United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

International Hydrological Programme

Opening speech

(English translation)

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Chairperson

Intergovernmental Council of the International Hydrological Programme (IHP) of UNESCO

Secretary-General

Ministry of Water and Sanitation, Senegal

Opening speech by Mr Thierno Hamet Baba LY

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear colleagues and friends

Dear participants

I am delighted to welcome you, on behalf of the Intergovernmental Council of the International Hydrological Programme (IHP) of UNESCO, in my capacity as its Chairperson, to this session organized by UNESCO-IHP's International Initiative on Water Quality (IIWQ).

Today we are gathered here—representing different regions and countries, national and international organizations, governmental and academic institutions, and the civil society—to discuss together a common challenges that we face:
Microplastics in freshwater environment.

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The plastic and microplastic pollution in oceans is so serious that it has been put on the agenda of the UN Ocean Conference, as well as at the G7 level.

However, this problem does not only concern the oceans; but also freshwater resources (rivers and lakes) and aquatic ecosystems (such as estuarian habitats).

In fact, a large portion of microplastics in the oceans originate from land-based human activities—in particular from the disposal of wastewater and solid waste in rivers.

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Every year the large rivers and streams of the world transport several millions of tons of plastic to our seas and oceans.

According to researchers, the world's large rivers are responsible for about 80-90% of the plastic pollution in the oceans.

Most of these large rivers are located in Asia, Africa and Latin America, where countries with the biggest populations in the world are also located.

These are also the same regions, where wastewater management remains a major problem, which require urgent actions.

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Microplastics in freshwater environments is an emerging and growing global challenge that needs to be addressed urgently.

It is a major environmental problem in all countries of the world—with no exception. No region, no country can consider itself free of this problem.

A recent study by German researchers has found microplastics even in the ice of the Arctic.

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Lack of scientific knowledge and information on microplastics—in particular on their human health and ecological effects and their pathways in the environment—holds us back from taking appropriate action to address this problem.

This session, which is the first of its kind, provides us with an excellent opportunity to share and disseminate knowledge related to microplastics in freshwater environments.

Key findings of a study on the presence of microplastics in freshwater at the global level—the first of its kind, too—conducted by the International Initiative on Water Quality of UNESCO-IHP will be presented with the aim to engage different stakeholders to respond to this challenge.

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This session also provides a platform for a high-level scientific exchange.

Today in this room, we are honored by the presence of leading international experts—most of them brilliant women scientists—who have travelled to Stockholm to share their research results in related fields.

Finally, this session will allow us to discuss together the required appropriate solutions and to develop and promote scientific cooperation in this field.

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The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, among other targets, aims to improve water quality and reduce water pollution.

The achievement of this Target is an enormous task. Yet, it can be achieved if we act together and share our knowledge and experience.

With this aim, the UNESCO's International Initiative on Water Quality disseminates scientific knowledge and new technologies, fosters international scientific cooperation, raises awareness of policy-makers and the public on water quality issues

- in order to enhance the knowledge base and build capacities to help countries to better manage their water resources and implement the SDG 6.

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So, let us make the best use of this session to **exchange**, **discuss** and **reflect** on our collective action to respond to this challenge that we face together: **How to protect our water resources and reduce water pollution, including microplastics in freshwater environments?**

I wish you fruitful discussions and exchange.

Thank you!