

# GLOBAL NETWORK FOR JUSTICE

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## INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR ACTION WATER FOR LIFE, 2005 – 2015

### The Water Crisis

The world's water crisis has many faces. A girl in Africa walks three miles before school to fetch water from a distant well. A teenage boy in China is afflicted with terrible skin lesions because his village well is contaminated with arsenic. Impoverished slum dwellers in Angola draw drinking water from the local river where their sewage is dumped. Farmers on the lower reaches of the Colorado River struggle because water has been diverted to cities like Las Vegas and Los Angeles.

According to the United Nations, every day 4,400 children under the age of 5 die around the world, having fallen sick because of unclean water and sanitation. In fact, five times as many children die each year of diarrhea as of HIV/AIDS. A third of the world's population is enduring some form of water scarcity. One in every six human beings has no access to clean water within a kilometer of their homes. Half of all people in developing countries have no access to proper sanitation. Water is critical for life and for livelihoods. Yet billions of people suffer from disease, poverty and a lack of dignity and opportunity because they have no access to this basic resource.

### Why is this so?

Access to water is mainly a crisis for the poor. More than two-thirds of those without clean water survive on less than \$2 a day. Either poor people are excluded because of

a lack of legal rights to claim adequate water, or they fall outside the scope of limited water infrastructure that serves largely the rich.

The problem of water provision severely affects slums and shantytowns. Over the next few years a majority of the world's population will live in cities — for the first time in human history. In large parts of Africa, more than 60 percent of city dwellers are in fact slum dwellers. For many of them, water comes not from faucets inside their shacks but from water tankers or standpipes, neither of which is reliable as a water source. Open sewers increase the risk of water-borne diseases.

Water is also a crisis for women and children because they bear the burden of collecting water. In some places, women have to walk nearly 10 kilometers to reach a water source. Girls drop out of school either because they have to help fetch water or because there aren't adequate sanitary facilities in school toilets. Millions of school days are lost as a result.

Water scarcity affects some parts of the world more than others. Today, 800 million people live under a threshold of "water stress."

As rivers dry up, lakes shrink and groundwater

reserves get depleted, that figure will rise to 3 billion in 2025, especially in parts of Asia and Africa. There is an urgent need to reduce waste and invest in infrastructure to "harvest" rainwater or increase storage.



Most water use is in agriculture. Farming uses up to 70 times more water than is used for cooking and washing. Many countries have to import more than half their food needs because they do not have enough water to grow more food. If we do not change the way we use water, the amount needed for a rapidly growing world population will double in the next 50 years. Corruption makes responding to the problem of scarcity more difficult. Up to 40% of water is lost to water leakages in pipes and canals, one of the main causes of which is illegal tapping. The increase in the cost of water, as a result, affects the poor more than others.

But the water crisis hits cities in the rich world as well — Houston and Sydney, for example, are using more water than is replenished. Australia is the world's driest continent, where increasing salinity in water is threatening agriculture. Large parts of Europe are affected by recurring droughts.

Global warming is another threat. It will be responsible for declining rainfall in some regions, glacial melt in others, and rising sea levels. Other natural disasters occur with more sudden intensity. The floods that affect the Yangtze River in China every year, the hurricane that devastated New Orleans or the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean that killed more than 200,000 people are all examples of the threats that natural events continue to pose for millions around the world.

Water is ultimately a shared resource. Two-fifths of humanity lives in river and lake basins that lie within two or more countries. Tied together in a web of interdependence, these societies can either suffer from increasing political conflicts or benefit from cooperation. Shared management of river basins has the potential for yielding large benefits in terms of the quantity, quality and predictability of water flows.

### **Learn more about the world's water crisis**

Check out some of these resources: The United Nations has declared 2005-2015 as the 'Water for Life' decade. The goal is to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water by 2015 and to stop unsustainable exploitation of water resources. Governments pledged to do this when they adopted the Millennium Development Goals in 2000.



### **WATER IS ESSENTIAL FOR LIFE**

Water is crucial for sustainable development, including the preservation of our natural environment and the alleviation of poverty and hunger. Water is indispensable for human health and well being.

**The United Nations General Assembly, in December 2003, proclaimed the years 2005 to 2015 as the International Decade for Action “Water for Life”.**

**A decade of action! The primary goal of the “Water for Life” Decade is to promote efforts to fulfill international commitments made on water and water-related issues by 2015.**

These commitments include the Millennium Development Goals to reduce by half the proportion of people without

access to safe drinking water by 2015 and to stop unsustainable exploitation of water resources. At the World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002, two other goals were adopted: **the aim to develop integrated water resource management and water efficiency plans by 2005 and to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation.**

A major effort is required in this decade to fulfill these commitments and extend access to these essential services to those who remain un-served, the majority of whom are poor people.

As women play a central role in water provision and management, a special emphasis will be placed on ensuring the participation and involvement of women in these development efforts.

Among the themes that are central for the 'Water for Life' Decade are: scarcity, access to sanitation and health, water and gender, capacity-building, financing, valuation, Integrated Water Resources Management, trans-boundary water issues, environment and biodiversity, disaster prevention, food and agriculture, pollution and energy.

**UN-Water is coordinating the 'Water for Life' Decade, 2005-2015. UN-Water is the United Nations inter-agency mechanism of all relevant agencies, departments and programs involved with water-related issues.**

**The “Water for Life” Decade was launched on 22nd March 2005 by the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan with the following video message:**

*Dear friends,*

*Water is essential for life. Yet many millions of people around the world face water shortages. Many millions of children die every year from water-borne diseases. And drought regularly afflicts some of the world's poorest countries. The world needs to respond much better. We need to increase water efficiency, especially in agriculture. We need to free women and girls from the daily chore of hauling water, often over great distances. We must involve them in decision-making on water management. We need to make sanitation a priority. This is where progress is lagging most. And we must show that water resources need not be a source of conflict. Instead, they can be a catalyst for cooperation. Significant gains have been made. But a major effort is still required. That is why this year marks the beginning of the “Water for Life” Decade. Our goal is to meet the internationally agreed targets for water and sanitation by 2015, and to build the foundation for further progress in the years beyond.*

*This is an urgent matter of human development, and human dignity. Together, we can provide safe, clean water to all the world's people. The world's water resources are our life-line for survival, and for sustainable development in the 21st century. Together, we must manage them better.*

**Secretary General Kofi A. Annan**

**For more information visit:**

[www.un.org/waterforlifedecade](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade) A link to *Water For Life, 2005-2015* .

## **Background (UN-Water)**

In 2003, UN-Water was endorsed as the new official United Nations mechanism for follow-up of the water-related decisions reached at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Millennium

Development Goals. It will support Member States in their efforts to achieve water and sanitation goals and targets.

UN Water's work encompasses all aspects of freshwater, including surface and groundwater resources and the interface between fresh and sea water. It includes freshwater resources, both in terms of their quality and quantity, their development, assessment, management, monitoring and use (including, for example, domestic uses, agriculture and ecosystems requirements). The scope of the work of UN-Water also includes sanitation - encompassing both access to and use of sanitation by populations and the interactions between sanitation and freshwater. It further includes water-related disasters, emergencies and other extreme events and their impact on human security. UN-Water acts at global, regional and country level. It adds value to the work and expertise of separate UN agencies and programs. It brings coherence and integration among them, and serves as the common voice of the UN system on water and sanitation. It will improve cooperation with external partners, and provide timely information on status and trends of the world's freshwater resources.

**Who we are:** UN-Water is responsible for organizing the annual United Nations World Water Day (22 March) and the up-coming United Nations Decade on Water 2005 - 2015.UN. It is made up of the UN agencies, programs and funds that have a significant role in tackling global water concerns. It also includes major non-UN partners who cooperate with them in advancing progress towards the water-related goals of the Decade Water for Life and Millennium Declaration.

**For more information: Visit [www.unwater.org](http://www.unwater.org)** A link coordinated by the United Nations Food And Agriculture Organization (FAO) on behalf of UN-WATER.

### **Asia Pacific Water Forum**

"During the regional process leading up to the 4th World Water Forum, it became clear that several water-related issues and challenges were common across the entire Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, with the increased interactions in the implementation of follow-up activities to the 3rd World Water Forum held in Kyoto in March 2003, stakeholders in the region quickly recognized that the region's diversity was not an obstacle but rather an asset to the identification and adoption of solutions to specific water issues. Based upon this common understanding, we will establish a new network, the Asia-Pacific Water Forum, to work in complete solidarity to identify and adopt solutions to water issues in the region."

*Joint Declaration issued by the Water Ministers of the Asia-Pacific Region Fourth World Water Forum, Mexico City, March 21 2006*

### **Asia and Pacific's Water Forum (APWF) challenges**

Water is crucial to life and all forms of social, economic, and environmental development. According to the UN Task Force on Water and Sanitation (2005), safe water and sanitation is a prerequisite for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and for sustaining good health and quality of life.

At Fourth World Water Forum (4th WWF), regional documents coordinated by Japan Water Forum (JWF) and 5 sub-regional coordinators (Korea Water Forum, Global Water Partnership (GWP) South East Asia, GWP South Asia, GWP CACENA and the Pacific Islands Applied Geo-Science Commission (SOPAC)) together with regional water stakeholders reported on the Asia-Pacific region's formidable water related challenges. These include the need for increased access to improved water supplies and sanitation (#1) through investments in infrastructure and capacity building, the protection and restoration of river basins as the fundamental provider of

freshwater resources through Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), and (#2), the need to drastically reduce the vulnerability of human populations to water-related disasters.

There are already a large number of stakeholders, from international institutions to local NGOs, who are spearheading important activities and have achieved significant results throughout the Asia-Pacific region. For example, between 1990 and 2002, 35% of the total urban population (representing over 368 million people) gained access to improved drinking water. As recognized during the participatory regional consultation process that preceded the 4<sup>th</sup> WWF, such improvements can be further enhanced by harnessing the knowledge and experience of these stakeholders and creating a cooperative platform through which this growing knowledge base can be disseminated.

### **Why an APWF?**

The Asia-Pacific Water Forum (APWF) was initially proposed by the participants during the 4<sup>th</sup> WWF Regional Preparatory Process that was coordinated by the Japan Water Forum (JWF). During the Ministerial Meeting that lead to the Joint Declaration, the establishment of the APWF was supported by several agencies in the region, including ADB (Asian Development Bank), UNESCAP (United Nations Economic Social Commission for Asia Pacific), GWP (Global Water Partnership), KWF, SOPAC (Pacific Island Applied Geo-science Commission), JBIC (Japan Bank for International Cooperation), MRC (Media Research Center), FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), UNDP (United Nations Development Program), UNEP (United Nations Environment Program), UNESCO (United Nations Educational , Social and Cultural Organization), UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund), UNISDR (United Nations Institute for Social Development Research) and IUCN. In

calling for the creation of the Asia-Pacific Water Forum (APWF), the region's water ministers sought to establish an effective mechanism to encourage more collaborative efforts on water resources management and to accelerate the process of effective integration of water resources management into the socio-economic development process of the Asian and Pacific region. On the Asia-



Pacific Day at the WWF, the establishment of the APWF was announced by Mr. Ryutaro Hashimoto, the President of Japan Water Forum.

The APWF was officially launched on the 27th of September 2006 at the headquarters of the Asian Development Bank, in the presence of former Prime Minister of Japan Yoshihiro Mori, who succeeded Mr. Hashimoto as the President of Japan Water Forum. Visit: [www.apw.org](http://www.apw.org)

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