



## **World Water Day: Joint Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell and Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius**

Brussels, 22 March 2021

On World Water Day 2021, we celebrate all of the different ways in which water benefits our lives. We resolve to value water properly and safeguard it effectively for everyone.

This year's theme focuses on the 'value of water'. We should not forget that access to drinking water and sanitation are basic human needs and rights, and are fundamental for human dignity. At the same time, water is a shared resource, a critical ecosystem, and its use underpins various sectors of the economy.

Yet, access to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water remains a challenge in many parts of the world.

Faced with the urgency of the global climate crisis, many regions in the world face more frequent, severe, and longer lasting extreme weather events, water cycle and temperature changes, or sea level rise putting people's livelihoods and ecosystems under additional stress. This leads to severe situation of water scarcity, which can have seriously destabilizing effects on countries and regions, affecting peace, security and increases inequalities.

Water scarcity already affects a quarter of the world's population.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a severe health and economic crisis that is affecting progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Access to clean water and sanitation remains the best protection to reduce the spread of infections and save lives.

Water stress is increasing in Europe as well. With the European Green Deal and our ambitious climate neutrality target, we will address the pressures on Europe's rivers, lakes, coastal waters and groundwater, move towards more sustainable agriculture using fewer pesticides. The protection and restoration of aquatic ecosystems including through nature-based solutions, the increased efficiency of water use and promotion of water reuse are also high on our agenda. With our Zero Pollution Ambition we are revamping our chemicals policy, reducing the presence of pharmaceuticals in water and soil, fighting micro plastics and supporting innovative practices and technologies.

Based on our long experience of transboundary water management, the EU strongly encourages and where possible directly supports increased cooperation and transparency in water governance at all levels. Just this month we are inaugurating in Djibouti a desalination plant powered with renewable energies and a wastewater treatment plant in the West Bank equipped with collection and irrigation networks to re-use water.

Sustainable management of water resources requires global action through strong international cooperation, the benefits of which extend far beyond the water sector. Everyone needs to play their full part in ensuring safe, secure, resilient, ecologically sustainable and inclusive access to water and sanitation worldwide.

Together we must give water its true value, safeguarding this most precious of natural resources for everyone. Let's make every drop count.

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