**World Bank Global Water Practice Director remarks at the Meeting of the National Development Council under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan on June 10, 2024**

It is a great honour to be present today at the meeting of the National Development Council chaired by Your Excellency, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon with participation of the Government representatives and development partners.

Particularly exciting is that today marks the first day of the 3rd High-Level International Dushanbe Conference dedicated to implementation of the International Decade of Action “Water for Sustainable Development” for 2018-2028.

I would like to commend the Government of Tajikistan for working tirelessly in the past two years to build partnerships and promote water agenda globally by hosting jointly with the Kingdom of the Netherlands the UN2023 Water Conference in New York, elevating the focus of COP28 on water, proposing a new initiative on Glaciers’ preservation, ensuring linkages between all the global water-related events and hosting next year (2025) an International Year on Glaciers.

I would like to think of the Conference this year differently as it does not only allow us to take stock of progress made towards the SDG6 and other water-related goals, but also enables stakeholders to report on the progress against voluntary commitments made to the Water Action Agenda and propose new more tangible commitments.

It is an absolute privilege to see the national development agenda and global water agenda intertwining in Tajikistan through Your personal leadership at the global level on water and climate agenda.

Acting on water challenges and priorities, as part of the national development agenda, has never been more pressing. We should recognize that water touches almost every aspect of development as without water security, countries will fail to achieve most of the other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Climate change poses additional threats to water security, intensifying flood and drought risks, leading to damages and more frequent water scarcity events, affecting economies. Water scarcity is projected to cost some regions up to 6% of their GDP. Water is also at the centre of this crisis: as nine out of 10 climate events are water related.

The reality of climate change is already here. The floods of 2024 caused substantial damages to the economies of Central Asia countries, including Tajikistan. 256 natural disasters were registered in Tajikistan from May 3 to May 26, causing long-lasting infrastructure damages, loss of lives, assets and livelihoods.

Droughts and water scarcity periods are also becoming more prevalent. The World Bank climate diagnostics indicates that in Central Asia climate change is expected to decrease water availability by 25-31% by 2050, while irrigation demand will increase by 15%, including in Tajikistan, exacerbating water scarcity.

This is to emphasize that achieving the SDG6 targets will require huge investments, strategic sector-level planning and reforms to tackle these new challenges with institutions that are efficient and fit-for-purpose. Meeting global water infrastructure needs requires $6.7 trillion by 2030 and $22.6 trillion by 2050. These resources are not within the public sector.

In the long run, this also requires countries to think beyond conventional and linear model of “take, make, consume, and waste” and apply principles of circular economy given the limited nature of the resource. As the DCC chair mentioned, what got us here, will not get us there.

Commitments to the Water Action Agenda and National-Level Priorities

In New York, your Excellency indicated a need to develop a National Water Sector Strategy and the National Water Supply and Wastewater Program to set the course of actions for achieving SDG6 beyond 2030 and to double financing of the sector.

In Tajikistan, JMP data shows that access to safely managed water supply services is at 52 percent, with 15 percent of population still relying on unimproved water sources for drinking. Current population growth rate of 2.5 percent is outpacing progress towards SDG 6.1. The gap in access to services between urban and rural areas remains large. Recent survey also demonstrated that only 41 percent of population is receiving services from regulated service providers (a mix of safely-managed and basic level), exposing public health gains of the past years to risk for unregulated self-supplied population.

Our estimates show that achieving universal coverage of population with basic water supply services in Tajikistan would require US$800mln by 2030. Yet the water sector currently attracts less than 0.2% of GDP on average since 2015, estimated at US$20mln a year. Foreign financing contributions towards the WASH sector have consistently exceeded domestic financing.

Hence, we are supportive of the commitment Your Excellency made to doubling public financing in the sector through a programmatic approach. This approach will allow to transition from fragmented project-by project development of the past into a more strategic one with scaling up financing for results.

For development of the **National Water Supply and Sanitation Program**, under the World Bank-financed project we supported a strategic scenario analysis of the water supply and wastewater situation to identify the most cost-efficient planning scenario to meet sector goals, the financing needed, and the realistic set of reforms required to unlock that financing. The program would also help to address lack of institutional clarity and overlapping mandates, which needs to be addressed through a new set of policy reforms, and strengthen monitoring and sector planning capacity so that results can be taken to scale.

The **National Water and Sanitation Sector Strategy**, aligned with SDG6, will adopt an integrated approach to water management, water supply and sanitation services, and resilience to climate variability and change. For this to happen, it is important to take on strategic steps to leverage data, talent and innovations in the sector. There are a few forward-looking points we see as important for the next 7 years before 2030.

* The country needs to overcome barriers in data exchange between the government agencies and democratize data, make it accessible, enable the use of data for private sector solutions. The scope of digitalization in the water sector is huge, but progress is very slow, mainly because there is still resistance to it. We need a new culture of data sharing for development! In addition, the country needs to take full advantage of freely available satellite imagery, remote sensing, AI and all these innovative tools with which we should be training our young professionals. Using that data for making informed decisions is essential to prepare for an uncertain future.
* Investments in water storage and water efficiency and conservation will dominate the next generation of investments. The Rogun Dam in Tajikistan is not just an engineering marvel but a cornerstone for regional water security. As one of the tallest dams in the world, it will play a pivotal role in ensuring a reliable water supply for agriculture, hydropower, and daily use downstream. But as Central Asia is losing its winter storage with shrinking snow and ice covers, it is impossible to build enough dams to compensate for that loss, thus we must also think of better managing groundwater storage, in integration with surface water. And as water will become scarcer, investments in irrigation modernization for water conservation and increasing food security and economic production are also an important priority.
* And last, but not least, leveraging financing will require a more nuanced financial assessment and diversification of financial sources. Later today, we are starting our first conversation with private sector operators to learn of creating enabling conditions to crowd-in resources and innovations in the water sector of Central Asia.

One again I am very excited to be here today and look forward to the successful Dushanbe Water Action Decade Conference.