



United Nations Development Programme

Communications Office

PRESS RELEASE

International community to step up action on water and sanitation agenda

Washington, 16 April 2007--New commitments were expressed Saturday by donors, international development institutions and developing countries to tackle the water and sanitation crisis that affects the world's poor. Over a billion people in developing countries lack access to a reliable water supply, and half the population of developing countries are without proper sanitation.

This global response to the water and sanitation crisis took shape during a special event held during the World Bank and IMF spring meetings co-hosted by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The meeting brought together developed and developing-country government representatives along with civil-society leaders and development agencies to galvanize common action on access to clean water and sanitation.

A number of donors present committed to increase and improve support to countries to expand water and sanitation services, including:

- Supporting those governments which already have plans in place and have committed to invest their own resources;
- Helping countries without water and sanitation plans to prepare them;
- Renewing commitment to the African Development Bank's Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative. This provides a unique opportunity to harmonize, increase and improve donor support behind national plans;
- Giving special treatment to those countries that, despite their needs, do not receive sufficient attention from donors. As a first step this will include reporting shortfalls in their funding and agreeing who will do what;
- Focusing on sanitation services and hygiene education. Both are cost-efficient and effective life savers.

In addition, participants agreed to better coordinate their actions at a global level to deliver a greater impact on the ground, and identified some practical initiatives, such as:

- A proposed annual global monitoring report prepared by UN Water and its members, to be launched with a special focus on sanitation in 2008, the year of sanitation. This will set out progress towards achieving the water and sanitation Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets;
- Agreement that there should be one annual meeting to discuss this report and agree actions on it. The Stockholm World Water Week in August 2007 was identified as the venue at which these future annual meetings will be identified;
- 'Follow up' to existing water action plans; and
- A common approach on sanitation.

"I'm delighted that today we've agreed some really practical steps for tackling the global water and sanitation crisis – that takes the lives of 5,000 children a day," said UK Secretary of State for International Development Hilary Benn. "These include agreeing what will now be an annual report on water and sanitation, identifying an annual event when we get together to make decisions on the basis of this report, and agreement that the UN will identify one lead body on water and sanitation in each country."

World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz added: "Public spending on water and sanitation has declined to less than 1 percent of the GDP in most countries, and in poorest countries, private sector financing is

nearly non-existent. Overseas development assistance for water has remained stable at best. What we need is for investments to be doubled, from \$15 billion to \$30 billion a year. Water, sanitation, and hygiene services save lives. The international community has an obligation to respond to this crisis with commitment and passion.”

Kemal Derviř, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, said: “As we have seen in last year’s Human Development Report, ensuring that the poor have access to sanitation and water is central to achieving all the MDGs. Reaching the Goals, including those for water and sanitation, is possible. We have the knowledge and the financial capacity needed to address the water crisis. What is missing now is sufficient political will, and concerted and agreed action. This is where our collective commitment and support is needed.”

Ugandan Minister of State for Water, Maria Mutagamba, who also chairs the African Ministers’ Council on Water (AMCOW), said: “Our message to you is clear. Africa is ready to scale up and provide sanitation and water supply to all. We need donor support. Particular attention must focus on sanitation and hygiene. Over sixty percent of Africans are forced to defecate in the open. Toilets save lives and provide dignity. But more toilets will not improve health on their own. Better hygiene is what matters. And that means making hand-washing a part of normal everyday behavior in every family.”

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