



FINAL DECLARATION

1st Edition of the West Africa Regional Water Forum (FREAO)

Abidjan, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, 25 September 2026

We, Ministers in charge of water resources of the Member States of the ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS areas, representatives of transboundary basin organisations, sub-regional institutions, financing institutions, civil society, the private sector, and women's and youth organisations, gathered in Abidjan on 24 and 25 September 2026 for the **First Edition of the West Africa Regional Water Forum (FREAO)**, under the central theme: **“Valuing Water to Transform West Africa”**:

- **Considering that water is a vital resource, an inalienable human right and the indispensable foundation of all sustainable socio-economic development in West Africa;**
- **Welcoming the Decision of the African Union (Assembly/AU/Dec.912(XXXVIII)) adopting “Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063” as the AU theme for the year 2026;**
- **Recognising the Africa Water Vision 2063 and its related Policy as the continental implementation framework for achieving the goals of Agenda 2063, and as Africa's Common Position and contribution to the 2026 United Nations Water Conference, with a view to accelerating the implementation of SDG 6;**
- **Aware of the severe impacts of climate change, which exacerbate water stress, ecosystem degradation and the vulnerability of our populations;**
- **Reaffirming our commitment to the United Nations 2030 Agenda, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6), as well as to the Africa Water Vision 2063 and its related Policy;**
- **Further welcoming the leadership of the Republic of Senegal and the United Arab Emirates as co-hosts of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference, as well as that of the co-chairs of its interactive dialogues, namely the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Republic of Ghana, the Republic of South Africa and the Republic of Zambia, together with their other counterparts.**

Accordingly, we:

- **Call on the West African region to domesticate the Africa Water Vision 2063 and its Policy at local, national and regional levels, and to mobilise the resources needed for their effective implementation;**
- **Welcome the consultation process on Africa's Common Position and priorities for the 2026 United Nations Water Conference and the 11th World Water Forum, led by the African Union Commission and the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW), with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and other partners;**

- **Commit** to advancing Africa's Common Position and priorities, and their subsequent domestication within the West African region, with a view to achieving the Africa Water Vision 2063 and its Policy, in coherence with West African regional water frameworks, notably the 2026-2035 Ten-Year Strategy of the African Network of Basin Organizations (ANBO).

Adopt this Declaration, structured around five (5) major commitments:

I. WATER-ENERGY-FOOD-ENVIRONMENT NEXUS

For integrated and resilient resource management:

- ❖ **Sectoral optimisation:** We commit to breaking down institutional silos by adopting an integrated “Nexus” approach in order to maximise water-use efficiency in irrigated agriculture and hydropower generation.
- ❖ **Ecosystem preservation:** We reaffirm the need to protect headwaters and wetlands and to restore degraded soils in order to safeguard the sustainability of the water cycle in the face of climate hazards.
- ❖ **We reaffirm the absolute urgency of protecting, restoring and preserving, in an integrated manner, the ecosystems of the Fouta Djallon Highlands, the true “Water Tower of West Africa”;** and call for large-scale climate and financial mobilisation to reverse the degradation of this regional natural heritage, an essential condition for ensuring the water, energy and food security of the sub-region.

II. FINANCING WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

For the mobilisation of innovative and sustainable financial resources:

- ❖ **Innovative mechanisms:** We call for the implementation of alternative financing, notably through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), green and blue bonds, and direct access to global climate funds.
- ❖ **Priority investment:** We urge States to increase the share of national budgets allocated to water resources monitoring, drinking water, sanitation and major hydraulic developments, in order to close the region's investment gap once and for all.
- ❖ **Accelerate the entire “project – financing – infrastructure – impact” chain** and ensure the sustainability of investments: mobilising billions is not an end in itself; the true measure of success is the impact delivered for people and economies. We therefore call for simultaneous action on project preparation, the mobilisation and disbursement of financing, procurement, implementation capacity, results monitoring and, above all, the operation and maintenance of infrastructure.

III. GENDER, YOUTH AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

For inclusive, equitable and participatory water governance:

- ❖ **Empowerment and leadership:** We commit to breaking down structural barriers by promoting the direct access of women and young people to decision-making bodies, financing and the strategic governance of water resources at all levels.
- ❖ **Territorial equity:** We reaffirm our determination to correct geographical disparities by ensuring universal, inclusive and secure access to drinking water and sanitation, particularly for rural and peri-urban populations and the most vulnerable groups in our regional space.

- ❖ **Capacity and skills building:** We call for the roll-out of large-scale programmes of technical training, mentoring and technology transfer dedicated specifically to young people and women, in order to strengthen their expertise, stimulate green eco-entrepreneurship and position them as key technical actors in integrated water resources management.

IV. REGIONAL COOPERATION AND HYDRO-DIPLOMACY

For peace, solidarity and the management of shared basins:

- ❖ **Strengthening basin organisations:** We reaffirm our full support for the transboundary basin authorities (ABM, ABN, ABV, OMVS, OMVG, OGBFT, ABCBT) as essential instruments of regional cohesion.
- ❖ **Financing and investment:** Make transboundary basin organisations (TBOs) genuine levers for structuring investments that foster shared prosperity, peace and stability in transboundary basins.
- ❖ **Conflict prevention:** We commit to using hydro-diplomacy as a lever for peace and stability, by ensuring the sustainable financing and densification of hydrological observation networks, and by promoting the transparent sharing of data and the concerted management of shared infrastructure.
- ❖ **Safeguarding achievements in times of crisis:** We firmly commit to protecting and sustaining transboundary cooperation in the water sector, ensuring that the shared governance of the resource remains a space for uninterrupted technical and political dialogue, notwithstanding the complex geopolitical changes and institutional reconfigurations that have taken place in the region.

V. WEST AFRICA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE 2026 UNITED NATIONS WATER CONFERENCE

For a strong and united West African voice on the global stage:

- ❖ **Common position:** We decide to formulate a West African Common Position for the 2026 United Nations Water Conference, reflecting the priorities, specific challenges and ambitions of our region.
- ❖ **Media and diplomatic outreach:** A communication campaign (press kits, social media relays, ministerial interviews) will be deployed before and during the Conference to highlight West African successes.
- ❖ **Establishment of a negotiation Task Force:** We decide to set up a small group of thematic experts to follow the technical negotiations and ensure that the final declarations of the Conference reflect West Africa's financial and technological priorities.
- ❖ **Post-Conference follow-up mechanism:** As soon as the event ends, a follow-up committee will be set up to translate the political and financial commitments obtained into operational roadmaps at regional and national levels.

VI. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISM

For transparency, accountability and concrete action:

To ensure that the commitments made under this Declaration do not remain mere intentions but translate into measurable action on the ground, we decide to establish the following monitoring and evaluation mechanism:

- ❖ **Establishment of a Regional Monitoring Committee (RMC):** A permanent committee will be established, composed of representatives of the ECOWAS and UEMOA Commissions, CILSS, transboundary basin organisations, civil society (representing women and young people) and technical and financial partners. This committee will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Declaration.
- ❖ **Roadmap and performance indicators:** Within three (3) months, the Regional Monitoring Committee will draw up an operational roadmap with clear performance indicators for each of the five strategic pillars.
- ❖ **Biennial report on the state of water in West Africa:** An assessment report will be published every two years to measure the progress made by each Member State.

Done in Abidjan, on 25 September 2026.

The Forum

-----Together, Let Us Value Water to Transform West Africa-----