

SIWI Insight Brief

Part of SIWI's 2026 Engagement Series

Event Name	th High-Level International Conference on the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” 2018–2028
Location	Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Date	25–28 May 2026



The event

Proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly, the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” has helped elevate water on the global sustainable development agenda since 2018, driving political commitment, partnerships, and action towards SDG 6. The Dushanbe conference marked an important milestone on the road to the 2026 UN Water Conference and discussions on the future of global water governance beyond 2028.

At a glance

A strong message emerged from Dushanbe: the global water community is no longer lacking commitments, but implementation. Participants repeatedly called for greater accountability, stronger governance, increased financing, improved data systems, and more effective mechanisms to turn ambition into action.

What stood out

The conference highlighted a growing recognition that water is a governance, economic, resilience, and security issue as much as an environmental one. At the same time, concerns are growing that current systems are not equipped to respond at the scale and speed required.

Key signals

- The dominant message was the need to move from commitments and declarations to implementation and accountability.
- The 2026 UN Water Conference is increasingly being positioned as a conference focused on accelerating action and sustaining momentum beyond 2028.
- Water is being recognized as a foundation for climate resilience, food systems, energy transitions, public health, economic stability, and security.
- Governance fragmentation, financing gaps, and weak institutional capacity remain major barriers to progress.
- Stronger science-policy links, better data and monitoring systems, more inclusive participation, and enhanced transboundary cooperation are increasingly seen as essential for effective water governance.

Implications

Future progress will depend less on new commitments and more on stronger governance, financing, capacity, and accountability for implementation.

SIWI perspective

The conference reinforced the need for stronger links between science, policy, finance, and implementation. As the global water agenda shifts towards delivery, World Water Week offers a unique platform to connect stakeholders beyond traditional water processes and help turn commitments into action.

Looking ahead

Attention is now turning to the 2026 UN Water Conference and the High-level Political Forum, where SDG 6 will be reviewed. SIWI and the Government of the Netherlands will continue the discussion through a side event on turning Rio Convention commitments into water action, while debate grows around how to sustain momentum beyond 2028.