



## LEADERSHIP GROUP ON WATER SECURITY IN ASIA

### Asia-Pacific Water Forum 5th Governing Council Meeting, Singapore

### PROGRESS REPORT (June 2009)

In the fall of 2008, the Asia Society established a Leadership Group on Water Security to examine decreased access to a safe, stable supply of water as a driver of political and socioeconomic instability in Asia. Under the chairmanship of Singapore's Ambassador-at-Large **Tommy Koh**, the Leadership Group includes economist and Director of the Earth Institute **Jeffrey Sachs** (United States), Nobel Laureate and Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change **Rajendra K. Pachauri** (India), former Foreign Ministers **Gareth Evans** (Australia), **Han Sung-joo** (South Korea), **Yoriko Kawaguchi** (Japan) and **Surin Pitsuwan** (Thailand), health expert **Nafis Sadik** (Pakistan), development specialists **Erna Witoelar** (Indonesia) and **Xianbin Yao** (China), political scientist **Yuan Ming** (China), and CEOs **Andrew Benedek** (ZENON Environmental, Canada), **Ajit Gulabchand** (Hindustan Construction, India), and **N.G. Wickremeratne** (Hayleys Limited, Sri Lanka).

In April 2009, we released the Leadership Group's report, *Asia's Next Challenge: Securing the Region's Water Future*. The report highlights the fact that although Asia is home to more than half of the world's population, the region has less freshwater per capita than any continent other than Antarctica. Currently, one out of five people (700 million) in Asia does not have access to a clean water supply, and half of the region's population (1.8 billion people) lacks access to basic sanitation. Population growth, rising urbanization rates, and climate change are expected to dramatically worsen the situation over coming decades. In response to the cascading set of consequences that reduced access to fresh water likely will trigger—including impaired food production, the loss of livelihood security, large-scale migration within and across borders, and increased economic and geopolitical tensions and instabilities—the report puts forward a comprehensive strategy to avert a crisis in Asia.

Essays included in the report were contributed by **Margaret Chan**, Director-General of the World Health Organization, **Upmanu Lall**, Director of the Earth Institute's Water Center at Columbia University, **Kapil Narula**, Director of the Earth Institute's Water Center's India office, **Jennifer Turner**, Director of the China Environment Forum at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, **Vitton Viriyasakultorn**, Senior Governance Specialist at the US Agency for International Development/Environment Cooperation-Asia, and Leadership Group member **Rajendra Pachauri**. The report was drafted in close consultation with an international advisory council that includes leading specialists from environment, security, development and humanitarian sectors. **Saleem Ali**, Professor of Environmental Planning and Asian Studies at the University of Vermont, serves as the project's principal advisor, and **Suzanne DiMaggio**, Director of Policy Studies at the Asia Society, is the project director. Our partners in this effort include the Earth Institute's Water Center at Columbia University, the Asia-Pacific Water Forum, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

In addition, the Society created an online resource dedicated to this initiative ([AsiaSociety.org/water](http://AsiaSociety.org/water)), where visitors can download a PDF copy of the report, view an accompanying video featuring Leadership Group member **Jeffrey Sachs**, project advisor **Upmanu Lall**, and project director **Suzanne DiMaggio**, and access a collection of briefings outlining the water security challenges in a selected group of Asian countries.

Through this initiative, the Asia Society seeks to contribute to existing efforts focused on Asia's water problems by raising awareness of the importance of water as a means of security at multiple levels. The report draws attention to some of the most significant current and future water-related challenges facing the region and highlights that no matter how one approaches water resources—whether it is on the basis of quality and quantity, or as the most potent manifestation of extreme climatic events—hydropolitics is likely to be a growing force in Asian security that will require a broader understanding of and strengthened institutional capacities for governance. The emerging water scarcity picture in Asia underscores an urgent need to begin looking at these issues in a more comprehensive way that takes into account the complex national security and development challenges that countries and communities will face as water scarcity intensifies.

The report includes a forward looking action plan outlining how governments, businesses, NGOs, and regional and international organizations can work together to address water challenges. At the recent Asia-Pacific Ministerial Meeting on Water Security, which was held during the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul in March 2009, the work of the Leadership Group on Water Security was designated as part of the region's roadmap toward the implementation of the 2007 Asia-Pacific Water Summit Declaration.

Building on the Society's convening power and global presence, we organized a series of public launch events for the report in New York, Washington D.C., Dubai, and Manila. Attendance at these events was very strong, drawing representatives from government, diplomatic missions, civil society organizations, business, academia, media, and the general public. Plans are underway to convene additional events in Houston, Hong Kong, Melbourne, Mumbai, and Seoul over coming months. Press coverage of the report and the initiative has been similarly robust, and the report has been featured in media outlets across the world, including TIME Magazine, Bloomberg News, Circle of Blue (Water News), Reuters, Daily Star (Pakistan), Gulf News (UAE), The Business Mirror (Philippines), The Hindu, The Globe and Mail (Canada), WNYC Television (New York), and ABC Radio (Australia), among many others. The online resource developed for this project has been viewed by thousands of visitors and the web page is now one of the ten most visited pages on the Asia Society's award-winning website.

The Asia Society will continue to draw upon its resources and status as a global organization and work in cooperation with like-minded partners to mobilize political and public action to address Asia's water crisis. Looking ahead, the Society plans to build on the findings and recommendations of the Leadership Group's report. Potential areas for future work include: water challenges and the impacts on poor populations in Asia, particularly among the 1 billion people living in absolute poverty in the region; climate-related impacts on water resources in Asia; and the water/food security nexus.

**About the Asia Society.** The Asia Society is the leading global and pan-Asian organization working to strengthen relationships and promote understanding among the people and institutions of Asia and the United States. Founded in 1956, the Society is a nonpartisan, nonprofit educational institution with Centers in Hong Kong, Houston, Los Angeles, Manila, Melbourne, Mumbai, New York, San Francisco, Seoul, Shanghai, and Washington D.C. With a distinguished Board of Trustees drawn from the U.S. and Asia, the Asia Society seeks to increase knowledge and enhance dialogue, encourage creative expression, and generate new ideas relating to the most critical challenges facing the U.S. and Asia.

**For more information, please visit:**

[AsiaSociety.org/water](http://AsiaSociety.org/water)



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