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UN Secretary-General Names Five Key Areas Where Johannesburg Summit Can Make a Real Difference

14 May, New York — Water and sanitation, Energy, Health, Agriculture, Biodiversity: these are the five key areas where concrete results can and must be obtained at this August's World Summit on Sustainable Development, according to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

These five areas could be remembered by a simple acronym – WEHAB – Mr. Annan said today as he launched a new campaign to raise awareness for the Summit. "You might think of it like this: we inhabit the earth. And we must rehabilitate our one and only planet." The Secretary-General added that he hoped this acronym would become "something of a mantra" between now and the opening of the Summit in Johannesburg on 26 August.

By concentrating on these five areas, Mr. Annan said, in a speech at the American Museum of Natural History, the Summit could produce an ambitious but achievable programme of practical steps to improve the lives of all human beings while protecting the global environment.

(Because of the Secretary-General's urgent mission to Cyprus, where he is trying to give new momentum to the peace talks, his address at the Museum was delivered by his wife Nane Annan.)

"These are five areas," he said, "in which progress would offer all human beings a chance of achieving prosperity that will not only last their own lifetime, but can be enjoyed by their children and grandchildren too."

The World Summit on Sustainable Development, which will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September, will bring world leaders, citizen activists and business representatives together to work on an agenda for ensuring that planet Earth can sustain a decent life for all its inhabitants, present and future.

All too often that issue is overshadowed in the policy-making process by more immediate problems, such as conflicts, globalization, and most recently, terrorism, the Secretary-General said. But the Johannesburg Summit offers humanity "a chance to restore the momentum that had been felt so palpably after the Earth Summit"[held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992].

New efforts are needed, he added, because the present model of development, which has brought privilege and prosperity to about 20 per cent of humanity, has also exacted a heavy price by degrading the planet and depleting its resources. Yet, according to the Secretary-General, "at discussions on global finance and the economy, the environment is still treated as an unwelcome guest."

High-consumption lifestyles continue to tax the earth's natural life support systems, research and development are under-funded and neglectful of the problems of the poor, and developed countries "have not gone far enough," he said, to fulfil either of the promises they made in Rio – to protect their own environments and to help the developing world defeat poverty.

The issue, the Secretary-General said, is not environment versus development, or ecology versus economy. "Contrary to popular belief," he said, "we can integrate the two."

Mr. Annan summarized the progress he hoped to see in the five areas—"areas in which progress is possible with the resources and technologies at our disposal today," – as follows:

- ◆ **Water**— Provide access to at least one billion people who lack clean drinking water and two billion people who lack proper sanitation.
- ◆ **Energy**—Provide access to more than two billion people who lack modern energy services; promote renewable energy; reduce over-consumption; and ratify the Kyoto Protocol to address climate change.
- ◆ **Health**—Address the effects of toxic and hazardous materials; reduce air pollution, which kills three million people each year, and lower the incidence of malaria and African guinea worm, which are linked with polluted water and poor sanitation.
- ◆ **Agricultural productivity**—Work to reverse land degradation, which affects about two-thirds of the world's agricultural lands.
- ◆ **Biodiversity and ecosystem management**—Reverse the processes that have destroyed about half of the world's tropical rainforest and mangroves, and are threatening 70 per cent of the world's coral reefs and decimating the world's fisheries.

"In Johannesburg, we have a chance to catch up," he said. "Together, we will need to find our way towards a greater sense of mutual responsibility. Together, we will need to build a new ethic of global stewardship. Together, we can and must write a new and hopeful chapter in natural—and human—history."

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