

22 March 2002

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
on the World Day for Water**

The theme of this year's World Day for Water is Water for Development. Water is needed in all aspects of life. Currently an estimated 1.1 billion people lack access to safe drinking water, 2.5 billion people have no access to proper sanitation, and more than 5 million people die each year from water-related diseases-10 times the number killed in wars, on average, each year. All too often, water is treated as an infinite free good, rather than as the precious resource that it is. Yet even where supplies are sufficient or plentiful, they are increasingly at risk from pollution and rising demand. By 2025, it is estimated that two-thirds of the world's population will live in countries with severe or moderate water shortages.

At the Millennium Summit, world leaders committed themselves to an ambitious course of halving absolute poverty by 2015 and a string of related goals, including halving the number of people unable to reach or afford safe drinking water supply 2015. These commitments must certainly be reinforced at the World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September this year. We must also take heed of the statement in the Millennium Declaration 'to stop unsustainable exploitation of water resources by developing appropriate water management strategies at all levels.'

Water is in fact a key to sustainable development, and integrated water resources management is a means to put sustainable development into operational practice. Sustainable water resource use requires a balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental.

Water and development are intrinsically linked. Water today defines and confines development aspirations-human, social, and economic-in many parts of the world. In developing countries, demand for freshwater is increasing steadily due to rapid growth in agriculture, industry, and urban development. It is vitally important that the issue of world's water management and sanitation be given priority at the World Summit.

Water should be regarded as a finite resource having an economic value with significant social and economic implications reflecting the importance of meeting basic needs. I believe that the international community should continue its efforts to develop a global framework for integrated water resource management within a comprehensive set of policies for human health, food production, preservation and distribution, disaster mitigation plans, environmental protection and conservation of the natural resource base.

It is also necessary to recognize and actively support the role of the community in water management at the local level, with particular emphasis on women.

In the long process of bringing water issues to the top of the global agenda, the year 2003 has been proclaimed as the International Year of Freshwater by the General Assembly resolution 55/196 of December 2000, which will be of major interest and importance in the context of follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. We must all work together, through partnerships among the UN system and its agencies, Governments, the private sector, civil society and NGOs to secure the basis for sustainable development through sound water resources management. Development will only be possible with reliable, accessible and clean water resources for all people.