

Reflections: Today Is World Water Day!

by Sharon B. Megdal
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Greetings from New York City and Happy **World Water Day!** Today is the official start of the **UN 2023 Water Conference**, the first water conference convened by the United Nations in almost 50 years. Thousands of participants have gathered to commit to strong actions to address water issues at all scales across the globe. It is recognized that advancing achievement of **Sustainable Development Goal 6** — clean water and sanitation for all — requires actions on the part of each one of us.

Registration for the conference was not open to individuals. Instead, NGOs, universities, and others had to apply for accreditation to participate. UArizona's accreditation enabled the participation of eight registered delegates, who all arrived in New York City eager to participate. The UArizona delegation members include Colorado River Indian Tribes Chairwoman Amelia Flores, Gila River Indian Community Governor Stephen Roe Lewis, UArizona Professor and Director of the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy Andrea K. Gerlak, UArizona graduate student Wilzave Quiles Guzmán, Colorado River Basin Water & Tribes Initiative Co-Directors Matt McKinney and Daryl Vigil, UArizona alumna Elia Tapia, and yours truly. It is great to be at the conference with UArizona colleagues and partners, including former UArizona Extension Agent Josh Moore, who now works as Farms Manager for his home community, the Colorado River Indian Tribes.

Prior to the formal three-day conference, several of us participated in the all-day March 21 **Water Diplomacy Symposium**, where the discussion focused heavily on the need for inclusive and equitable consultation and engagement. We explored issues related to Indigenous communities, gender, income, and age, with a very strong focus on shared waters. Empowering ourselves was an important theme, whether it be through sharing of data and information, perspectives, and/or practices. Dialogue through the breaks was robust, and many new friendships were made. The Women in Water Diplomacy Network was the key convener. The network's signature clip will be worn by many throughout the UN Water Conference.



Women in Water
Diplomacy Network Clip

World Water Day activities officially started for me at midnight, when I delivered via Zoom the keynote lecture, "Taking action to change the ways we use, consume, and manage water," for the Water Research Center at Sultan Qaboos University.

My World Water Day continued with the afternoon side event session at the UN, **The Role of Indigenous People in Governing Shared Waters**, which was co-convened by the Water & Tribes Initiative | Colorado River Basin and the WRRC. We were honored that U.S. Department of Interior Secretary Deb Haaland delivered inspirational comments to lead off the session. Observing that water security depends on good water stewardship, she noted that a more equitable water future depends on respect, integrating Indigenous knowledge, and putting words into action. Indeed, the featured speakers from the Colorado River Basin and other parts of the world inspired attendees to recognize that working through respectful partnerships is essential.

Of course, there is great excitement associated with the conference and related events, which are occurring at the UN and all over New York City. Though everyone realizes that action is necessary and commitment statements are being developed, only time will tell if the commitments to action translate into improved water and sanitation conditions.

I'll end this Reflections — more to follow via the WRRC's **Weekly Wave** newsletter and through our **March 28 webinar** about the conference experience — with how I ended my lecture for Sultan Qaboos University's celebration of World Water Day: Let's all act to improve!

