

**PRESS RELEASE****14 May 2020****World leaders call for action on  
water, sanitation and hygiene to prevent COVID-19***40% of the world's population do not have a handwashing facility with water and soap at home*

Heads of State and of United Nations agencies, International Financial Institutions, and leaders of civil society, private sector and research and learning organizations made the following statement today:

“Until there is a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19, there is no better cure than prevention. Water, sanitation and hand hygiene, together with physical distancing, are central to preventing the spread of COVID-19, and a first line of defense against this serious threat to lives and health systems. Handwashing with water and soap kills the virus but requires access to running water in sufficient quantities.

Our response plans – at national, regional and global levels – must therefore prioritize water, sanitation and hygiene services.

Leaders that recognize the role of water, sanitation and hygiene in preventing the spread of COVID-19, will save lives. Leaders that prioritize international collaboration and support, will save lives. We are only as healthy as the most vulnerable members of society, no matter in which country they are.”

Coordinated by the global partnership Sanitation and Water for All (SWA), the Call to Action outlines five concrete measures that decision-makers around the world can take to enhance the preventive effects of access to water, sanitation and hygiene in the fight against COVID-19.

The Hon. Kevin Rudd, SWA's High-level Chair, said, “Access to clean water and sanitation is absolutely crucial to slow the spread of COVID-19. This is particularly important in countries with fragile healthcare systems or where social distancing is harder. The support from world leaders for this Call to Action is a strong demonstration of their support for the work of the United Nations' partnership Sanitation and Water for All.” He concluded, “Now we need to make sure this political message turns into additional practical action on the ground, especially as the risk of a third wave of this virus across a number of developing countries increases.”

SWA is planning a follow-up process with ministers responsible for water, sanitation and hygiene and other leaders on their commitment and action to delivering water and sanitation services for all, always and everywhere.

Currently, 40% of the world's population, or 3 billion people, do not have a handwashing facility with water and soap at home. Forty-seven percent of schools lack a handwashing facility with water and soap affecting 900 million school-age children, and the same happens to 16% of healthcare facilities, or around 1 in 6, meaning they lack hand hygiene facilities where patients receive care, as well as soap and water at toilets.

[Access the full Call to Action and the list of signatories.](#)

### **Note to the editor**

Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) is a multi-stakeholder partnership of governments and their partners from civil society, the private sector, UN agencies, research and learning institutions and the philanthropic community. Together, SWA partners stimulate high-level political dialogue (at both the country, regional and global levels) and coordinate and monitor progress toward the sanitation, water and hygiene-related targets of the [UN Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#).

More information: [www.sanitationandwaterforall.org](http://www.sanitationandwaterforall.org)

#GlobalCall4Water #SWAinAction

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### **Available for interviews**

- [Catarina de Albuquerque](#), SWA CEO and former UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation  
(Languages: English, Portuguese, French, Spanish, German)
- [Patrick Moriarty](#), Chair of SWA Steering Committee  
(Languages: English, French)
- Other signatories on a case by case basis, please contact us