

United Nations Water Conference: The Butterfly Effect calls for stronger international water governance - **Report**

From the 9th World Water Forum in 2022 to the United Nations Water Conference in 2023, the international civil society water coalition "Butterfly Effect" - led by the International Secretariat for Water (ISW) and with over 140 CSO members - has been fully mobilised to influence the first UN water conference in almost 50 years.

1 The conference in brief

- From 22 to 24 March 2023 in New York
- Co-chaired by Tajikistan and the Netherlands, with the support of UN-DESA
- Intergovernmental sessions :
 - A general debate with official statements from the Member States
 - 5 interactive dialogues, each led by 2 Member States
- Parallel events :
 - 5 special events led by non-state actors
 - **500 side-events** put on by a wide range of players
- Strong attendance, with around **10,000 people** taking part
- Political presence of **8 heads of state** (Bolivia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Botswana, Slovenia, Gambia, Tuvalu and Namibia); **6 heads of government and over 100 ministers**



2

Results of the Conference

The aim of the conference was to carry out a mid-term review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, on the theme of water for sustainable development, and it was understood that the results would not be binding.

As a result, one of the main outcomes is a programme of action for water - the **Water Action Agenda** - which to date lists more than 800 voluntary commitments, 43% of which come from NGOs, 26% from governments and 11% from multilateral institutions. To date, no information has been provided on the follow-up to the implementation of these commitments - many of which are not "game changers".

Tajikistan - co-organiser of the Conference - has announced its willingness to host the next UN Water Conference in 2028, and **more than 150 countries have expressed their support for the creation of a post of UN Special Envoy on Water to the UN Secretary General**. In addition, a number of countries, including Germany, Switzerland and France, have announced financial commitments to support the work of this Special Envoy. The need to establish regular intergovernmental meetings on water within the United Nations was also mentioned by many member states.

This progress - albeit still too timid - on structuring global water governance means that **this conference will have provided a valuable framework for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG6 dedicated to water**.



3 The influence of the Butterfly Effect

As this is a unique opportunity to bring states and the international community together around our most precious and limited resource, water, and to give us the chance to solve the water crisis, the Butterfly Effect has mobilised to move the lines and influence the outcome of this conference.

Building on the positions taken at the World Water Forum in Dakar (Senegal, March 2022), the coalition widely disseminated [its recommendations](#) for strengthening global water governance, calling for strong political leadership to address the water crisis.

The Butterfly Effect's positions were **widely disseminated before and during the conference at various sessions** and meetings with strategic players, including various ministers and parliamentarians, the Secretary General of the United Nations, government delegations (Holland, France, Germany, the European Union, South Africa, Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia and Senegal), the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to drinking water and sanitation, the Head of the Human Rights Office in New York and many others.); to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; to the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Water and Sanitation; to the Head of the Human Rights Office in New York; and to many other stakeholders.

Some of the coalition's advocacy messages will have been **taken up at the highest level**, at least in part, such as the call for the establishment of regular intergovernmental meetings on water within the UN; the creation of a post of Special Envoy on Water to the UN Secretary General; and the establishment of a new global information system on water.



Members of the BE (ISW, ACF, Coalition Eau and SIF) in the presence of the French ministerial delegation in New York



Members of the BE Secretariat in the presence of the Peruvian delegation

4 The Butterfly Effect at the UN Water Conference in brief

- **17 members** mobilised in New-York
- **1 Policy Paper** containing the demands of civil society
- **1 contribution** to the Water Action Agenda
- **2 contributions** to global consultations
- **1 contribution** to the interactive dialogue concept note 5
- Participation in the **preparatory meeting** in New York in October 2022
- Participation in various working groups to **coordinate civil society organisations**
- **Strengthening synergies** with young people - an integral part of civil society



- Organisation of **two online information workshops**
- **Regular information sharing** (newsletter and publications on social networks)
- **Regular dialogue** with the various stakeholders (Member States, private sector, civil society organisations)
- **Strengthened synergies** with the delegations of numerous international players working to strengthen international water governance, such as **the European Commission and the delegations of Senegal, Peru and France.**

5 Highlights

- **Side event "From Mar del Plata to the UN 2023 Water Conference; where do we go?"**

One of the highlights of the Butterfly Effect's participation in the New York Conference was preparing for and taking part in the side-event organised by the **Peruvian government** as part of the official programme at the United Nations headquarters.

With the participation of representatives of **civil society, youth, delegations from Peru, Senegal, the European Commission and the private sector** (AquaFed), this event, which brought together around a hundred participants, provided an opportunity for dialogue between the various key players on the need to strengthen international water governance.

- [Side-event programme](#)
- [Side-event video](#)



Hania Perez de Cuellar - Minister for Housing and Sanitation of Peru



5 Highlights

- **Meeting of civil society organisations and presentation of the Joint Civil Society Manifesto**

The Butterfly Effect signed and contributed to the drafting of paragraph 9 on global water governance of the **civil society manifesto**, endorsed by over **450 organisations**.

Presented at a networking evening ahead of the Conference, the manifesto was handed over to **Pedro Arrojo** - United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights to drinking water and sanitation, **José Francisco Calí Tzay** - United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, and **Nathalie Olijslager** - Programme Director of the New York 2023 United Nations Water Conference for the Government of the Netherlands.

This manifesto was subsequently **presented in plenary session** at the United Nations Conference by Pedro Arrojo.



From left to right: Pedro Arrojo; Nathalie Olijslager; José Francisco Cali Tzay



6 Next steps

While this conference has opened many doors, there is still a great deal of work to be done to achieve concrete commitments and strengthen international water governance. **Solutions to the global water crisis can only be found through shared action and decisions at all levels.**

The Butterfly Effect will therefore continue to mobilise its members and develop its advocacy in line with forthcoming international events such as the **High-Level Political Forum** in June 2023, the **United Nations General Assembly** in September and the **World Water Forum** in Bali in 2024.

Helpful resources

- ▶ [Positioning paper for the Butterfly Effect](#)
- ▶ [Summary of proceedings](#)
- ▶ [Programme of the side-event](#)
- ▶ [Video of the side-event](#)
- ▶ [Side-event concept note](#)
- ▶ [Civil society manifesto video](#)
- ▶ [Commitment to the Water Action Agenda](#)
- ▶ [Official United Nations press review](#)
- ▶ [Earth Negotiations Bulletin daily reports Highlights and images for 23 March 2023 \(iisd.org\)](#)
- ▶ [Link to concept notes and key messages from the Interactive Dialogues](#)
- ▶ [Journal of the UN Water Conference 2023 \(programme and declarations\)](#)

To join us and follow us

 butterflyeffectcoalition@gmail.com

 [@ButterflyEffectNgoCoalition](https://www.facebook.com/ButterflyEffectNgoCoalition)



www.effetpapillon.org



[@BEeffectCoal](https://twitter.com/BEeffectCoal)

[Subscribe to our newsletter](#)

Coordinated by: With the support of:



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Supported by the



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC



MINISTÈRE
DE L'EUROPE
ET DES AFFAIRES
ÉTRANGÈRES

Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité

The points of view presented in no way represent the official point of view of the organisations providing financial support.