



## **Access to safe water a priority as the UN marks the beginning of International Decade**

### **Government Ministers to Meet in April to Decide on Policy Measures Necessary to Reach Targets for Water, Sanitation, Slums**

(New York, 17 March 2005) – As the International Decade for Action “Water for Life” begins, the United Nations and Governments are seeking to galvanise efforts to meet the internationally agreed targets of halving the number of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015. Ministers and government delegates will meet next month in New York to take policy decisions on practical measures and options to accelerate progress toward these and other water-related goals at the Commission for Sustainable Development’s 13th session.

The ‘Water for Life’ Decade, which will be launched next week on World Water Day (22 March), calls on the international community to strengthen efforts to increase access to water and sanitation for all. The Decade aims to promote efforts to fulfil international commitments made on water and water-related issues by 2015, placing special emphasis on the involvement and participation of women in these efforts.

“This is an urgent matter of human development, and human dignity,” stated UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his message to launch the ‘Water for Life’ Decade. “Together, we can provide safe, clean water to all the world’s people. The world’s water resources are our lifeline for survival, and for sustainable development in the 21st century.”

Meeting the targets on water and sanitation would also contribute significantly to the realization of other UN Millennium Development Goals, including reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, reducing child and maternal mortality and providing universal primary education. The importance of achieving these two targets, together with that of achieving a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020, was behind the decision by governments to focus on these three issues in the first two-year cycle of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development’s new programme of work.

#### **Governments to decide on policy options and actions**

To be held from 11 to 22 April 2005, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development’s Thirteenth Session (CSD-13) will be the first policy-setting session since the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg in 2002. The aim of the meeting is to decide on concrete policy options and actions to be taken to achieve the goals and targets related to water, sanitation and human settlements contained in Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

“The importance of the work of CSD-13 cannot be overestimated. The policy options and actions Governments are expected to agree on will underpin our common endeavours in the coming years to meet the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation targets and commitments in water, sanitation and human settlements,” stated H.E. Dr. John W. Ashe, Chairman of CSD-13.

Increasing the participation of women in decision making on water and sanitation was one of the issues on the table at the recent preparatory meeting for the Commission on Sustainable Development, in addition to its being a key focus of the ‘Water for Life’ Decade.

“We need to free women and girls from the daily chore of hauling water, often over great distances. We must involve them in decision-making on water management. We need to make sanitation a priority. This is where progress is lagging most,” stated UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

#### **Focus on developing countries**

The preparatory meeting also recognized that developing countries, especially those in Africa, the least developed countries, land-locked countries and small island developing States, face the greatest challenges in achieving targets for sustainable development.



Following are a few examples of the many policy options that will be discussed at the CSD-13:

#### Improving access to safe drinking water and sanitation

- Ensuring that no one is excluded from essential water supplies. Examples of possible actions include the provision of means-tested direct subsidies to the poor as in Chile, applying increasing block rate tariff structures to water pricing as in Cote d'Ivoire and the provision of a basic daily quantity of water free of charge to households as in South Africa.
- Decentralizing the delivery of water services and providing technical assistance and capacity building to local authorities and community based organizations in water resources management. Examples include the federal government of Mexico's policy of matching costs paid by municipalities for investment in water services.
- Strengthening governance of public water utilities such as Senegal's reform of its national water utility.
- Making sanitation access affordable to poor people, for example through the provision of subsidies for household hookups to sewerage services as in Jamaica and Trinidad and cross-subsidies to meet the sanitation needs of the poor as in Egypt. India has used financial incentives to encourage rural communities to improve sanitation infrastructure.

#### Financing water and sanitation-related investments

- Increasing donors' Official Development Assistance commitments towards the 0.7 per cent of GNI target.
- Addressing the debt burdens of poor countries, for example in Uganda, where debt relief helped finance its Poverty Eradication Action Plan.
- Bolstering revolving funds and microcredit programs that assist communities and households in improving water and sanitation access.
- Targeting limited public resources at highest impact sanitation interventions. Examples include programs in African countries such as Ethiopia, Malawi, Uganda, Burkina Faso and Zambia which prioritize sanitation provision in schools and public buildings.

#### Mainstreaming sanitation at the national level

- Prioritizing and institutionalizing sanitation at the national level as part of an overarching policy framework. Examples include Tanzania's inclusion of sanitation in its national development plans and Senegal's creation of a separate Ministry of Protection, Public Hygiene and Sanitation.

#### Improving housing and services for the urban poor

- Improving security of tenure in slums and informal settlements through such measures as the residential licensing programme in Tanzania, which facilitates access to formal credit, and realizing women's equal rights to hold legal contracts of tenure, inheritance and other acquisition of real estate.
- Follow an integrated approach to human settlements planning, involving land-use planning, housing development, water, sanitation and other infrastructure, education and health facilities

The Commission on Sustainable Development is the United Nation's high-level forum responsible for ensuring follow up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and monitoring progress towards achieving internationally-agreed development goals.

For more information on CSD-13 visit: [www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd13/csd13.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd13/csd13.htm)

For more information on the International Decade for Action "Water for Life" please visit [www.un.org/waterforlifedecade](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade) (to be launched on 22 March 2005)

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#### For media queries regarding the 'Water for Life' Decade and the CSD, please contact:

Renata Sivacolundhu

U.N. Department of Public Information

Tel: +1 212 963 2932 Fax: +1 212 963 1186

Email: [mediainfo@un.org](mailto:mediainfo@un.org)