

Press Release

SG/SM/9430

SECRETARY-GENERAL SETS OUT PRIORITIES FOR HIS WATER/SANITATION ADVISORY BOARD,

CITES TERRIBLE COST OF UNSAFE DRINKING WATER, POOR SANITATION

Following are Secretary-General Kofi Annan's remarks to the first session of his Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation:

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and dear friends, welcome. It is indeed a pleasure to see you all here.

I'm grateful to you, Prime Minister Hashimoto, for agreeing to Chair the Board on Water and Sanitation, as I am to each and every one of you for agreeing to serve as Board Members. You are a diverse and high-profile group, and each of you brings something unique to the table.

We all know the terrible cost of unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation in our world. Today, one person in six will drink unclean water. One person in three will not have access to proper sanitation. And around 10,000 people will die today as a result of this preventable situation.

That is unacceptable. The world has recognized that it is unacceptable. And it has also recognized that if we don't address water and sanitation issues, we can't have effective development strategies. That's why commitments were made in the Millennium Declaration in 2000, and at Johannesburg in 2002. The commitments were to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, and to develop integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans by the year 2005.

As the recent High-Level Segment of the Commission on Sustainable Development concluded, a considerable number of countries are on track to halve the proportion of their population without access to safe drinking water by 2015. But many others will fail to meet the goals unless progress is stepped up. And a large number of countries are not on track to reach the target of halving the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015, either in rural or urban areas, unless

there is a dramatic increase in resources and efforts. Also, a considerable number of countries are expected to reach the target of developing integrated water resources management and efficiency plans by 2005. But many others will need more technical assistance if they are to reach that goal.

Of course, a lot of good work is being done on water and sanitation issues. Locally, the best work is being done where there is effective and accountable public administration, where governments involve communities in decision-making and project implementation, and where there is a genuine commitment to equity. There is also quite a lot being done through the international system. The United Nations is heavily involved and the non-governmental organizations are working hard. The private sector has an important role to play too.

But while all this work is admirable, it clearly isn't enough, and it could be better focused to have greater impact. That's where I turn to you to make a difference. I am convinced that the agreed targets for water and sanitation are achievable in the time frames laid down. The key is to get measurable improvements more quickly and in more places. That requires political will, strengthened governance at all levels, and the more effective mobilization and use of resources. My hope is that, with an integrated strategic approach, you can help generate some of those missing ingredients.

I have asked you to focus on four areas:

-- First, it is important to assess what progress has, and has not been, made towards achieving the water and sanitation goals.

-- Second, I need your help to raise the political visibility of water and sanitation issues, by increasing public awareness, and by being advocates for action with governments, civil society and in the media.

-- Third, I look to you to help mobilize more human and financial resources to press forward the water and sanitation agenda.

-- And finally, I ask you to encourage governments and the organs of the international system to maintain and upgrade the quality of data and statistics, and to strengthen their capacity to monitor policies and actions.

The name of the game is not to come up with new plans, but to help step up efforts to implement existing plans and meet agreed targets. Mr. Ocampo, the Under-Secretary-General for

Economic and Social Affairs, will work with you, and he will oversee the Secretariat's support for the Board.

You are, of course, all very busy people, and you will only be meeting once or twice a year. You will obviously have to organize your work in a way that gives it the most impact. I will leave it in your capable hands to work out how best to do so. However you proceed, I ask you always to provide me with the most open, honest, and independent advice.

Thank you once again for agreeing to take up this difficult and critically important task. I will be relying on you for your help, and I hope that together, we can make a real difference.

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