

Open Letter to the Parliament of Sweden

We, members of the international Steering Committee for the Global Water Partnership (GWP), have taken notice of the Government of Sweden's surprise announcement – made by the Minister for Development Aid in the Swedish press on 25 October 2024, without any consultation and with no prior warning to us – that Sweden intends to leave our Partnership and force our Secretariat to leave the country, by terminating the Host Country Agreement.

We regret this announcement and believe that withdrawing from GWP will not only cloud Sweden's proud history of global impact in the area of water security; it will diminish Sweden's influential role in shaping global water policy in the future.

GWP is a uniquely powerful global Network, built with Sweden's foresight and commitment, and it now stands as a key organisation in global water management and climate resilience. With **13 Regional Water Partnerships, 77 accredited Country Water Partnerships, and over 2,800 registered partners across more than 170 countries**, GWP has become a vital mechanism for mobilising resources, expertise, and partnerships to address the world's water challenges. It has taken decades to build this extensive, highly effective Network, with its strong capacity to address water security in diverse contexts.

Sweden is the country that gave birth to and nurtured GWP in the 1990s. Sweden is also the country that initiated the creation, through treaty, of the Global Water Partnership Organisation (GWPO) as an intergovernmental institution, governed by international law. Sweden has been the home of GWPO, which also functions as our Network's global Secretariat, for twenty-two years, which is greatly appreciated.

Most importantly, Sweden has been a reliable, strong supporter of our well-documented, highly impactful efforts to build a more water secure world, through improved water law, policy, regulation, technical capacity, stakeholder engagement, and investment. In a climate-stressed world, these efforts – in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe, everywhere we work – are needed more than ever.

We understand that a decision will soon be made, first by the Swedish Parliament, and finally by the Swedish Government. We strongly believe that a decision to leave one of the few intergovernmental organisations hosted by Sweden – and to force the hub of our global Network, GWPO, to leave Sweden – would be a mistake for Sweden. Based on the fact that GWPO is not represented in these deliberations, we wish to present GWP's side of the story.

The Global Water Crisis and Sweden's Role

The world is facing a serious, growing crisis in relation to water, as recent scientific reports and news events continue to underscore. Rivers are drying up. Groundwater is disappearing. Climate change is leading to higher incidence of both droughts and floods. These problems also combine in tragic ways. For example, droughts make floods more deadly and destructive, by reducing the ground's capacity to absorb rain, as witnessed in Spain just last week.

Water problems create, in turn, many other problems, including food shortages, economic stress, forced migration, local conflicts and geopolitical tensions.

Sweden has long been recognised globally to be at the forefront of understanding the central role of water in the world's affairs, and the power of action to improve water security on creating better futures. Ensuring that water resources are clean, sufficient, available, sustainable, and climate-resilient helps to create economically vital communities and nations. Working together on water-related issues also promotes international cooperation and peace, across boundaries of all kinds.

In recent years, the world has made great strides in improving water resources management, as evidenced in recent United Nations reporting, [using data](#) that GWPO in Stockholm helped to produce. Especially given the foresight and vision that Sweden showed in originally setting up the Global Water Partnership, Sweden deserves a great deal of credit for supporting and enabling years of global progress on water governance and management. Much of this work happens through GWP's Regional and Country Water Partnerships, listed here:

Accredited Regional Water Partnerships	Accredited Country Water Partnerships					
GWP Caribbean	Argentina	Chile	Guinea	Moldova, Rep. of	Senegal	Zambia
GWP Central Africa	Armenia	China	Honduras	Myanmar	Slovakia	Zimbabwe
GWP Central America	Azerbaijan	Colombia	Hungary	Namibia	Slovenia	
GWP Central and Eastern Europe	Bangladesh	Congo	India	Nepal	Somalia	
GWP Central Asia and Caucasus	Benin	Costa Rica	Indonesia	Nicaragua	Sri Lanka	
GWP China	Bhutan	Cote d'Ivoire	Kazakhstan	Niger	Sudan	
GWP Eastern Africa	Botswana	Egypt	Kenya	Nigeria	Tajikistan	
GWP Mediterranean	Brazil	El Salvador	Kyrgyzstan	Pakistan	Tanzania	
GWP South America	Bulgaria	Estonia	Latvia	Panama	Tchad	
GWP South Asia	Burkina Faso	Eswatini	Lesotho	Peru	Thailand	
GWP Southeast Asia	Burundi	Ethiopia	Lithuania	Philippines	Uganda	
GWP Southern Africa	Cambodia	Gambia	Malawi	Poland	Ukraine	
GWP West Africa	Cameroon	Georgia	Malaysia	Rwanda	Uruguay	
	Central African Republic	Ghana	Mali	Romania	Uzbekistan	
		Guatemala	Mongolia	Sao Tomé & Príncipe	Venezuela	
					Viet Nam	

Sweden's withdrawal from GWPO will jeopardize many vital projects, current or planned, intended to improve and secure water resources for millions by mobilising the knowledge, expertise, people, resources and institutions in the Network. By requiring GWPO to leave, Sweden also sends a message that cooperation on global water security is no longer a priority for the country.

Leading and Managing Change Effectively at GWPO

Between 15 and 25 October, 2024, the Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet published a series of news articles about GWP, focusing on issues faced by our global Secretariat (GWPO) in the recent past. These articles present a deeply incorrect picture of our Organisation.

The GWP Secretariat experienced significant challenges during the post-pandemic period of 2022-2023, but these challenges were already well known to the Government of Sweden. The issues associated with that period were independently audited, identified, reported to funders, verified or not (depending on the evidence base), and addressed. The Secretariat was significantly restructured and downsized at the end of 2023. New leadership was put in place. We managed this change quickly and effectively. The year 2024 has been one of rapid recovery. Most observers – including most GWPO funders – say to us that they are very pleased with our changes and with our work.

Throughout this period, the GWP global Network – and the many programs and projects managed through that Network, as described above – continued to perform well and to produce very significant results, as documented in our [annual reports](#). GWP continued to mobilise millions in new investment for climate resilience, build capacity for better water management in dozens of countries, and influence the improvement of laws, regulations and policies for managing water more effectively and sustainably, to name just a few of the high-impact results we produce, day in and day out.

As an example, here are the key numbers from our Annual Report 2023:

A year of inspiring results



Unfortunately, in the first major set of Swedish news articles to cover GWP since its founding in the 1990s, Svenska Dagbladet elected only to focus on the challenges of the past in our global Secretariat. The articles ignored the swift improvements made in the past year within the Secretariat, and did not report on our global, regional, and country-based results, or the positive impact we have consistently made on water security, around the world, supported by funding from the people of Sweden and many other countries. GWPO considers this one-sided reporting to have been deliberately destructive.

To make matters worse, the newspaper has chosen to present a distorted, error-filled, and at times fictional portrayal of GWPO. GWPO has published [extensive statements](#) refuting claims made in these articles, while still acknowledging our problems as noted above, as well as the value of fact-based investigative journalism. To summarise some of our concerns, the articles in Svenska Dagbladet (1) spread incorrect and misleading claims about our employment practices, (2) grossly exaggerate and misrepresent the travel of our leadership, (3) seriously misrepresent the structure and management of our global organisation and its partners, and (4) fail to present any facts at all about the actual work we do and the historically significant results we have consistently achieved for water security, around the world, over many years.

We have attempted to alert the newspaper's editors to the many errors of fact, misunderstandings, or misrepresentations that we have identified, but no significant corrections have been forthcoming.

Looking Forward

As members of the GWPO global Steering Committee, we operate under the mandate of the group of [Sponsoring Partner nations and institutions](#), bound by treaty, that Sweden is now intending to exit. We have a solemn duty to ensure that the Global Water Partnership can continue to do its work. We

need financial support for that work, but we also need safe, reliable, stable conditions for our Secretariat to work in, just as any intergovernmental organisation or United Nations agency would need. This includes the provision of normal diplomatic status in the country where our Secretariat is based.

We would prefer that GWPO remain headquartered in Sweden, but this surprising announcement by the Government of Sweden indicates we in all likelihood must (depending on the Parliament's vote) seek those conditions elsewhere.

Regardless of the outcome of deliberations in the Swedish Parliament, we request that there be a continuous, respectful and constructive dialog between the Government of Sweden and GWPO to ensure that our vital and necessary work, which takes place principally at the regional and country-level, is not jeopardized.

We are hopeful that the Swedish Parliament's deliberations will allow the truth about GWP to come out. Our Secretariat in Stockholm stands ready to answer any questions the Parliament might have about our work. But as custodians for a global Network whose unified global mission is the advancement of good water management, for water security, in increasingly challenging times, we must look resolutely forward, and we have begun the process of looking for a new home for GWPO.

The Global Water Partnership will always be grateful to the people of Sweden and their government for having the foresight to create, institutionalise, support, and host this Organisation since its founding in 1996. We look forward to a renewal of Sweden's engagement with the Global Water Partnership, through open dialogue, whenever that may occur.

Signed by the following Members of the GWP Steering Committee:

Pablo Bereciartua, Chair of the Steering Committee (Argentina)

Abdoulaye Sene, Chair of the Regional Chairs (Senegal)

Jaehyang So, Chair of the Global Technical Committee (USA / Republic of Korea)

Atem S. Ramsundersingh (Netherlands / Singapore)

Carolina Tornesi MacKinnon (USA)

Chris Ilagan (Philippines)

Jing Xu (China)

Jorge Enoch Furquim Werneck Lima (Brazil)

Nchedi Moripe (South Africa)

Ndey Sireng Bakurin (Gambia)

Paulette Bynoe (Guyana)

Yamileth Astorga (Costa Rica)