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ON EVE OF WORLD SUMMIT, NEW UN REPORT WARNS THAT CURRENT PATTERNS OF DEVELOPMENT COMPROMISE LONG-TERM SECURITY OF EARTH AND ITS PEOPLE

**-- UN Calls on World Leaders to Commit to a Sustainable Future at Upcoming
Johannesburg Summit --**

New York, 13 August 2002 – A report released today by the United Nations highlights the disturbing toll of current patterns of development on global living standards and the Earth's natural resources. Published on the eve of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the report, *Global Challenge, Global Opportunity*, underscores the need for greatly increased efforts to support sustainable development to better manage global resources.

Today's report comes as over 100 world leaders prepare to attend the Summit, to be held in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September, where they are set to finalize a new global implementation plan to accelerate sustainable development, and to launch a series of innovative partnerships to promote sustainability.

"*Global Challenge, Global Opportunity* highlights the choice we face between two futures," said Nitin Desai, Secretary-General of WSSD at the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs, which published the report. "If we do nothing to change our current indiscriminate patterns of development, we will compromise the long-term security of the Earth and its people. At Johannesburg, we have an opportunity to build a more secure future, by embracing a more sustainable form of development that will improve lives today, and build a better world for our children and grandchildren."

The report examines a number of issues that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has identified as central to the negotiations at the Summit, including water and sanitation, energy, agricultural productivity, biodiversity, and human health. In a sobering assessment of current trends in these areas, the report finds that:

- At present, 40% of the world's population faces water shortages.
- Global sea levels are rising, a clear indication of the impact of global warming.
- Many plant and animal species are at risk of extinction, including half of the large primates, man's closest animal relatives.
- 2.4% of the world's forests were destroyed during the 1990s.
- Every year more than 3 million people die from the effects of air pollution.

On a positive note, the report identifies the emergence of sustainable development practices on a small scale that are beginning to be replicated to address issues such as ecosystem preservation, urban air pollution and child mortality linked to unsafe water. But these gains are imperiled, say Summit representatives, if greater action is not taken soon to reverse the more disturbing trends noted in the report.

The Need for Action on Water, Energy, Agriculture, Biodiversity and Health

Global Challenge, Global Opportunity reviews the most authoritative data concerning global use of natural resources today:

- **Water and Sanitation** – Despite some recent improvements in this area, 1 billion people still lack access to safe drinking water. By 2025, half of the world’s population – 3.5 billion people – will face serious water shortages, particularly in North Africa and West Asia, as groundwater supplies are consumed faster than they can be replenished.
- **Energy** – Fossil fuel consumption and carbon emissions continued to rise in the 1990s, particularly in Asia and in North America. Signs of climate change linked to global warming are also more apparent – for example, droughts have increased in frequency and intensity in parts of Asia and Africa. This is particularly true for the Summit’s host country, South Africa, which, along with several neighbouring countries, is currently experiencing severe drought.
- **Agricultural Productivity** – Demand for food is rising as the world population grows, and the capacity of food production to keep pace is diminishing, especially in developing countries. This situation creates a long-term threat to food security, particularly in regions of the world where land has been degraded due to over-cultivation or desertification. There is now little scope for expanding agricultural land in Southeast Asia and Europe, while in North Africa and West Asia ongoing shortages of freshwater supplies limit the potential for agricultural development.
- **Biodiversity and Ecosystems** – An estimated total of 90 million hectares of forests – an area larger than the size of Venezuela – was destroyed in the 1990s. Deforestation on this scale is a major threat to biodiversity as forests are home to two-thirds of terrestrial species. In addition, 9% of the world’s tree species are endangered, risking the loss of potential medicinal benefits from botanical sources.
- **Health** – A significant proportion of mortality in least developed countries is caused by environment-related disease. While some progress has been made in this area, contaminated water kills 2.2 million people per year. Malaria is increasing due mainly to the reduced effectiveness of available medications, but the spread of the disease has also been assisted by development factors that favour the breeding of mosquitoes – including irrigation systems and deforestation.

“We now have unequivocal evidence that the goals of human progress and environmental protection are co-dependent,” Mr. Desai noted. “Governments,

corporations and civil society must come to Johannesburg with a commitment to improve people's lives on a sustainable basis. At the Summit a number of major partnership initiatives will be launched – however, many more such programmes must be set up and implemented if we are to reverse the destructive patterns of development highlighted by this report.” Desai cited the innovative *WASH* (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All) Initiative as an excellent example of the new partnerships. *WASH* involves 28 Governments, development banks, UN agencies, NGOs and major businesses in a global effort to provide water and sanitation to over 1.1 billion people by 2015.

Food Production Drives Depletion of World's Natural Resources

Global Challenge, Global Opportunity illustrates the underlying impact that the human need for food is having on the world's natural resources. In recent years, demand for food has increased with the growth in the human population, but also because food consumption per person has increased: from 2100 to 2700 calories in developing countries, and from 3000 to 3400 calories in industrialized nations.

The report finds that global water use has increased six-fold over the last century, twice the rate of population growth, and that agriculture represents 70% of this consumption. The greatest drain on the world's freshwater supplies is inefficient agricultural irrigation systems, which lose about 60% of the water they transport. The expansion of agricultural lands is the cause of almost all global deforestation and the single greatest threat to biodiversity and ecosystems. While many of the world's ocean fisheries are fully utilized or over-exploited, aquaculture is increasing rapidly to meet growing demand for fish, according to the report, but further growth will have to address environmental impacts.

“A top priority at the Summit is the need to agree on policies and programmes that improve agricultural yields in order to meet our long-term food needs,” said Mr. Desai. “Equally pressing is the goal of expanding sustainable agricultural practices, including the introduction of efficient irrigation systems. At Johannesburg, a new initiative will be launched by the Food and Agriculture Organization involving various governments and NGOs, with the aim of stimulating these advances in the way we produce food.”

Parts of the World Being Left Behind in Global Development

In addition to improving access to and use of natural resources, the Summit aims to build on recent global efforts to meet the UN's Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people living in poverty by 2015. The Summit marks the culmination of a landmark 12-month period that has seen the agreement on the need for trade reforms at World Trade Organization talks in Doha in November, and the announcement of a major increase in US and European development aid at a UN financing conference in Monterrey in March.

Global Challenge, Global Opportunity finds that some progress was made in reducing poverty in the 1990s, with the number of people living on one dollar a day declining from 1.3 to 1.2 billion. This improvement was concentrated in East Asia and Latin America, regions which also registered a decline in the number of those suffering from chronic hunger. However, the report finds that certain regions are not yet seeing such positive

trends. Africa continues to experience the highest levels of mortality, poverty and hunger, and the widest gap in standards of living compared with industrialized countries. The problem extends beyond living standards to the condition of Africa's natural resources: the global deforestation rate is highest in Africa, where an alarming 7% of forests were destroyed in the 1990s.

“Johannesburg seeks to build on the advances at Doha and Monterrey by arriving at a consensus on how the international community's increased funding for development should actually be deployed,” said Mr. Desai. “Global living standards will only be improved now and in the long term if these resources are allocated on a genuinely sustainable basis.”

First Signs of a Sustainable Future

Amid the worrying trends, the report does find some evidence of sustainability emerging in strategically important areas around the world. Two per cent of forests worldwide have now been certified for sustainable logging practices. Nature reserves, parks and sanctuaries are expanding, and now amount to 5% of total land mass in Europe, and 11% in North America, providing a basis for the rapidly growing global eco-tourism industry.

On energy, the report finds that renewable energy sources have increased their share of the global energy supply from 3.2% in 1971 to 4.5% now, while urban air pollution is being brought under control in middle and high-income countries as living standards rise, with significant reductions recorded from the 1970s to 1990s in Tokyo, Mexico City, Singapore and Seoul. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation improved gradually in the 1990s, and the goal of a 50% reduction in child mortality due to diarrhoeal diseases, adopted at the World Summit for Children in 1990, has been achieved, with child deaths decreasing from 3.3 million in 1990 to 1.7 million in 1999.

“Success in achieving the target on child mortality linked to diarrhoeal diseases, and the unprecedented increase in development funding agreed in Monterrey earlier this year, show what UN Summits can achieve,” said Mr. Desai. “Sustainable development is starting to take root in some parts of the world, but it needs to be accelerated rapidly if we are to build a future free of the poverty and instability that will come if we continue our present management of natural resources. World leaders must come to Johannesburg ready to embrace a new approach to global development, and – most importantly – to support this goal with concrete commitments.”

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