

Ms. Wilson (Australia):

Water gives life, supports human development and enables sustainable economic growth. Yet water crises are ranked by the World Economic Forum as one of the top 10 global risks. Climate change has the potential to exacerbate water crises, which could in turn lead to or intensify conflicts and fuel forced migration.

Australia is concerned about the increasing risks to peace and security created by extreme weather events, including water scarcity. Cities, towns and peri-urban areas require functional water supply and sanitation systems. Failure to provide such services often leads to community tension and instability and can easily result in conflict. We see improved water governance as a key component in adapting to climate change, while planning for a growing population and ensuring economic development.

Good water governance is also essential to achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — most directly SDG 6, on ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. The 21 September joint statement of the High-Level Panel on Water called for a fundamental shift in the way the world looks at water. The Panel presented a transformative agenda to deliver change in water management and to increase investment on a global scale to build more resilient economies and societies. For Australia — a dry continent prone to highly variable rainfall — effective water management is critical to our economy. It has allowed us to make the most efficient use of our scarce water resources and to enable investment to meet the growing needs of agriculture, industry and urban communities, while ensuring there is water for the environment.

Through the High-Level Panel on Water, Australia has committed to a number of practical initiatives aimed at strengthening the capacity of countries facing water crises. We are preparing a guide to improved water management, drawing on experience from within Australia and in our region, to help other countries effectively allocate water among competing users. That will have flow-on effects for food production, health outcomes and economic development. We have also established the Australian Water Partnership to assist countries to improve their water governance. It is a practical way to improve water resources management in partnership with countries and the United Nations system.

Australia also believes that the effective implementation of SDG 6 requires explicit attention to gender equality and social inclusion. Women and vulnerable populations face an increased risk of violence where water and sanitation services are only available outside the home, often in unsafe locations. Furthermore, we need to deliberately and proactively engage women and marginalized people and encourage their participation in strengthening water governance.

Australia is committed to encouraging and supporting sound water governance at the highest levels. That is why Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull is an active member of the High-Level Panel on Water, and it is why Australia will continue to work with countries in our region and beyond to protect precious water resources — in peace and in conflict.