



Press Release

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World Water Day 2013 – Cooperation for peace, prosperity and sustainable development

The fulfillment of basic human needs, the environment, socio-economic development and poverty reduction are all dependent on water. Cooperating around this precious resource is key for security, poverty eradication, social equity and gender equality.

“Water is central to the well-being of people and the planet,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his video message for the International Year of Water Cooperation 2013. “We must work together to protect and carefully manage this fragile, finite resource.”

Every action involving water management and use requires effective cooperation between multiple actors, whether at the local or the international scale. In recognition of this reality, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2013 to be the International Year of Water Cooperation, following a proposal from a group of Member States led by Tajikistan. World Water Day, celebrated on 22 March, is dedicated to the same theme this year. UNESCO, in collaboration with UNECE and UN DESA, is leading activities for both the Year and the Day on behalf of UN-Water.

Today, over 780 million people do not have access to improved sources of drinking water and 2.5 billion people are without improved sanitation. Population growth associated with changing consumption patterns, especially in cities, is driving an increase in water demand. Our lifestyles are more water-hungry. With the world population expected to grow from a little over 7 billion today to 8 billion by 2025, water withdrawals should increase by 50 percent in developing countries and by 18 percent in developed countries. Water for irrigation and food production constitutes one of the greatest pressures on freshwater resources.

An estimated 148 states share a basin with one or several countries, which is a potential source of conflict, as actions upstream have impacts on downstream countries. The Danube, for example, is shared by 19 countries, and the Nile River by 11. Water over-extraction, diversion, pollution, scarcity and the neglect of existing agreements are often at the roots of water tensions.

“Governments must commit to finding inclusive and cooperative solutions to water challenges,” said Ms Irina Bokova in her messages on the occasion of World Water Day. “For this, we must take decisions that involve all relevant actors, from investors to users,” she continued.

A new UN-Water analytical brief on water security released today on the occasion of World Water Day underlines that numerous examples from across the globe demonstrate that shared waters provide opportunities for cooperation across nations and support political dialogue on broader issues such as regional economic integration, environmental conservation, and sustainable development.

Cooperation mechanisms can vary in terms of decision-making structures, levels of participation, and rules and regulations, but the principle remains the same: when water resources are cooperatively shared and managed, peace, prosperity and sustainable development are more likely to be achieved. Cooperation can help overcome inequity and prevent conflicts, and thus contribute to poverty eradication, socio-economic development and improve living conditions and educational chances, especially of women and children.

Once again, UN-Water has awarded two projects that contribute to the fulfilment of international commitments made on water and water-related issues this year. The UN-Water "Water for Life" Best Practices Award was given to a project implemented in the city of Kumamoto in Japan for the conservation of groundwater resources and to the "Safe Water and Sanitation for All" initiative in the Republic of Moldova, aimed at improving coverage in rural areas of the country.

The Rio+20 outcome document identifies water as a key area for achieving sustainable development. "The International Year of Water Cooperation is in fact providing excellent opportunities for engagement and dialogue in the UN System and among Member States on all water-related issues in the context of the Rio+20 outcomes and moving towards 2015," said Mr Michel Jarraud in his keynote at the World Water Day celebrations in The Hague, The Netherlands.

World Water Day and the International Year of Water Cooperation certainly give us the opportunity to reflect on the benefits of cooperation and promote increased cooperation at all levels for the management and use of water resources as a way to achieve sustainable development.

Notes to Editors

- World Water Day

World Water Day is held annually on 22 March as a means of focusing attention on the importance of freshwater and advocating for the sustainable management of freshwater resources. An international day to celebrate freshwater was recommended at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The UNGA responded by designating 22 March 1993 as the first World Water Day. Each year, UN-Water selects a theme to highlight a specific aspect of freshwater and one or several members of UN-Water are then responsible to coordinate related activities.

- World Water Day celebrations in The Hague and New York, 22 March 2013

Official celebrations of World Water Day will be hosted by the Government of The Netherlands in The Hague on 22 March. The programme of the day includes inspirational speeches, presentations, panel and thematic discussions as well as a series of public events. It will be preceded on 21 March by a Multi-stakeholder Dialogue on Water organized by the Dutch Government to address water in the future development framework. A High-Level Interactive Dialogue will also take place on the occasion of the 67th session of the UNGA at the UN Headquarters in New York on 22 March. Happening in the context of current discussions on the post-2015 development framework and the process of developing a set of SDGs, the main objective of the event is to identify and discuss water-related challenges and key areas which in the future will require stronger political support and international cooperation.

- UN-Water

UN-Water is the UN inter-agency mechanism for all issues related to water and sanitation. It was formally established in 2003 by the United Nations High Level Committee on Programmes and is the result of a long history of close collaboration among UN agencies. It was created to add value to UN initiatives by fostering greater cooperation and information sharing among existing UN agencies and outside partners. Today, UN-Water comprises 31 members of the UN system and 27 international partners.

- UN-Water “Water for Life” Best Practices Award

The Award is given annually in two categories, “best water management practices” and “best participatory, communication, awareness-raising and education practices” to projects or programmes achieving particularly effective results in the field of water management or in raising awareness of water issues. This year’s edition focuses on water cooperation.

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