

**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of World Water Day**

22 March 2023

Not only is water the source of all life, but it is also the foundation for the health and development of our societies. Water is thus at the confluence of the objectives of UNESCO and the United Nations: for how can we learn well, how can we be in good health, how can we build a world of peace and justice, in a world that is thirsty, or that makes itself sick by drinking water that is unfit for consumption?

And yet, today, according to the United Nations, 2 billion people do not have access to water.

It is therefore urgent to act, to ensure access to water and sanitation for all - and this is all the more urgent as the consequences of climate change are already being felt and threaten to aggravate droughts and water shortages, as well as the scale and frequency of floods.

It is to mobilize the international community that the United Nations Water Conference is being held this 22 March in New York, with one goal: to bring together, around this great cause of water, all the actors involved - States, international organizations, NGOs, civil society and scientists – so as to come up with a programme of action commensurate with the challenge.

Meeting this challenge will also require partnerships and cooperation agreements at all levels. This is why this year's United Nations World Water Development Report, coordinated by UNESCO on behalf of the UN-Water family, is focusing on this issue. It is particularly important to identify the good practices that allow such agreements to really bear fruit, such as adopting a multidisciplinary approach, comparing views and expertise, and involving women and indigenous communities in the sustainable management of water resources.

At UNESCO, we have long been convinced of the value of this cooperative approach, whether through our Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme, which over five decades has gradually brought together 169 National Committees; or with the UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme, the 29 independent UNESCO water centres and the 70 UNESCO university Chairs on water.

Much remains to be done, especially in the management of transboundary basins and aquifers. This is why the Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition was launched last December at the UN-Water Groundwater Summit, organized by UNESCO. The Coalition aims to encourage cooperation between countries that share aquifers, lakes and river basins, because it is by creating spaces for exchange and joint decisions that an equitable and sustainable use of resources can be guaranteed.

On this World Day, UNESCO would like to recall the extent to which water, whose cycle is global, is permanently at odds with human boundaries. It is up to us to draw the necessary conclusions and to see it as what it is: a vital and common good of humanity, which must therefore be considered on the scale of humanity.