

**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY H.E. MR. MAHMOUD SAIKAL, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, ON BEHALF OF H.E. MR. MIROSLAV LAJČÁK, PRESIDENT OF THE 72ND SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AT OPENING OF THE LAUNCH EVENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR ACTION: WATER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, 2018 – 2028**  
**22 MARCH 2018**  
**New York**

*Excellencies, Mr. Secretary General, Mr. President, Esteemed Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Dear Colleagues,*

The President of the General Assembly, His Excellency, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák intended to launch this Water Decade, this morning. Unfortunately, the snow storm prevented him from making it back in time. I am, therefore, honoured to welcome you all, to our launch event, and to deliver this statement on his behalf.

So, it is official.

We are all, now, living in the International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development. And I want to thank all of you for being a part this launch. In particular, thanks to President Rahmon and Secretary-General Guterres, for their participation. As we begin our discussions today, I want to make three main points.

The first is that we need to face reality. And, reality can look different, depending who and where we are. Did you know that there are 76 drinking water fountains in this building? And, nearly 500 toilets? I will be honest here. I, personally, did not. Until very recently. Because, frankly, I did not think to ask. I just took the water facilities, available to me here, for granted. And I am sure that I am not alone. No one, working in this building, will go thirsty. None of us will wonder whether our next sip of water will make us ill. None of us will risk our dignity, or our safety, to meet our basic human needs. This, simply, is our reality.

But, for too many people around the world, it is a different story. Still, today, billions are without a basic toilet. Still, today, millions lack access to safe drinking water. Still, today, hundreds of thousands of children are dying from water-related illnesses. This is another reality. Their reality. And, there is an even darker side to it. It means we need to face the fact that people still live their lives without access to water. But, at the same time, we must grapple with the prospect that, very soon, there might not even be enough of it to go around. Because, our water resources are in grave danger. Population growth, and water-intensive economic activity, are depleting our supplies. Rainfall patterns are changing – and not for the better. The damage we have done to the environment is affecting our climate, and intensifying water-related disasters - including famines, floods and droughts.

And, there is yet another real danger. Competition for water is growing. And so is the risk that this competition could turn violent, and result in conflict - and therefore more human suffering. This is the reality we all have to face. It is not pretty. But, it should not come as a surprise. We have known about it for a while. And, luckily, we still have enough time to do something about it.

Which brings me to my second point. And the reason we are all here: The need to do something about it. And, we are not starting from nothing. We have seen, from past experience, that international cooperation on water is possible – and that it works. So far, we have met the Millennium Development Goal target of halving the amount of people without access to safe drinking water. We have come together, in this Hall, to confirm that all people have a human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

We have made water a priority of our most transformative framework yet. Not just through dedicating an entire goal, SDG 6, to it - but also by reaffirming that water is a prerequisite of all goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. And, today, we are launching this International Decade for Action. We will also learn more about the report of the High-Level Panel on Water. And we will hear about the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's Action Plan for the decade ahead. This is a major opportunity.

And there are others ahead. We need to grasp them, and ensure that they contribute to changing our reality, when it comes to water. Here, I am referring to the ongoing reform of the United Nations' Development System. I am also talking about the upcoming High-Level Political Forum, which will place a focus on the review of SDG 6. So, cooperation has worked. Now, we need much more of it. And we are, today, staring into our biggest window of opportunity yet. But it is closing fast. Both, for our planet, and for people on the ground. To keep it open, we need action. Which is why we are dedicating a whole decade to it.

Before I conclude - and as my third point - I will give you my vision for the decade ahead. And that is a decade of action on water – the likes of which we have never seen. A decade in which water and sanitation are priorities for the budgets and policies of national governments. A decade which sees a surge of cooperation on water management and disaster risk reduction. A decade which brings together different stakeholders on water, including the United Nations, governments, international financial institutions, businesses and civil society. A decade of more innovations, and more investments, in water than ever before. A decade which sees water become a resource for peace, rather than a risk of conflict. And a decade in which everyone has access to water – but no one takes it for granted.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

It is, indeed, time to face reality. And that means looking beyond our own. In here, we have clean toilets. We have safe water fountains. But the reality, out there, is very different. It involves sick children. Open defecation. Disease. Hunger. Dry lakes. And dead crops. And so, like I said, it is not pretty. But it is reality - for too many people. And we need to face it. Not just today – but every day, for the next ten years.

So, let us resolve to make this a decade for action. Not just in name - but in reality.

*Thank you.*