

Welcome Speech by  
Y.Bhg. Datuk Paduka Ir Hj Keizrul bin Abdullah  
Chair, GWP SEA and  
Director General  
Department of Irrigation and Drainage Malaysia  
at the Official Launching of  
Asia Pacific Water Forum  
ADB Manila  
27 September 2006

Mr. Yoshiro Mori,  
President of Japan Water Forum and  
Former Prime Minister of Japan

Mr. Haruhiko Kuroda,  
President,  
Asian Development Bank

Ms Erna Witoelar,  
UN Special Ambassador for Millennium Development Goals in Asia and  
the Pacific

Distinguished Guests, Friends, Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased and honoured to be here at this auspicious occasion to mark the official launching of the Asia Pacific Water Forum. I remember well the birth of the APWF in Mexico City during the 4<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum. I am proud to have participated at that birth and I am even more happier to be here on such a historic occasion.

Some people say that to give birth is easier than to raise a child. I have no experience in giving birth and so I apologise to all the mothers in this hall if I have trivalised the process. However, I do have experience in raising two children and I know that much care, love and resources are needed especially in the early years. Similarly too it will be for the APWF. To make it a success will require, not only a willingness to provide the needed resources from all the stakeholders, but also our sincere

commitment and a common vision that this is the only path to solve our water problems.

And as we are all aware, our water problems are immense. Much of Asia and the Pacific lie in the humid tropics, and thus, Asia is the wettest continent with almost a third (32 %) of the total global runoff. However, Asia with 40 percent of the world's land area, is home to 60 percent of the world's population. Hence, the water availability per person per day is only 13 cubic metres, or barely half (54 %) of the global average of 24 cubic metres/person/day. The net result is that during the wet season, we are inundated with excess water, while during the dry season, we suffer from chronic shortages. To make matters worse, the quality of our water and our rivers have been degraded, reducing even more the quantity of clean water available for our use.

Most of our water use goes towards growing our food, and globally irrigated agriculture consumes 70 percent of total water use. For Asia, the average figure is 85 percent and in some of our developing countries, it is as high as 95 percent. Even here, we are not able to adequately feed the world. The FAO of the UN estimates that 850 million people (or 1 in 7) suffer from malnutrition, of which 519 million are from Asia and the Pacific. Hence the very first of the eight MDGs touches on poverty and hunger, for it is the poor who frequently go to sleep in hunger.

Over the last two decades, the rapid pace of development in much of Asia has brought with it increased demands for water for our industries, and thus, the competition for water is expected to intensify in the coming years. In a nutshell, we could say our water problems comprised of : too much water in the wet months, too little water in the dry months, and too polluted water overall.

Having adequate water is one thing. Making it accessible to people is another. 62 percent of the population of Asia and the Pacific, or some

655 million people have no access to safe drinking water. For sanitation, the figures are even more depressing as some 1.927 billion people or 74 percent of the population are not provided with proper sanitation facilities. It does seem sometimes that our governments do not pay sufficient attention to our water problems. Perhaps it is because we have so much rain that we think we have no water problem. Investments in water facilities often lag behind other infrastructure. I am therefore, very heartened by the proposal to hold an Asian Water Summit where our leaders will be invited.

The formation of APWF is indeed timely and I must express my thanks and gratitude to the Japan Water Forum and the Government of Japan for playing the major role in its establishment.

I would like, on behalf of the Global Water Partnership and all her regional groupings in Asia, to pledge our commitment and support to the AWPF. There is now increased awareness of the need to manage our water resources in a sustainable manner. Business as usual is no longer tenable. Even more important, there will now be increased expectations that with the AWPF, there is light at the end of the tunnel. On our part, the GWP will do our best to ensure that these expectations will be fulfilled.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

In closing, I would like to congratulate the JWF and the ADB for the successful launching of the APWF. I would like to thank all of you for your efforts to make the APWF a reality. Let us now work together to manage our water resources better and more sustainable, Last but not least, I would like to thank the ADB for their untiring efforts to ensure the smooth running of this event.