

Hydropolitics Association



by Hydropolitics Association

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Will Global Water Goals Turn into Action? 2026



2026 UN Water Conference



2026 may become a turning point in global water politics—not because the world needs more commitments, but because it must finally implement those already made.

The **Dushanbe Water Conference (May 2026)** delivered a clear political message: the central problem is no longer defining global water goals, but converting them into measurable results. Its outcomes—including the Dushanbe Declaration—were explicitly carried forward toward the 2026 UN Water Conference.

World Water Week in Stockholm (August 2026) reinforced this shift from *ambition to implementation*. The discussions emphasized that technology alone will not solve the water crisis; implementation requires stronger **governance, finance, institutions, data and accountability**.

The next political test is **COP31 in Antalya, 9–20 November 2026**. Water must move from the margins of climate negotiations into the core of **climate adaptation, resilience and climate finance**. Without this integration, global climate policy and global water policy will continue to operate on parallel tracks.

Finally, the **UN Water Conference in Abu Dhabi, 8–10 December 2026**, will provide the year's decisive political moment. Its mandate is explicitly to accelerate implementation of **SDG 6** and strengthen global water governance. Thus, 2026 creates an unusual political sequence:

Dushanbe → Stockholm → COP31 Antalya → UN Water Conference Abu Dhabi The opportunity is to transform this sequence into an **implementation chain**:

Global Goals → Political Commitment → Finance → National Policies → Investment → Measurable Results

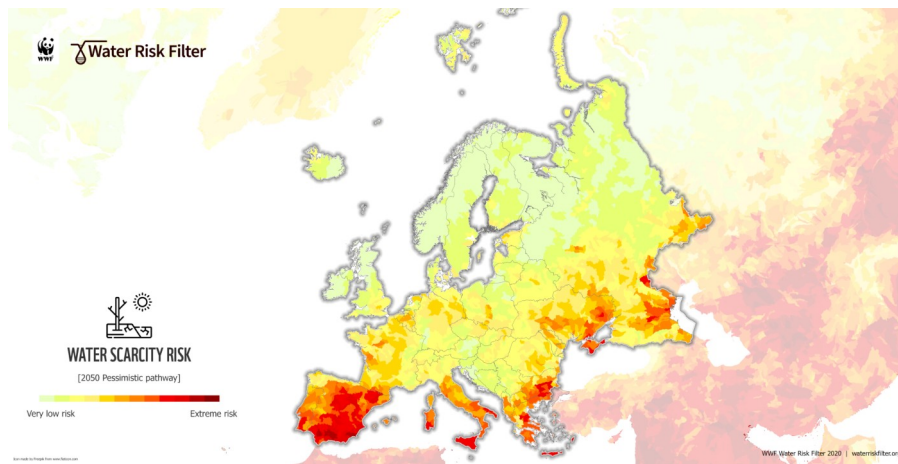
The real question is therefore no longer **“Do we have global water goals?”**

It is **“Are governments prepared to finance them, govern them and be accountable for delivering them?”**

If Abu Dhabi can begin converting voluntary commitments into **financed, time-bound and measurable national actions**, 2026 could mark the transition from **global water diplomacy to global water delivery**. Otherwise, the world risks entering another cycle of ambitious declarations without sufficient implementation.

Dursun Yıldız – Director

Growing water crisis in Europe



Is it a structural water management issue ?

Dursun Yıldız

Director-Hydropolitics Association

17 July 2026

Drought, once seen as a problem only in Mediterranean countries like Spain, Portugal, and Greece, has started affecting Germany, France, the Netherlands, and even Scandinavian nations. The European Union sees this as both a consequence of climate change and a matter of economic and national security. Developments over the past two years show this clearly:

- * In Germany, water levels in the Rhine River dropped to historic lows. Shipping was disrupted, and steel and chemical production slowed. Germany responded by creating a nationwide digital "Low Water Information System (NIWIS)" to monitor water resources in real time. Restrictions on garden watering and river water extraction were imposed in some regions.

- * In France, irrigation bans are enforced in many regions during summer, and farmers face water quotas.
- * The Netherlands has warned it could soon face "actual water scarcity."
- * In southern Spain, water levels in some dams have fallen to critical lows, severely damaging agricultural production. Scientists say this is not just a meteorological issue but a structural water management problem.

A structural water management problem means that the ways water is controlled, distributed, stored, and used are not equipped to deal with changing availability and growing demand. This includes outdated infrastructure, inefficient allocation of water resources, and lack of long-term planning, which can make water shortages worse even when there is normal or only slightly reduced rainfall #

What measures is the European Union taking?

The European Commission has launched a comprehensive Water Resilience Strategy for the 2025–2026 period. This strategy comprises over 50 actions. Key objectives include:

- 1) 1. Increasing water efficiency by at least 10% by 2030. Measures such as reducing leakage and promoting smart meters and water-saving technologies are being encouraged.
- 2) 2. Reusing treated wastewater. The use of advanced-treated water—rather than drinking water—is being promoted, particularly for agricultural irrigation.
- 3) 3. Storing rainwater. Plans include rainwater harvesting in urban areas, as well as the implementation of permeable pavements, green roofs, and water-retention parks.
- 4) 4. Protecting groundwater reserves. Stricter controls are being introduced regarding excessive groundwater extraction.
- 5) 5. Reducing water pollution. New regulations will ensure stricter monitoring of PFAS, microplastics, pharmaceutical residues, and certain pesticides. PFAS are a group of human-made chemicals used in products like non-stick coatings and firefighting foams, but they can contaminate water and are difficult to remove. Microplastics are small plastic particles less than five millimeters in size that come from sources such as synthetic clothing and the breakdown of larger plastic waste; these can accumulate in water supplies and harm both animals and humans
- 6) 6. Agricultural transformation. Practices such as drip irrigation, precision agriculture, the use of drought-resistant crop varieties, and methods that enhance soil water-retention capacity are being encouraged.

What might happen over the next decade?



The following practices are expected to become more widespread in Europe:

- Mandatory rainwater storage systems in cities,
- Greywater recovery in new buildings,
- Agricultural irrigation quotas,
- Tiered pricing based on water consumption,
- Drought-resistant landscaping,
- Closed-loop water use in industry,
- AI-powered water management systems.

These developments show that water has become a strategic resource in Europe, like energy. Because of climate change, both floods and prolonged droughts and water scarcity have become key issues on Europe's environmental and economic agendas. For citizens, this could mean facing stricter water usage rules at home, higher water bills, or restrictions on when they can water gardens and wash cars. Industries such as agriculture and manufacturing may need to adopt new technologies and change production processes to use less water or recycle it more efficiently.

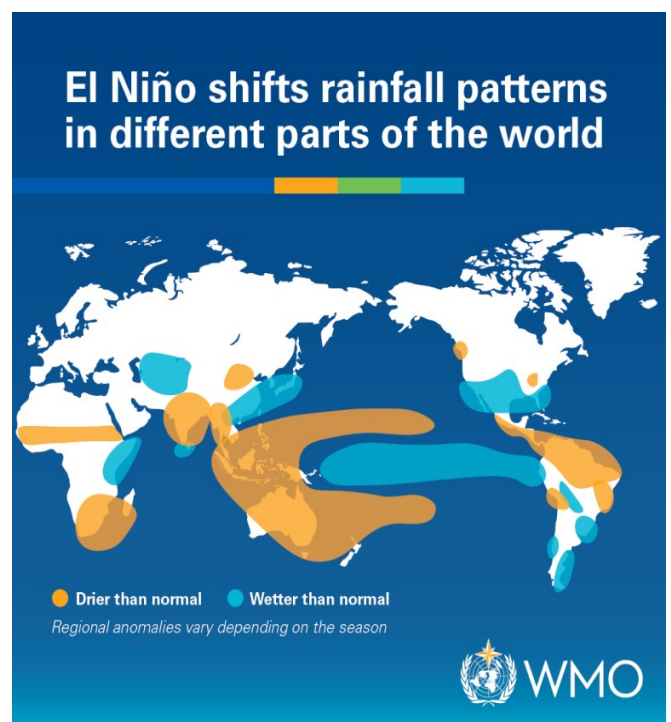


How countries are preparing for El Niño's impact



Data from the World Meteorological Organization shows El Niño could last until at least February 2027. Credit: AFP via Getty Images

The world is in a "danger zone of extreme weather". That's what the UN has warned as the impacts of a "supersized" El Niño start to be felt globally. Officials have strengthened early warning systems and sorted pre-emptive medical assistance, but the strength of the climate phenomenon has scientists seriously concerned. There has already been a sharp rise in sea temperatures in parts of the Pacific, and in Australia, marine heatwaves threaten wildlife and ecosystems. Drier-than-usual conditions are forecast in parts of South East Asia and Central and South America, increasing the risk of droughts and wildfires. Indonesia is currently struggling to contain massive blazes, with experts predicting this "Godzilla" El Niño will exacerbate the situation.



Malawi joins UN Water Convention to build climate resilience across borders

04 September 2026

The Republic of Malawi has acceded to the United Nations Water Convention, reinforcing its commitment to the sustainable and equitable management of shared water resources. Malawi becomes the 60th Party to the UN Water Convention — the 15th from Africa and the 5th from Southern Africa.

Malawi is landlocked but rich in transboundary water systems, sharing rivers, lakes, and aquifers with several neighbouring countries. These waters are vital for agriculture, hydropower, fisheries, and drinking water – supporting the population of over 22 million people, especially in rural areas where about 80% of people live and depend on groundwater.

In recent years, Malawi has faced increasing climate-related shocks, including floods, droughts, and rising temperatures. These events threaten food security, water supplies, and the livelihoods of millions, particularly in rural areas. Strengthening transboundary water cooperation has therefore become a strategic priority for building climate resilience and protecting vulnerable communities. This approach is fully aligned with the Africa Water Vision 2063, which promotes equitable and sustainable water use as a foundation for socio-economic development and regional integration across the continent.

Malawi is already part of several bilateral and regional agreements, including with Tanzania and Mozambique. Joining the UN Global Water Conventions now provides a stronger legal foundation to deepen and expand this cooperation. The UN Water Convention secretariat, with the sponsorship of Finland, is currently supporting Malawi and Zambia to develop a Memorandum of Understanding on a shared sand and gravel aquifer, which demonstrates the practical value of the Convention in establishing transboundary water cooperation frameworks.

UNECE Executive Secretary Tatiana Molcean stated “I welcome Malawi's accession to the UN Water Convention which further consolidates the strong momentum for water cooperation in Africa and the growing interest in the Convention worldwide. As Malawi is both an upstream and downstream country, this highlights the Convention as a practical tool for unlocking cooperation, strengthening water security, and building trust across borders”



Malawi has jointly acceded to the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention, which is mutually compatible. Together with the 1992 UN Water Convention, the United Nations have urged countries to develop river, lake and aquifer arrangements and to support that endeavour by becoming a Party to, and fully implementing, both UN global water conventions.

As countries prepare for the next UN Water Conference in December 2026 in Abu Dhabi, co-hosted by Senegal and the United Arab Emirates, Malawi's accession sends a strong signal at a critical time for transboundary water cooperation. Other countries that are considering accession are encouraged to accelerate their progress and join the Water Convention.



With this step, Malawi joins a growing number of African countries, including Southern African Parties such as Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana, embracing the UN Water Convention as an instrument for peace, sustainable development, and shared prosperity.

The accession follows a National Workshop on the UN Global Water Conventions held on 24–25 February 2026 in Lilongwe. Organized by the UN Water Convention secretariat with financial support from the European Union, a national roadmap to accession was the major outcome.

Source: <https://unece.org/media/Environment/press/416114>

Pakistan Wins Legal Battle Over Indus Waters Treaty

1 Sep 2026

A court of arbitration in The Hague has ruled that India cannot unilaterally suspend the Indus Waters Treaty, rejecting every argument New Delhi has used to justify holding the six-decade-old water-sharing agreement “in abeyance” since April 2025.

In a unanimous decision issued on Monday, the five-member court found that the treaty “remains fully in force” and that India “must observe its obligations” under it, including those governing the design and operation of hydropower projects on rivers that flow into Pakistan.

The ruling is the first time an international court has ruled on whether India’s decision to place the treaty in abeyance is legally valid.

An international arbitration ruling strengthens Pakistan’s legal position in its water dispute with India, but hydropolitical tensions remain unresolved.

Pakistan has secured a significant legal victory in its longstanding water dispute with India following a ruling by an international Court of Arbitration operating under the framework of the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).

In its ruling of 31 August 2026, the Court reaffirmed that India cannot unilaterally suspend or terminate its obligations under the treaty. The decision followed India's announcement in April 2025 that it was placing the treaty in abeyance after a deadly attack in Kashmir.

The Court also addressed restrictions relating to India's Ratle Hydroelectric Project on the Chenab River, reinforcing the importance of compliance with treaty provisions governing hydropower development on the western rivers.

Pakistan welcomed the ruling as a major victory for international law and its water security. India, however, rejected the Court's jurisdiction and maintained its position regarding the treaty's suspension.

India has rejected the jurisdiction of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) – an intergovernmental court outside the United Nations system whose mandate New Delhi has accepted in other cases – in the Indus Waters Treaty case brought by Pakistan to The Hague. India did not participate in any of the hearings that culminated in Monday’s ruling.

It was quick to reject the verdict, leaving Pakistan with a legal and diplomatic victory whose actual worth will now be tested.



A view of Baglihar Dam on the Chenab River that flows from Indian-administered Kashmir into Pakistan, at Chanderkote in Jammu region, May 6, 2025 [Reuters]



A Significant Development in Transboundary Hydropolitics

The ruling has implications beyond South Asia. It reinforces the principle that transboundary water agreements should not become instruments of political pressure during diplomatic or security crises.

Nevertheless, Pakistan's legal victory does not automatically guarantee water security. Effective implementation of the treaty, restoration of technical cooperation, and renewed dialogue between the two countries remain essential.



The Indus dispute demonstrates that international water conflicts cannot be sustainably resolved through unilateral political decisions. They require respect for international agreements, institutional cooperation, and effective water diplomacy.

The legal battle may have strengthened Pakistan's position, but the broader hydropolitical confrontation between India and Pakistan is far from over.



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GAZA NEEDS HELP

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