

## **HIGH LEVEL THEMATIC DEBATE ON WATER** **CONCEPT PAPER**

### **22 March, “World Water Day”**

Water-related issues are at the top of the world’s sustainable development agenda and are relevant to many challenges the global community is facing. This is particularly relevant to the availability and quality of freshwater resources, as well as the issue of access to drinking water and sanitation services.

By its resolution 58/217, the General Assembly proclaimed 2005-2015 as the International Decade for Action “Water for Life”, to commence on 22 March 2005, and recalled its resolution 55/196, in which it had proclaimed 2003 as the International Year of Freshwater.

Furthermore the General Assembly through the adoption of its resolution 64/198, *invited* the President of the General Assembly to convene a high-level interactive dialogue (HLID) of the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly in New York on 22 March 2010, World Water Day, on the implementation of the abovementioned International Decade.

The primary goal of the International Decade for Action “Water for Life” is to promote efforts to fulfill international commitments made on water and water-related issues by 2015.

The Millennium Declaration commits Governments around the world to a clear agenda for combating poverty, hunger, illiteracy, disease, discrimination against women and environmental degradation. In the area of water resources and sanitation, Heads of State and Government pledged in 2000 to reduce by half the proportion of people who are unable to reach, or to afford, safe drinking water by 2015 and to stop the unsustainable exploitation of water resources.

Additional goals adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002, aim at developing integrated water resource

management and water efficiency plans by 2005 and at halving the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation by 2015.

Since the commencement of the International Decade for Action “Water for Life” on 22 March 2005, and taking into account the call for a coordinated response, many member-states in collaboration with the United Nations system<sup>1</sup>, undertook efforts that have resulted in significant increase of awareness, understanding and recognition of crucial importance of sustainable use and efficient management of freshwater resources and sanitation issues.

However, progress in many Member States lags behind the internationally agreed targets<sup>2</sup>. This is mainly due to the lack of resources, capacity and financing. Moreover, progress is jeopardized by multiple crises, such as the food, energy and economic and financial crises. Additional challenges such as population growth, increased pressure on ecosystems and climate change also impede the achievement of the envisaged goals. According to UN-

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<sup>1</sup>In particular the United Nations Department on Economic and Social Affairs, UN-Water (the UN systems’ coordinating mechanism on water issues and for the Water for Life Decade, hosting also the two UN-Water Programmes on the Water for Life Decade in Bonn and Zaragoza and UN-Water’s World Water Assessment Programme), the United Nations Secretary-General Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, the UN Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, WHO-UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme, Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council and other regional and sub-regional organizations. In addition many non-UN organizations, are contributing actively to achieving the goals of the Water for Life Decade, such as the World Water Council, International Water Management Institute, Wateraid, Global Water Partnership, International Water Association, Stockholm International Water Institute and other regional, national and local organizations.

<sup>2</sup> -UN-Water (2009), Third World Water Development Report, Water in a changing World; Earthscan, London

-UN-Water (2008a), Status Report on Integrated Water Resources Management and Water Efficiency Plans, Prepared for the 16th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development; available at: [http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW\\_Status\\_Report\\_IWRM.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW_Status_Report_IWRM.pdf)

-UN-Water (2008b) Roadmapping for Advancing Integrated Water Management (IWRM) Processes; available at:

[http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW\\_ROADMAPPING\\_IWRM.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW_ROADMAPPING_IWRM.pdf)

-WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (2008) (2010 Report forthcoming in March 2010) <http://www.wssinfo.org/en/welcome.html>

-UN-Water (2008) The Global Annual Assessment on Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) Pilot Report (2010 Report forthcoming in March 2010)

[http://www.unwater.org/downloads/glaas\\_2008\\_pilot\\_finalreport.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/downloads/glaas_2008_pilot_finalreport.pdf)

Water, every sixth person (*more than 894 million people*) does not have access to safe drinking water, and, 2.5 billion people, including almost 1 billion children, do not have access to basic sanitation. More than 4 thousand children die every day from infectious diseases, resulting from shortage of safe drinking water and insanitary conditions. The First, Second and Third World Water Development Reports prepared by the UN experts in collaboration with other international organizations also indicate these problems and recommend ways to overcome difficulties connected to water supplies and sanitation.

The challenge of the International Decade for Action “Water for Life” is to focus attention on action-oriented activities and policies that ensure the long-term sustainable management of water resources, in terms of both quantity and quality, and include measures to improve sanitation. Achieving these goals will require sustained commitment, cooperation and investment on the part of all stakeholders up to 2015 and beyond.

Water-related impacts of climate change are being experienced in the form of more severe and more frequent droughts and floods. Higher average temperatures and changes in precipitation and temperature extremes are projected to affect the availability of water resources through changes in rainfall distribution, soil moisture, glacier and ice and snow melt, and river and groundwater flows. These factors are also expected to lead to further deterioration of water quality. Areas identified as the most vulnerable include the least developed countries, small island developing states and arid areas with fragile populations, economies and environments. In this respect, adaptation to the hydrological impacts of the climate change is of primary importance.

Some would argue that as demand for water resources approaches the limits of finite supply, potential conflicts on trans-boundary waters between nations seem imminent. Nevertheless, water resources also present an opportunity for cooperation rather than a source of conflict, and in that regard, reaching agreements on equitable and sustainable use and management of trans-boundary rivers, lakes and aquifers is a matter of great importance.

Midterm comprehensive review of the International Decade for Action “Water for Life” is an opportunity to take stock of the progress achieved in the implementation of internationally agreed water-related goals and

fulfillment of the international commitments on water and water related issues by 2015, and an opportunity to discuss measures to accelerate efforts toward timely and full achievement of these goals.

This high-level dialogue will provide an important input to the preparatory process of the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly, to be held on 20-22 September 2010 in New York. It will also contribute to the High-Level International Conference to be hosted by Tajikistan in June 2010.

A summary of the key documents on water related goals will provide the background for discussions in the High Level Interactive Dialogue and High Level International Conference.

## **OUTCOME:**

Summary of the Chairman (President of the General Assembly). Inputs from the synthesis provided by the Moderators will be considered as part of the summary.

Taking into account the time constraints of the one day event, and in order to fully benefit from the Member States perspectives, a website related to the event will be launched, for which all Member States are invited to provide statements/ papers, on a voluntary basis, to serve as input for this Mid term Review of the International Decade as well as to the High Level Meeting in September 2010 and other related processes.

The website will be available at <http://www.un.org/ga/president/64/thematic/water.shtml> and Member State's inputs can be sent to [pga64@un.org](mailto:pga64@un.org).

A possibility to have a publication with all these inputs at the end of the event, will serve as a contribution from the President of the General Assembly on the implementation of the Water Decade, recommendations for the MDG's Summit, and for other processes related to the water issues towards the 65<sup>th</sup> session.