

Second Meeting of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation
December 9, 2004
Opening Address

Chair of the Board
Ryutaro Hashimoto

At the opening of the second meeting of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, I am deeply grateful to all the members for coming, from both near and far.

The first meeting of the Advisory Board was held on July 21 -22 at the UN Headquarters in New York, with 14 attendees, and a lively discussion was held among them. On that occasion, 10 priority issues we should address to accomplish the millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were identified. We agreed that we should act as an independent body to heighten public awareness about water and sanitation by suggesting concrete actions, not by just submitting reports. For this purpose, we clarified three pillars of focus. One was that we should organize three working groups to give strategic advice to UN's Secretary General. Another was that we should convey the local voices to the supreme decision-making body by meeting a wide range of people from ministers to mayors, to union leaders. The last was that we should present our recommendations to the Commission on Sustainable Development 13th Session (CSD-13) and the MDG Review Meeting, which are to be held in April and September, 2005, respectively.

We have experienced many natural disasters, especially several devastating water-related disasters in many quarters of the globe this year. Even in the countries where advanced disaster-prevention measures were introduced, the disasters took a heavy toll. This experience taught me that it was nearly impossible to prevent all water-related disasters. Those who are hit hardest are the poor who have no choice but to stay there, even if they know those areas are vulnerable to disasters. And such devastating damage leaves them much poorer, and thus leads to a vicious cycle of poverty. Catastrophic damage to the water-related infrastructure hampers the accomplishments of the Millennium Development Goals. Considering that we are exposed to a heightened risk of natural disasters due to climate change and growing populations, our greatest challenge is to find drastic solutions to minimize the risks associated with such disasters.

For three days from December 6 to 8, the International Conference on Integrated Water Resources Management was held, organized by the Japan Water Forum, where I serve as a Chair.

A major objective of the meeting was to reaffirm that it was crucial to develop, manage, and preserve invaluable water resources properly to ensure both socio-economic prosperity and rich natural environment. In addition, we were required to encourage every government to ascertain that all countries prepare an Integrated Water Resources Management Plan by 2005, adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002. In the plenary session, pioneering approaches to the IWRM and concrete actions around the world were presented and discussed. The outcome of the meeting was compiled as recommendations to the Advisory Board.

Water issues are diverse in each area or country. The approach to water resources management in each country reflects specific water issues and socio-economic situations in that country. Therefore there is no universal way of managing water resources. What is important is that each country should constantly review its own way of managing water resources, to identify its own priority issues, and to heighten common awareness of its challenges.

Here, I would like to emphasize the fact that each country cannot accomplish its goals without international cooperation, because most countries in the world share common water resources, and many rivers flow across borders. It is our mission to continue our quest for better water resources management, in which both ownership and participation of all stakeholders are secured. We have to establish the future direction to our goals and more importantly we have to undertake concrete actions to achieve these goals.

At the second meeting of the Advisory Board, we are expected to face up to our responsibilities for creating a concrete action plan. Since the first meeting, I have requested all the members to give suggestions about what and how we should do. I hope all the members engage actively in discussions based on the useful suggestions offered. During these two days, each working group, focused on specific topics, is to hold serious discussion to find our future direction. I look forward to a fruitful meeting.

Thank you.