Secretary General of the United Nations H.E Antonio Guterres, Vice President of the General Assembly H.E Mahmoud Saikal, H.E. Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of Tajikistan, Excellencies

On behalf of His Excellency, Cyril Ramaphosa, President of Republic of South Africa, we wish to reconfirm the commitment of the Government of South Africa to take forward the implementation of the recommendations of the Panel on which his predecessor, former President JG Zuma served.

South Africa is a water scarce county. A fortnight ago government declared a national state of disaster in to deal more effectively with the drought affecting amongst others, the City of Cape Town. Access to water and sanitation are central to our National Development Plan.

South Africa shares 60% of its fresh water resources with its neighbours in Southern Africa. We are committed to multi-lateral, transboundary collaboration to ensure that water is a catalyst for socio-economic development and transformation.

The historic adoption by the African Union of an Agreement on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) highlights the advances towards integration and collaboration on our Continent.

Yesterday, 21 March, South Africa celebrated South African Human Rights Day, a day that in the past, we commemorated as Sharpeville Day and that this General Assembly declared the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
It is a day which serves as a painful reminder of the sacrifices made during our struggle for a united, non-racial, non-sexist, just and prosperous South Africa.

It is also a reminder that we were not alone in this struggle but that the people of the world stood with us in solidarity and this august body declared Apartheid a crime against humanity.

We commemorate not only to remember, but also to measure how far we have come in achieving the ideals cherished by those who lost their lives in the struggle. Central to these ideals is the life sustaining access to water and the dignity afforded by sanitation, rights which are now enshrined in our Constitution.

On 18 July this year South Africa will celebrate the centenary of the birth of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, first President of a democratic South Africa.

We reiterate our appreciation to the General Assembly for declaring 18 July, Nelson Mandela International Day for Freedom, Justice and Democracy. This year’s theme is: “Action Against Poverty”.

Speaking at the launch of the “Make Poverty History Campaign”, in 2005, President Mandela reminded us that: “Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”

This underscores our shared responsibility to ensure implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, understanding that they are inter-related and inter-dependent and that SDG 6 is central to them all.

During the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, President Mandela gave delegates the following powerful message:

“When I return, as I often do, to the rural village and area of my childhood and youth, the poverty of the people and the devastation of the natural environment painfully strike me.

And in that impoverishment of the natural environment, it is the absence of access to clean water that strikes most starkly.

That our government has made significant progress in bringing potable water nearer to so many more people than was previously the case, I rate amongst the most important achievements of democracy in our country.
Amongst the many things I learnt, as a president of our country, was the centrality of water in the social, political and economic affairs of the country, continent and indeed the world.

I am, therefore, a totally committed "water person".

The excellent work done by the High-Level Panel on Water and International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” 2018-2028 are indeed calls to action for all of us to be “totally committed “water person(s).

I THANK YOU