

REGIONAL MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Water Supply and Sanitation in Small Rural Settlements in the Black Sea Region

Sofia, 27 May 2009

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations responsible for water supply and sanitation in the countries of the Black Sea Region, gathered in Sofia, Bulgaria on 27 May 2009 on the occasion of the 12th Meeting of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water & Sanitation (UNSGAB),

Acknowledge that sustainable access to clean water and safe sanitation is a basic human need, integral to human well-being through the protection of health and environmental conservation, and is critical to economic development and poverty reduction,

Are mindful of the negative impacts of climate change on water resources, natural hydrological processes and ecosystems, and understanding the need to adapt to the unprecedented changes, including through improved cooperation at all levels;

Affirm our commitment to the internationally agreed targets on water and sanitation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Hashimoto Action Plan and the objectives of the International Year of Sanitation;

Recognize that the countries of the Black Sea Region, sharing similar environmental, economic and demographic characteristics, and having achieved considerable improvement in water supply and sanitation, continue to face challenges in the following areas:

- universal sustainable access to clean water is not yet achieved, although existing statistical data suggest high levels of water supply coverage;
- insufficient access to safe sanitation and adequate wastewater treatment;
- insufficient sewage collecting systems
- insufficient budget allocations for water supply and sanitation development;
- significant disproportion in resources devoted to water and sanitation between urban and rural areas ;
- most of technologies, facilities and infrastructure currently in place do not meet modern standards; insufficient use of ecologically friendly sanitation technologies preventing penetration of untreated human waste into the environment;
- serious problems with pollution, biodiversity degradation, land use and climate change;
- extreme weather events destroying infrastructure, including water supply and sanitation infrastructure.

Also recognize that the problems are further aggravated in rural communities in some countries, which are generally less developed, fall behind in infrastructure, receive less political attention and financial resources and compared to urban areas have;

- lower level of potable water treatment;
- absence or insufficient wastewater collecting systems;
- lack of modern wastewater treatment technologies;
- general lack of new modular technologies for single houses/farms;
- wide-spread primitive latrines.

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations, responsible for water supply and sanitation in the countries of the Black Sea Region have agreed on the following recommendations:

National Actions

- Allocate higher priority to water supply and sanitation in national development strategies with the aim to improve population health, promote development and protect the environment in rural areas;
- Support further implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and Water Efficiency Plans;
- Undertake steps to ratify and implement the Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Trans-boundary Watercourses and International Lakes;
- Further strengthen the institutional and legal capacities dealing with water supply, sanitation and reuse issues by establishing a national authority or focal points, where it is not yet in place, in order to ensure leadership and coordination of action at governmental level on water and sanitation-related issues and facilitate regional and international cooperation where appropriate and feasible;
- Incorporate adequate sanitation and drinking water supply measures into disaster-readiness and mitigation plans to ensure appropriate post-disaster mitigation and rehabilitation measures for affected people in vulnerable areas;
- Consider including the World Health Organization Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization, Black Sea Commission recommendations on pollution prevention and safe re-use of human waste and wastewater in agriculture into national legislation and promote affordable and socially and culturally acceptable technologies and practices;
- Improve water and sanitation related monitoring and reporting systems and ensure that information is made available to all parties who have an interest in it.

Financing

- Support efforts to improve sanitation and ensure access to safe drinking water, including in the rural areas;
- Call upon the interested international organizations, financial institutions, and private donors to mobilize additional financial resources to complement the efforts made by national governments to develop sustainable water resources and management and to build the infrastructure base for a sustainable sanitation and agriculture production in rural areas;

- Understand that effective coordination of donors and more effective use of the existing resources is an important precondition for the mobilization of additional resources;
- Note the involvement of the European Commission in the Black Sea region, particularly by promoting water supply and wastewater projects.
- Develop with the assistance of regional and development banks innovative local financial mechanisms to support sustainable water resources and improved sanitation in rural areas of the Black Sea Region, including microfinance and microcredit in accordance with national legislation on banking.

Innovative solutions

- Consider adopting community-driven sanitation approaches in small rural settlements;
- Develop guidelines and best practices manuals for sanitation options and solutions in rural areas;
- Applying better policies, norms and standards for construction and consider implementing best practices in wastewater treatment planning, construction, use and maintenance inclusive of reuse scenarios in capturing nutrients for agriculture;
- Continue efforts to develop national water operators partnerships and explore the advantages of establishing a regional network of water operators partnerships to build capacity;
- Support scientific research and the development, utilization and dissemination of new technologies, practices and processes in water supply and sanitation issues and promote bilateral and regional cooperation on these issues;
- Promote projects aimed at improving sanitation facilities with due regard to gender differences and specific women's needs.

Education

- Promote capacity building in the areas of sustainable sanitation systems in training curricula of technical institutes and universities;
- Cooperate closely with civil society and private sector to raise public awareness through educational programs and outreach activities specifically reflecting sanitation problems in small rural areas.

Trans-boundary Cooperation

- Give high priority to trans-border cooperation in water and sanitation, bearing in mind the situation in the region and to avert possible negative influences on relations by pollution of trans-boundary rivers where appropriate in rural and mountainous border areas and the Black Sea by untreated wastewaters from domestic and farming, from point and non-point sources. Turning these real or potential ecological problems into an important field of cooperation, highly beneficial for the development of these areas implies:
 - mobilizing additional effort and resources to assess the current state of the outstanding issues in water supply and sanitation in the basins of trans-border water flows;
 - consultations among neighbouring countries where appropriate and feasible for defining the key problems and agreeing on measures to be undertaken on the territory of each country;

- elaborating joint or parallel projects for their priority realization;
- crucial support from the international community.

Regional cooperation

- Consider incorporating regional cooperation on water supply and sanitation in BSEC agenda and explore the possibilities to recommend modalities of such cooperation including;
 - setting up a regional system of monitoring by the BSEC Working Group on Environmental Protection,
 - establishing regional mechanisms to exchange best practices and share information on pilot projects, new technologies and innovative approaches suitable to the region, including creating a web page as well as inviting international organizations and institutions to support efforts for dissemination of experiences and sharing of best practices from other regions on sustainable water resources rehabilitation, protection, conservation, management and utilization,
 - nominating a regional focal point on water supply and sanitation to facilitate cooperation with interested international organizations and financial institutions,
- Improve regional cooperation involving the Black Sea Commission and develop a common strategy in order to reduce the organic pollution into Black Sea;

We acknowledge the commitments made by international organizations and institutions who have pledged support for addressing water and sanitation issues in the region by offering technical assistance, promoting awareness and providing an opportunity for financial support.

We note with appreciation the participation of Governments, International and Regional Organizations in the present Ministerial Conference.

Finally, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations assembled in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 27 May 2009 would like to:

- Thank the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria for the organization of the 12th Meeting of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water & Sanitation (UNSGAB) and the present Ministerial Conference;
- Thank the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board for its valuable support for the present Ministerial Conference.