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Statement on the launch of the UN-Water System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation

Water is vital to human and planetary health, yet Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 on water and sanitation for all is off-track. To protect the health and livelihoods of 4.8 billion people who could face water risks by 2030, we must improve water quality and better manage freshwater ecosystems. This means, among other actions, addressing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss and pollution and waste.

The UN system-wide strategy for water and sanitation (SWS) and its links to the environment and management of ecosystems is an important step in achieving these goals. As we implement this strategy, we must take an approach that operates through an integrated water resource management (IWRM) lens and considers ecosystem conservation, protection, sustainable management and restoration. Such an approach will unlock action on nature, climate action and pollution abatement, backing the human rights to water and to a healthy environment.

Increased ambition will require commitments at the highest level and increased investments and decision-making based on accurate science and timely data. As the custodian agency of three SDG 6 indicators on integrated water resources management, freshwater ecosystems and ambient water quality, UNEP has been supporting Member States to strengthen the collection and use of data. This effort has supported the Secretary General in reporting on the SDGs. And UNEP has been supporting Member States to design and apply IWRM at all levels.

These tools, approaches and findings can help other UN agencies direct action where it is needed and increase collaboration across the UN system in supporting Members States. UNEP will throw all its knowledge and expertise behind the new system-wide strategy as we seek to secure clean and abundant water, and the freshwater ecosystems that provide it, for all.