

Powerful new global arena needed to confront coming water challenges, elite UN board warns

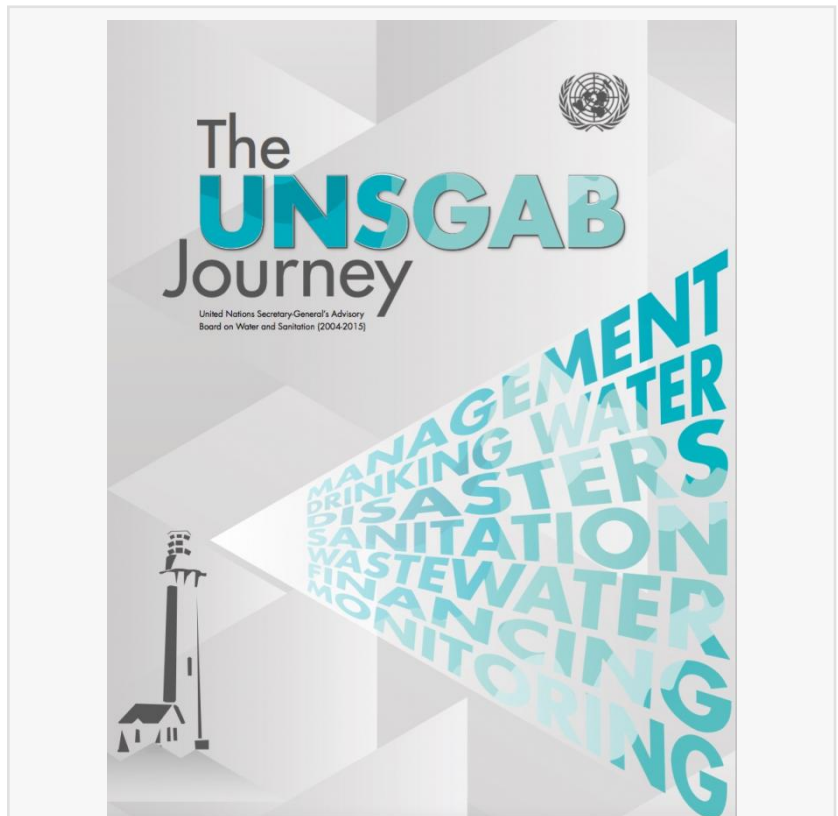
Blunt report from Secretary-General's water and sanitation advisory board prescribes route to next generation water goals, calls for major institutional upgrade

NEW YORK, NY, USA, November 18, 2015 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The supreme importance of water and sanitation to development and well-being merits creation of a powerful new global arena inside the UN, dedicated to resolving water conflicts and common challenges while tracking progress against the world's newly-agreed development goals.

The new intergovernmental platform, supported by strong, independent panels of world scientists, counsellors and monitors, is part of a sweeping set of recommendations and conclusions released today by UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (unsgab.org) at the end of its 11-year mandate.

Created by then-SG Kofi Annan in 2004 to advance water-related Millennium Development Goal targets, the elite 21-member UNSGAB -- which includes OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría -- warns that today's institutional infrastructure requires a major upgrade for the world to possibly meet water and sanitation-related objectives in the 2030 Agenda -- the new "Sustainable Development Goals" adopted by UN Member States this year for achievement by 2030.

"There is currently a mismatch between the integrated and ambitious 2030 vision of freshwater and sanitation management and the international political structures available to contribute to its



UNSGAB report, available at <http://bit.ly/1iHIsWo>



Solving global water problems is central to eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development

implementation," says the report, presented by UNSGAB Chair Uschi Eid to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at UN headquarters, New York.

The proposed body would be the world's preeminent sphere for reaching consensus on common water and sanitation concerns, and to assess progress. It would closely involve the private sector and other major stakeholders, supported by both a secretariat (UN-Water, unwater.org) and a panel of independent experts mandated to amass authoritative information on water and sanitation issues and stimulate research to fill knowledge gaps. It would inform international decision-making "in a



Dr. Uschi Eid was appointed Chair of UNSGAB by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in June 2014, after serving as Vice-Chair since 2004.

balanced, fact-based, transparent and comprehensive way."

Objective monitoring of progress towards world water targets for 2030 would complement the effort, as would a new independent Board to the Secretary-General to succeed UNSGAB.

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A lot has been accomplished, but the bucket of water challenges to be solved remains quite full
Uschi Eid, Chair, UNSGAB

Blunt valedictory report: Designate sanitation a medical issue

The Board's valedictory report underlines that water, sanitation and hygiene are central to human health and contains blunt messaging with the constructive intent of enhancing the UN's handling of water issues, which have been accorded newly elevated status within the world body.

"Considering that a lot of UN organizations are dealing with water but only as a marginal issue, nothing less than a full-scale water-cultural revolution within the UN is needed," the report says.

"Relevant UN organizations need to allocate (more) core funding to water and need to review their policies. It is, for example, high time that WHO endorsed water, sanitation and hygiene as primary prevention."

Noting "persistent and serious data inconsistencies in water-related UN communications," the Board says a 2012 claim that the global goal for safe drinking water goal had been met was underpinned by the wrong assumption that all "improved" water sources provide safe, uncontaminated water.

UNSGAB points out "there is a difference between a drinking water source that is only 'improved' and drinking water that is truly safe."

"In many quarters, the correction has been made: safe means safe, that is, uncontaminated. However, in too many others, including official UN statements, the fallacy persists and the global need for safe drinking water is thus seriously underestimated."

The UNSGAB report also calls for global-level UN data to better illuminate back-sliding in access to

water and sanitation services in cities: "the global regression seen today in urban areas is not currently being explicitly reported."

Among other UNSGAB observations and recommendations:

A Heads of State Panel on Water to champion and lead global advocacy around critical issues.

A global approach to water, noting that "globalizing forces, such as virtual water flows, increasing water scarcity, water pollution and ecological degradation, intensifying water-related disasters and persistent and emerging global public health threats ... in many parts of the world, need to be more systematically addressed from a global perspective."

For businesses to develop comprehensive strategies to mitigate water risks, and for governments to engage with the private sector, "both as an enabling partner and as a key player that needs to be held accountable."

That governments consider making water-use reporting legally mandatory for listed companies and large cities.

Within governments, for "extraordinary measures need to be considered, such as the creation of well-embedded water units within ministries of finance, in order to strengthen water financing at national and local levels," and requiring water impact assessments of development investments, which would help promote funding for wastewater management.

Documenting and targeting for action the world's 20 water scarcity hotspots in both North and South.

For high priority to be placed on water management in post-conflict and fragile environmental contexts, which would help combat "causes for migration and flight."

Says UNSGAB Chair Uschi Eid: "Certainly, a lot has been accomplished, but the bucket of water challenges to be solved remains quite full."

"With the benefit of 11 years of perspective, our Board's distinguished members offer recommendations for global action and institutional reform, together with advice on how future independent advisory boards may organize for maximum impact."

Clustering comments around seven themes, the report details the efforts and accomplishments of the Board and other international actors, along with insights and recommendations on future strategies and actions.

Full 16-page report, to be presented to the Secretary-General Nov. 18, is available at <http://bit.ly/1iHIsWo>.

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Terry Collins
UNSGAB
+1-416-878-8712
[email us here](mailto:terry.collins@unsgab.org)

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