

Session title

Groundwater at the Heart of the 2026 UN Water Conference: IAH Positions and UN Perspectives

PLENARY SESSION PROPOSAL

Description

The 2026 United Nations Water Conference, to be held in Abu Dhabi in December 2026, represents a rare high-level opportunity to shape the global water agenda. Ensuring that groundwater is fully recognized across all dimensions of this agenda is therefore critical. The International Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH) is committed to strengthening the visibility of groundwater in global water policy and decision-making processes. In support of this objective, the IAH has been actively contributing to the preparatory process for the 2026 UN Water Conference (UNWC) through the development of a IAH's Position Paper, a dedicated webinar series about groundwater contribution to the achievement of the 6 interactive UNWC dialogues, inputs to the High-Level Preparatory Meeting in Dakar, and participation in the UN Informal Preparatory Working Groups (IPWG) across all six Interactive Dialogues: Water for People, Water for Prosperity, Water for the Planet, Water for Cooperation, Water in Multilateral Processes, and Investing in Water. Building on this engagement, we propose a 90-minute interactive plenary session to present the IAH Position Paper and foster dialogue among IAH congress participants, UN agencies, and policymakers before presenting it at the 2026 UN Water Conference in December. The proposed plenary session will be structured in two parts. The first 20 minutes will feature one keynote presentation introducing the IAH position paper in the frame of the UNWC, drafted by the IAH's LUNA network and highlighting the urgent need for stronger representation of groundwater in multilateral processes. The remaining 70 minutes will consist of a moderated roundtable discussion in line with the six Interactive Dialogues to promote the exchange of ideas and perspectives to advance the SDGs. High-level panellists from UN agencies (IGRAC, UNESCO, IAEA...) and conference attendees (through Mentimeter and questions from the audience) will explore how groundwater- specific indicators, scientific evidence, education, and local expertise can be integrated into each of these global dialogues. To strengthen the link between the congress venue and the session's theme, a water expert from the Hungarian government will be invited to participate (opening speech or as panellist), recognizing Hungary's expertise in groundwater governance and helping to connect national perspectives with global priorities. In conclusion, the session will highlight the IAH's broader engagement in the UN Water Conference process, as well as in other multilateral processes, and its unique role in advancing groundwater on the global agenda. Expected outcomes of the plenary session include a revised IAH position paper for the 2026 UN Water Conference (including the main findings of the IAH Webinars) and a congress-wide statement to UN-WATER, that could be named the "Budapest Statement on Groundwater". Ultimately, this session aims to advance a unified voice for the IAH, ensuring that groundwater is visible and is fully considered in all pillars of the upcoming UN deliberations.

Keywords

Groundwater governance, 2026 UN Water Conference, IAH Position Paper, Transboundary Aquifers, SDG 6 Integration, Abu Dhabi 2026; LUNA network

Session Chair

Marie-Amélie Pétré & Elena Egidio

Conveners

Patrick Lachassagne