

**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY THE MINISTER OF SANITATION AND WATER RESOURCES, HON. CECILIA ABENA DAPAAH ON THE 2021 WORLD WATER DAY PRESS CONFERENCE HELD AT THE CONFERENCE ROOM OF THE MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING ON 22<sup>ND</sup> MARCH, 2021**

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press and welcome to this media event to observe the 2021 World Water Day.

The United Nations (UN) has designated 22 March of every year as International World Water Day to celebrate and raise awareness on the importance of fresh water resources. It is also to draw attention to the global water crisis by spotlighting on one of the many facets of freshwater resources.

This year, the theme for World Water Day is '**VALUING WATER**'. Water means different things to different people. How is water important to your home, family life, your livelihood, your cultural practices, your well-being, and your local environment? For instance:

- In households, schools and workplaces, water can mean health, hygiene, dignity and productivity.
- In cultural, religious and spiritual places, water can mean a connection with creation, community and oneself.
- In natural spaces, water can mean peace, harmony and preservation.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** the theme '**VALUING WATER**' therefore offers an opportunity to create a broader

understanding of how water is valued by different people in different contexts. All the different ways water benefits our lives socially, economically, culturally and environmentally urges us to safeguard this precious resource for the current and generations yet unborn. It is also to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 which is: Water and Sanitation for all by 2030.

Unfortunately today, water is under extreme threat from a growing population and increasing demands of agriculture and industry, whose demands and interests are not considered at all times. Pollution is also worsening the quality of our waters and most crucial of all climate change is making water more erratic.

Therefore, we value water more than its price, and this determines how water is managed and shared. The immense value of water for households, culture, education, economic sectors, and the environment should not be overlooked in order to avoid mismanaging this finite, irreplaceable resource.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** all the water that is abstracted for human use eventually returns to the environment, along with any contaminants and pollutant added. Hence, it is important that higher value must be placed on protecting our water sources and the environment to ensure good quality water supply and even for treatment. Sadly, our water ecosystems are not in a healthy state. In our beloved Ghana, it is common knowledge that illegal mining 'galamsey', in particular

has affected the quality of water bodies especially within the southwestern river system, which includes the Tano, Bia, and Ankobra river basins as well as the Pra basin and its Offin and Birim tributaries.

The proportion of rivers with fairly good ambient water quality or better at the end of 2016 was 39%. The proportion increased to 53% at the end of 2018, which was attributed mainly to the fight against illegal mining. The proportion further improved to 57.8% in 2019, but reversed to 56.6% at the end of 2020.

The result is that the water intake facilities are partially or completely non-operational, which is a major public health and economic concern. While the quantities of chemicals used for treatment and their costs increase, it is the final consumer - you and I as well as our industries, who ultimately bear the health and economic costs.

The condition of the water sources also discourages any form of aquatic life, securing water for food production, and compromises sustained water availability for future generations. Obviously, pragmatic and collaborative measures and actions on a variety of fronts are needed to sustain and reverse the situation.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** water for households, schools, workplaces and health care facilities is important and adds value in the form of greater health, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is worth noting that Ghana has made significant progress in the

provision of basic drinking water services to the population. The population with access to improved drinking water sources increased from 78% in 2017 to 81% in 2019. Government continues to make significant new investments focusing on bringing water to the homes of people through the Water for All Agenda. (Yendi, Damongo, Tamale, Sekondi Takoradi, Wenchi, Sunyani, Keta and other water projects.

The Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2017/2018 indicates that eight in every ten household populations in the country are using at least basic drinking water services. Currently, it worth-mentioning that an amount of about USD1.04 billion is being invested in about 8 urban water supply projects and 6 major rural water supply projects that are ongoing in the country and targeting about 4.87 million people to be served when completed. This certainly will be reflected in the result of the next Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey.

Government also aims at increasing investments in building climate resilient water infrastructure systems which will also reduce wastage in freshwater use; shift towards environmentally sustainable policies that take account of interconnection among ecological systems. This will reduce pollution; and promote efficient water treatment technologies that reduce the use of water and improve the quality of water to ensure that the citizenry have the water they need to lead healthy, happy and productive lives.

Government's policy response to safeguard our water resources for everyone and for every sector of the economy is that of a shared responsibility of us all. It, therefore, behooves on us, whether acting as a government, local authority, business, farmer, civil society, community, or as an individual, we all have a duty to:

- take stock of our socioeconomic practices and to make water-wise decisions that support only sustainable water use and management practices;
- take into account the multiple and diverse groups and interests in all decisions affecting water in ways that will ensure equity, transparency, and inclusiveness;
- prescribe and promote local remedial interventions to reduce the pollution not only from illegal mining, but from other contributory sources such as improper liquid and solid waste disposal;
- promote education and public awareness about the fundamental value of water and its essential role in all aspects of life;
- enable broader participation and inspire community attention for us to be more responsible towards water use, protection and conservation of our sources of water, including watersheds, rivers, aquifers, associated ecosystems, and used water for current and future generations;

- support the enforcement of existing laws, and other appropriate regulatory and management actions; and
- encourage increased investments in institutions, infrastructure, information, and innovation to realize the many different benefits derived from water and reduce risks.

These actions and measures demonstrate the need for strong commitment, solidarity, and cooperation that compels each and every one of us to preserve our waters.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** we are still not in normal times when the world, including Ghana, is facing the COVID-19 pandemic. Water continues to play an important role in keeping ourselves safe from exposure to the deadly virus. Clearly, advice and opinion from every quarter is not hard to come by, but still, amongst the best advice we have is to frequently wash our hands under running water. We are all therefore entreated to encourage and share knowledge and experience with whom it matters for a positive chain reaction across the entire country.

Remember that World Water Day is an opportunity for everyone to get involved - water is everybody's business. Let us foster dialogue to find solutions that would enable us achieve clean and better water that would improve our well-being and overall socioeconomic development.

Thank you.