

**UNITED NATIONS SYMPOSIUM ON HYDROPOWER  
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**27-29 OCTOBER, 2004**

**BEIJING INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER**

**BEIJING, PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA**

**Message for Official Opening Session**

**Delivered on behalf of Mr. José Antonio Ocampo**

**Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs  
United Nations**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It gives me great pleasure to address this message to you at the opening of the *United Nations Symposium on Hydropower and Sustainable Development*, which is co-organized by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) of the Government of the People's Republic of China, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the World Bank.

We are greatly honoured by the presence of so many senior officials, distinguished experts and participants from China and more than 30 other countries.

Please allow me to also use this occasion to express my profound appreciation and thanks to our hosts, the Government and people of China for their warm hospitality and their professional preparations for this event. UN DESA also greatly appreciates the generous financial support of the World Bank without which this event would not have been so impressive.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

At the World Summit held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002, the world's leaders reaffirmed their commitment to sustainable development and to building a humane, equitable and caring global society, cognizant of the need for human dignity for all.

As the world aspires for greater prosperity we now all understand that economic progress can only be sustained if the growing social disparities as well as environmental concerns are also effectively addressed.

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) adopted at the World Summit calls for poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, and protecting and managing the natural resource base for economic and social development. The JPOI provides the world community with a universal consensus guideline for sustainable development policies and programmes. However, translating the JPOI into practical policies, local action plans and sustainable development projects

remains a major challenge faced by many policy makers in developing and industrialized countries alike.

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation emphasizes the importance of energy for sustainable development and places energy firmly on the agenda of the Commission for Sustainable Development, calling for improved access to reliable, affordable, economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sound energy services, in particular for the urban and rural poor in the developing countries.

Lack of access to modern energy services and persistent poverty are closely linked. Today, an estimated 2 billion people still live without access to modern energy services; a life without electric lights or any other electrical appliance, a life without efficient stoves or cooking fuels, a life without modern means of education, production, transportation or communication.

During recent years significant public and private investment in expanding energy and electricity infrastructure has taken place in some countries, but the world population has grown, too. The disturbing projections of some on-going studies of the International Energy Agency (IEA) seem to suggest that - at current levels of investment in energy - the number of people without access to modern energy services will not significantly decline, not even by the year 2030. If the Millennium Development Goals adopted at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000 are to be achieved, including the goal to halve by the year 2015 the number of people living in absolute poverty, public and private investments in energy will have to be increased dramatically.

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation also calls for a diversification of energy supply and a significant increase in the global share of energy from renewable energy sources, notably including hydropower. In a world concerned with expanding access to energy for the poor, and also concerned with the growing threat of climate change, hydropower with its greenhouse gas emission reduction potential will certainly have a growing role to play in providing energy for sustainable development in the future. With the recently announced decision of the Government of Russia to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, hydropower development options may well attract more investment interests in the future.

In many of the industrialized countries of Europe and North America, modernization, electrification and industrialization have been closely linked to the development of hydropower resources. Whereas hydropower potentials have been largely utilized in the industrialized world, considerable unused potential exists in many developing countries, including countries in Sub-saharan Africa, Latin America and Asia.

Today, hydropower plants of varying size are in operation in some 140 countries, providing approximately one fifth of global electricity supply. In more than 50 countries, hydropower accounts for one half or more of domestic electricity production. Once built, hydropower facilities have low operating costs and a long service life, particularly run-of-river and reservoir projects where sedimentation is not a concern.

The economic importance of hydropower can not be underestimated. Current and projected high oil prices make hydropower an important energy option, in particular for oil-importing developing countries. If the electricity currently produced from the world's hydropower stations was to be produced from fossil fuels, the equivalent of an additional 4.4 million barrels of oil would be needed per day.

Whereas the economic and environmental benefits that can be derived from hydropower development are quite evident, the construction of large dams slowed down considerably during the 1990s. The construction of some large dams has revealed problems ranging from cost overruns to performance shortfalls. In some countries insufficient attention was given to ecological impacts caused by hydropower development and to damage to river basins or local or regional eco-systems. Some large dam projects have caused significant social impacts, particularly for indigenous people, some of whom were reported to have lost their traditional livelihoods or means of income under involuntary resettlement or inadequate compensation programmes. In some countries dam projects were delayed or even suspended over allegations of corruption or lack of good governance.

During recent years the search for environmentally sustainable sources of modern energy has led to a re-appreciation of hydropower options, taking into account lessons learned from past project failures. We now observe a growing awareness and consensus that dams and large hydropower projects require a thorough preparatory process, including the participation of affected groups. Hydropower projects need to be based on comprehensive comparative assessments of alternative project design options. Any negative social or environmental impacts need to be minimized and, wherever unavoidable, adequately compensated. Project development decisions need to be preceded by comprehensive social and environmental impact assessment studies, which identify acceptable solutions to mitigating any eventual loss of livelihoods, social or cultural heritage or biodiversity. Eventual threats to public health also need to be avoided or controlled.

The international debate on the pros and cons of large-scale hydropower shows some convergence over the principle that no affected group or individual must be left

negatively affected by the implementation of a project. However, considerable differences in methodology and opinion continue to persist on the precise implementation procedures and modalities.

The principal objective of this United Nations Symposium is to bring together leaders from government, distinguished experts from the scientific community and academia, representatives of the private sector, professional institutions, and representatives from international organizations, as well as non-government organizations to discuss the contribution hydropower can make to achieving the goals of sustainable development.

The Symposium is designed to provide an international forum for the exchange of experiences and a dialogue on hydropower development principles and policies, and to provide developing countries with information or contacts that can be useful in future project planning, including the mobilization of technical assistance and project financing support.

In 2006 and 2007, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is scheduled to review global progress in implementation of the JPoI, in particular with regard to energy for sustainable development, climate change, air pollution/atmosphere and industrial development. I expect that the perspectives on hydropower and sustainable development discussed at this Symposium will provide valuable input to the up-coming consultations of the Commission, and therefore look forward to learning the results of your deliberations.

Thank you for your kind attention.