Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

The Secretary-General has repeatedly stated that climate change severely impacts peace and security.

Water insecurity contributes to outbreaks of violence and increases their duration. It also undermines our efforts to build and sustain peace. The combination of conflict and climate change is a key obstacle to achieving SDG6 - water and sanitation for all.

At the same time, efforts to address climate change can inadvertently exacerbate or perpetuate underlying tensions or create new sources of vulnerability and inequality — a process known as “mal-adaptation” or “mal-mitigation”.

Decisions regarding access to – and control over – water remain inherently political as water allocation may favor one group over another or undermine livelihoods. Reduction of water availability due to climate change has the potential to exacerbate such tensions among competing users, especially in fragile or conflict-affected contexts.

Given the political complexities and the potential for conflict over water resources, international cooperation is key. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) is among UN-Water's newest members. We are pleased to contribute to the UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation.

As part of this session, we have all been asked to provide one or two specific examples of high-priority actions that could be incorporated into the strategy’s collaborative implementation plan.

*One high-priority action is ensuring that we adopt a conflict-sensitive approach to* implementing the strategy and invest in water diplomacy.
In West and Central Africa, for example, decreasing water supplies and viable pasturelands are exacerbating food insecurity and negatively impacting livelihoods. This is bringing herders into greater conflict with farmers. Together with the Economic Community of West African States, our regional office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) supported by DPPA is identifying good practices for preventing and resolving transhumance-related conflicts.

In Central Asia, our regional office (UNRCCA) promotes cooperation among the five states of Central Asia on topics related to water, energy, environment, and climate, including by sharing information and advice on transboundary water agreements and dispute resolution.

Another high-priority action is fostering a whole-of-UN approach to implement the UN system-wide strategy for water and sanitation.

Several Special Political Missions managed by DPPA are in climate-vulnerable or water-stressed locations. Some of them – such as those in Central Asia (UNRCCA) and Iraq (UNAMI) – have been mandated by the Security Council to facilitate regional dialogue and cooperation on water.

With funding via the Climate Security Mechanism - a joint initiative between my Department, UNDP, UNEP, and DPO - we have deployed Climate, Peace and Security (CPS) advisors in UN field missions to help lead this work. For example:

In Iraq, UNAMI has provided technical advice to the UN Water Taskforce and, through this platform, has promoted the inclusion of peace and security considerations into the water-related work of the UN Country Team. The mission has also undertaken capacity-building support on climate-related risk assessments to help ensure sustainable water management and promote effective, inclusive water governance.

In the Horn of Africa, the Special Envoy has established a climate, peace, and security hub. This UN hub supports efforts by IGAD and its Member States to promote sustainable natural resource management through joint analysis of transboundary water governance, data management, capacity development, and financing.

In Afghanistan, our political mission (UNAMA), together with the World Bank, launched a multi-stakeholder Afghanistan water platform (AWAP) to maximize the benefits of water-related development and humanitarian assistance in the country. UNAMA, with support from the DPPA Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers, is also engaging on issues related to international water law and hydro-diplomacy.

DPPA is also leveraging the power of innovation for better, more granular, and integrated risk assessments and risk mapping across sectors. Through innovation, our open-source geospatial data platform, we are analyzing environmental trends, such as water scarcity, to better
understand how they are linked to vulnerabilities across the Middle East, Central and West Africa.

Between 2017-2023, the Peacebuilding Fund - the UN’s leading financial instrument for prevention and peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected contexts – has invested more than USD 186 million in climate, peace and security and environmental peacebuilding projects. Addressing water issues as a driver of community tensions and conflict is a major theme, including, for example, initiatives to enhance the meaningful participation of women in water management and conflict resolution in some of the most water-scarce areas.

In short, the United Nations System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation (SWS) marks an important milestone in elevating and anchoring water as a central component of our work in conflict prevention, peacemaking, and peacebuilding.

In line with this year’s World Water Day theme, let us act urgently and ambitiously to deliver on the basic human right to water and sanitation, leveraging water for sustainable peace for all people, everywhere.

Thank you.