tidiane Dieye, President of the African Ministers’ Council on Water (AMCOW) / Minister of Hydraulics and Sanitation, Republic of Senegal (tbc)
- H.E. Mr. Masayoshi Hirose Vice-Minister for Engineering Affairs, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism of Japan
- H.E. Mr. Abdulla Balalaa, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Energy and Sustainability, United Arab Emirates
- H.E. Ambassador Tanja Miškova, Special Envoy on Water Diplomacy of the Republic of Slovenia
- H.E. Mr. Jonibek Hikmat, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan to the United Nations
- Dr. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (video)
- Mr. Alvaro Lario, Chair, UN-Water / President of the International Fund of Agricultural Development (IFAD) (video)
- Mr. Kamal Kishore, SRSG for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) (video)
- Mr. Loïc Fauchon, President of the World Water Council (WWC) (video)
- Mr. Pablo Bereciartua, Minister of Infrastructure of the Buenos Aires City Government Argentina / Chair of Global Water Partnership (GWP) (tbc)
- Mr. Saroj Jha, Global Director for Water, The World Bank
- Eng. Humoud Alkarshami, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- Youth representative

(3) Science and Technology Panel “From Glaciers to Ocean” (15:00-16:30)

Moderator: Prof. Kenzo Hiroki, HELP Coordinator/Professor of GRIPS

a) Keynote Speech

- H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan, Former Deputy Prime Minister of Czech Republic / President of the 57th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

b) Panel Discussion

- Prof. Toshio Koike, Executive Director of the International Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management (ICHARM)
- Mr. Henk Ovink, Executive Director and founding Commissioner for the Global Commission on the Economics of Water
- Dr. Atsushi Watanabe, Director, Ocean Policy Research Institute-Sasakawa Peace Foundation (OPRI-SPF)
- Prof. Kaveh Madani, Director, United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH)
- Dr. Abou Amani, Director of the Division of Water Sciences / Secretary of the Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP), UNESCO
- Prof. Huadong Guo, Director General, International Research Center of Big Data for Sustainable Development Goals (CBAS)
- Dr. Faisal M. Qamer, Intervention Manager, River Basins, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)
- Prof. Reita Furusawa, Professor, Chubu Institute for Advanced Studies International ESD/SDGs Center, Chubu University

(4) Closing (16:30-16:40)

Closing Remarks by H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo, Chair of HELP / former Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea