

## Summary of Water Seminar on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2025 at United Nations University

On May 16<sup>th</sup> 2025, the Embassy of Sweden to Japan, Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) and the United Nations University jointly hosted seminar on the importance of water management in tackling climate change. The seminar was organized in relation to the theme of this year's Expo main theme of "Designing Future Society for Our Lives" and in continued celebration of the 2024 World Water Prize Laureate Prof. Taikan Oki. The World Water Prize is an award presented annually by SIWI, a leading organisation in water governance as well as change-maker and champion of water solutions for a just, prosperous, and sustainable future. Moderated by Thomas Rebermark of Swedish Water House, the seminar started with the entrance and welcoming of H.M King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden and H.M. the Emperor of Japan, who as high-level guests and champions for water attended the seminar.

The seminar was kicked off with a welcome speech by Prof. Tshilidzi Marwala, Rector of the United Nations University, highlighting the symbolic nature of the seminar for continuity of deep-rooted traditions and shared commitment to preserving and nurturing our planet for future generations. Water as a resource and catalyst for enabling climate action and shaping a more resilient and sustainable society. Rector Marwala referred to Sweden and Japan as global leaders in innovation and sustainability, and in the spirit of this year's World Expo in Osaka, their strategic partnership was grounded in shared values and a common vision for the future.

UNU Rector was followed by an opening speech by the Ambassador of Sweden to Japan, Viktoria Li, who emphasized the importance of water management in combating climate change. Ambassador Li underlined the importance of shared commitment of Sweden and Japan to environmental research, particularly in hydrology, referencing Prof. Oki's being awarded the Stockholm Water Prize in 2024. Both historical and academic connections between the two nations were also highlighted, beginning with Carl Peter Thunberg's botanical studies in Japan in the 18th century, leading to the further strengthening of bilateral relations through scientific collaboration and the latest strategic partnership established in December 2024.

The first keynote was presented by the honorary guest and linchpin of the seminar, Prof. Taikan Oki. Prof. Oki's keynote set the scene for the seminar and enlightened the audiences about the nexus between water, climate and sustainability. Prof. Oki shared the different conceptions of water management and stewardship, and that all components - people, nature and infrastructure - are responsible for the healthy functioning of such a system. Prof. Oki presented the concept of **Water Minfra**, derived from the Japanese "*mina no infra*" (everybody's infrastructure) entailing this combined and integrated approach to resource management and the need for all intersections to be sustainable. Prof. Oki then highlighted the severity of climate change, health and disaster impacts already visible in society, and how water acts as the catalyst for mitigation of climate change. His keynote further stressed the socio-economic pathways and the cost associated with climate change, making the case for investment into a sustainable future and just transition.

The seminar as an interluding segment then honoured the late Prof. Malin Falkenmark, one of the key inspirations of Prof. Oki, as well as the organizational backbone of SIWI. One of her last video interviews was played, highlighting the changes in how we address water as well as her pioneering and inspirational research on the recognition of the hydrological cycle.

Prof. Falkenmark's research, beyond the access to water, also emphasized the new realities for rivers and basins as well as their management, which directly linked to the announcement of

World Lake Day, undertaken by Mr. Hiroyuki Saito, Director-General, Water Resources Department, Water and Disaster Management Bureau, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. Mr. Saito shared the Japanese approach to water resource management, its role in disaster risk reduction and announced the designation of August 27<sup>th</sup> as World Lake Day by the United Nations. The Lake Day is thereby scheduled to take place every year, during the same period as the annual Stockholm World Water Week.

After the announcement, the seminar continued with its second keynote by Dr. Malin Lundberg Ingemarsson, who presented the findings of the report “The Essential Drop to Net-Zero”, by unpacking the role freshwater holds in climate change mitigation efforts and therefore the approaches defining the future societies of our life - from safeguarding ecosystems, protecting biodiverse landscapes to decarbonizing energy systems. In relation to the role of land systems, their mitigation potentials and the need for water in these systems, Dr. Lundberg Ingemarsson also highlighted her and SIWI’s ongoing activities since the publication of the report, including action on the ground through forest and landscape restoration, research on forest-based mitigation measures, and the establishment of planetary boundaries for green water.

The final keynote presentation of the day was delivered by Prof. Kensuke Fukushi, on the theme of water and climate from a human and financial resource perspective. Prof. Fukushi highlighted the patterns of economic prioritization in Japan, which is also visible in the history of water pollution in the country. as well as the needs and benefits of investing across the entire water value chain. Prof. Fukushi concluded by stressing the need for a good water valuation system to attract more investments across various sectors in order to better address social, economic and climate challenges.

Importance of valuing water was also shared by the following segment of the seminar featuring Mr. Tom Erixon, CEO and President of Alfa Laval, and Mr. Harumichi Seta, Senior General Manager for Suntory Holdings Ltd. Mr. Erixon underlined the need for industry engagement to tackle climate change and Alfa Laval’s commitment to responsibly handle carbon and water scarcity across their own production sites. In addition, Mr. Erixon highlighted the issue of PFAS pollution and the need for economically commercializing solutions for the toxin removal, as well as new valve technologies for increased efficiency in industrialized water management.

Mr. Seta then followed by presenting Suntory’s initiatives in water resource management, ecosystem restoration, and community engagement to show how businesses can be proactive partners in securing water for people and nature. Those initiatives highlighted their restoration and recharge efforts and how they preserve ecosystems across the globe. Mr. Seta also shared Suntory’s early education program “Mizuiku”, reaching over 1.3 million people in 9 countries.

The seminar then invited prior Prof. Kaveh Madani, UNU-INWEH Director, and prior keynote speakers for an interactive discussion on the role of water for climate action and the future society. The panel covered the global flow of water through trade, landscape restoration, advancement for transboundary and social justice through water governance, as well as water footprint reductions and the integration of water into business models. After final remarks by Mr. Thomas Rebermark and under the watchful eyes of the audience at UNU, H.M King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden and H.M. the Emperor of Japan, the seminar concluded and gave an opportunity to carry momentum forward towards World Water Week, COP30, the UN 2026 Water Conference, and beyond, ensuring that water’s voice shape humanity’s climate journey.