

**(Tentative translation)**

**First Meeting of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation  
Opening Remarks**

**Chairman of the Board,  
Ryutaro Hashimoto**

At the opening of the first meeting of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, I, chairman of the board, am profoundly grateful to all the members who play active roles in various fields, for attending this meeting.

Water is the fount of all life and has supported human activities since ancient times. Water is essential for all life on the earth to survive. Water is a crucial factor for sustainable development. Expanding access to safe drinking water is one of the primary targets of the globally-agreed Millennium Development Goals. To achieve global targets on water and sanitation, all of us living on this earth must recognize the importance of water for sustainable development. Each of us must establish ownership and be aware of what we can do for the resolution of water issues. And upon it we should build global partnership.

I believe that resolution of water issues leads to the resolution of poverty, the most crucial and significant problem in the world. However, water exists on the earth and in our lives in various forms and so-called water issues are diverse. Moreover, different factors are inter-connected. Water and sanitation problems are inseparable from other factors, such as disasters like floods or droughts, financing, water environment, agriculture, energy, water transportation, education, culture and so on. Therefore, it is imperative that we consider with a broad perspective how we humans should address water and establish common fundamental principles on water.

I have become aware of the fact that children in different social environment have utterly different recognition of "safe water" by attending the Children's Forum held during the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Water Forum. 'Safe water' means 'hygienic water' to most Japanese children. However, to children in Chad or Sierra Leone, fetching water can be a dangerous and life-threatening task. Sometimes women or girls face the risk of rape. There is a case in Sierra Leone where a school of 1,800 have only two toilets for girls, and one of the two is used exclusively by teachers. Such situation not only pollutes the surrounding environment

but also threatens women's health. Some girls cannot attend schools simply because there is no toilet at schools. To achieve one of the MDGs—ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling—it would be important to improve sanitation situation at schools so that children can safely go to school. 'Water and sanitation' involves various problems, and therefore we need to look at it from various perspectives and identify the relevant issues and themes.

One of the challenges I have experienced in regard to water supply was the reconstruction assistance for Afghanistan. Japan took initiative and hosted the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan in Tokyo. On that occasion, concrete programs were developed in regard to food and medical supplies, but no plans were made for supplying safe drinking water to refugees. At that time I strongly appealed the need to reconstruct the water infrastructure in Afghanistan to the UN, international institutions, and various other organizations. We are now involved in the process of the reconstruction of Iraq, and their water supply is really a matter of life and death. I would like to assert that water should be listed as a top priority.

Sanitation and disaster are also closely related. Water-related disasters, such as floods, droughts, and cyclones, affect millions of people every year, causing loss of property and a large number of casualties. Such disasters lead to a great economic loss for an entire society. Especially in South-East Asia and South-West Asia, every time a disaster occurs, sanitation facilities are damaged and sometimes diseases caused by water ravish the area. Thus, sanitation cannot be discussed without considering the very real possibility of disasters. Alleviating water disasters leads to improved sanitation and reduction of poverty, and therefore it is crucial for sustainable development. At this meeting of the Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation we should address enhancement of measures to deal with water disasters, but also water for disaster recovery, including the water supply as the first step toward reconstruction after natural disasters like earthquakes. To cite an instance, a devastating earthquake hit Kobe in 1995, when I served as the Minister for International Trade and Industry. In the quake-hit areas around Kobe, almost all lifelines including electricity, gas, water, sewerage and telephone suffered catastrophic damage. Even water for extinguishing fire could not be obtained, which caused great difficulties in preventing the fire from spreading. While everybody knew the restoration of these facilities was a matter of urgency, water supply to the sufferers and the reconstruction of water-related infrastructure were the most urgent and crucial matters. I am ready to share with you our experience and countermeasures if necessary.

Just last week in Japan, heavy rain caused flooding in various parts of Japan on the Japan Sea side. They caused great damage with 18 deaths. Disasters can occur any time at any place. Isn't it time we share with each other our experience and knowledge on disasters?

In 2005 the World Conference on Disaster Reduction will be held in Kobe, the epicenter city. I believe presenting the results of the meeting of the Advisory Board on the occasion of major international conferences like the Kobe Conference.

At the Johannesburg Summit held in 2002, world leaders agreed to develop integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans. Though Integrated Water Resource Management is widely recognized as an effective way for managing and developing water resources, common understanding of this concept is yet to be established. Therefore, we should come to a common understanding about what IWRM represents before working out IWRM programs.

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Water Forum, the significance of grass-roots, or community level governance was confirmed. We are also required to discuss how major groups, including the UN, governments, local communities, scholars, women's groups, the youth, and children, get involved in the project in order to achieve the targets of MDGs.

Financing for the resolution of water issues remains a critical challenge. It will also help reduce poverty. In order to secure financial resources for water and sanitation, we are required to find innovative mechanisms for financing for the benefit of the poor, and measures to increase public and private funds. We should give special consideration to the concerns on privatizing water infrastructures and services. Though the discussion on private sector participation tends to be polarized to opinions for or against privatization, we should begin from asking ourselves how public and private coordination can be facilitated with the aim of ensuring sustainable water supply for the poor.

The mission of this advisory board is to increase public awareness on water and sanitation, secure necessary funds to develop projects related to water and sanitation, and facilitate new partnerships by utilizing our experience and expertise. This advisory board consists of various prominent members in different fields. Each member is expected to contribute to the promotion of public awareness of the importance of water issues without being constrained by the UN's framework. I believe all the members here are determined not only to discuss but also to take concrete actions toward the resolution of water issues.

Water teaches us the truth of life. One Japanese proverb says, "Water conforms to the shape of its container". Water has no fixed shape and changes its shape according to what holds it. What this proverb tries to tell us is that human is also influenced by his or her friends and the environment, whether it is good or bad. Depending on the container or the environment, water can be our good friend, or it can be our formidable foe. To ensure that we can hand over our precious water, the fount of life, to the future generations, let us begin our process of making an excellent water container at this meeting.

Thank you for your kind attention.