

## **Asia-Pacific Water Ministerial Meeting**

20 March 2006, Mexico City

Welcome address by

Dr Kim Hak-Su

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and

Executive Secretary

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

H.E. Mr. Ryutaro Hashimoto, former Prime Minister of Japan and current Chair of the United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation

Mr Geert van der Linden, Vice President of the Asian Development Bank

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to express, on behalf of UNESCAP, our sincere appreciation to the Japan Water Forum, under the leadership of His Excellency Mr. Ryutaro Hashimoto, former Prime Minister of Japan and current Chair of the United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, for inviting UNESCAP to co-organize this Ministerial Meeting for Asia and the Pacific.

As a co-organizer of the Ministerial Meeting, it is my pleasure to welcome the Honourable Ministers in charge of water resources management in Asia and the Pacific and distinguished guests. For this important meeting, we have come a long way from home to gather in this beautiful city in Latin America. This Meeting is a reflection of our shared commitment to work together for the sustainable development of the Asia and Pacific region, as a critical contribution to global sustainable development.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to over 60 per cent of the world's population. These are countries in the region that have achieved the highest economic growth rates in the world. However, the Asia-Pacific region is also known for its lowest per-capita fresh water availability. The region also has the highest number of people living below the poverty line. Over 600 million people live without access to safe drinking water and without appropriate sanitation. In 2005, per capita water availability was about 3,400 m<sup>3</sup> per annum, while the world average was estimated at 7,600 m<sup>3</sup> per annum.

Furthermore, in 2005, Asia was home to 71 per cent of the total number of people in the world without access to improved sanitation; 58 per cent of those without access to safe water; 56 per cent of the world's undernourished; and 54 per cent of those living in slums.

Asia and the Pacific is also known as the world's most disaster-prone region. A recent UNESCAP study showed that the Asian and Pacific region accounted for 91 per cent of the world's total deaths due to natural disasters. Forty-nine per cent of the total world damage due to natural disasters in the last century occurred in Asia-Pacific. Despite great efforts by countries in Asia and the Pacific to reduce the death toll due to natural disasters, the average annual death toll over the past 15 years still stands at 42,000 people from the annual average of 100,000 people over the past

five decades. The average annual economic damage has increased from US\$10.6 billion over the past five decades to US\$29 billion over the past 15 years.

More effort are needed. The challenges posed by the need to further reduce the number of deaths and reverse the trend of increasing damage require all stakeholders to work together in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Only by harnessing synergies through collaborative efforts, can we achieve prosperity and sustainable economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region.

On behalf of UNESCAP, I assure you of our commitment to work together with all stakeholders for the sustainable development of the water resources of our region.

Thank you for your solidarity and for joining us in this Meeting.

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