

## **WWDR Opening Address – 30 March 2018**

**by Ms. Maki Hayashikawa (IOC, UNESCO Asia Pacific Regional Bureau for Education)**

Distinguished Guests,

Dear colleagues and friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

On behalf of UNESCO, it is my pleasure to welcome all of you to this side event, which celebrates the 'Commemoration of the World Water Day 2018 and the Opening a Decade on Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028'.

I would like to thank UNESCAP, and our colleagues and partners for their collaboration in organizing an event that brings together people from a range of expertise and backgrounds, who are jointly committed to achieving water security and sustainability for all.

Water is fundamental to the functioning of all living things on our planet, and intrinsically linked to human quality of life. Water sustains ecosystems, nurtures our crops, is a primary factor for human health and an essential component in many industries. However, our natural water systems are under severe threat from disrupted climate patterns and increased water usage and pollution due to rapid population and industrial growth. Since the 1990s, the world's water systems have become increasingly polluted, a problem expected to worsen over the coming decades. To secure and protect this precious resource for all and future generations, improved water management practices and policies must be put into place.

In December 1992, the United Nations General Assembly designated 22 March World Water Day, in order to invite member states to discuss and promote the implementation of sustainable development recommendations and raise public awareness on the development and conservation of water resources.

The theme of World Water Day 2018 is 'Nature for Water'. Accordingly, this year's World Water Development Report, prepared and produced by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water, focuses on the global potential of water management through 'Nature-based solutions'.

Nature-based solutions are green engineering techniques that integrate or imitate natural processes. They can substitute or work in parallel with traditional grey engineering techniques. Natural and constructed wetlands, floodplain restoration, green roofs, and recovering groundwater recharge are examples of 'nature-based solutions' for water. Nature-based solutions enable ecosystem restoration, recovery and maintenance. This - protects biodiversity, aids in the development of sustainable water systems and reduces the risks associated with water-related disasters and climate change.

Ecosystems are a fundamental aspect of water cycle. They are involved in the movement, storage and transformation of water and serve as key element on determining water availability. By working with nature instead of trying to bypass it, 'Nature-based solutions' aim to improve water availability and quality, whilst reducing waste and pollution. This is a sentiment that must be adopted by the Asia Pacific, which is one of the most water insecure regions of the world. Home to over 60% of global population but only 36% of its water resources, the Asia Pacific has the lowest per capita water availability in the world. Adopting Nature-based solutions will allow the region to maximize its water potential and to generate social, economic and environmental co-benefits of our region. Nature-based solutions are essential to achieving water-related goals and targets of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and directly contribute to meeting several other interdependent goals and targets.

Indeed, this 2018 is a special year, towards synergizing global efforts for ensuring universal water security and sustainability. On the 2018 World Water Day last week, the United Nations launched the 'International Decade for Action - Water for Sustainable Development', which will last until 2028. This call to action will help put a greater focus on water for the next 10 years and highlight how important the UN regards water security, as part of the foundations required to build a more sustainable and resilient world for future generations. In addition, in this June, we will mark the publication of the first SDG 6 Synthesis Report, which provides a global status update on SDG 6 and discuss the performance of different SDG 6 targets. The report is a product of a Task Force coordinated by the UN World Water Assessment Programme of UNESCO and the 31 Members and 38 Partners that make up UN-Water.

I believe, together with this year's World Water Development Report, this 2018 will be a mile stone year to combine all these efforts for ensuring water security in our region, which will lead us towards sustainable and resilient society.

I hope that some of these synergies can start here.

Thank you!