World Water Council
3rd World Water Forum

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## The 3rd World Water Forum Opens March 16th
### Crucial Water Issues to be addressed

The most important international water meeting ever opens in Kyoto, Japan on March 16th to address life and death issues. These range from helping the 2.7 billion people who will face water scarcity by 2025 and preventing the 5 million annual deaths from water-related diseases, to growing dangers of accelerating conflicts over water and saving the world's lakes, rivers and wetlands.

"The world is in a water crisis that will only grow more acute and devastating in coming years unless governments start giving higher priority to water in their development and investment plans" " says William Cosgrove, Vice-President of the World Water Council. "Our discussions will have far more effect on humankind for the 21st century than the current crisis in the Middle East, or any other political problem of the day."

Over the next 20 years, the average supply of water per person is expected to drop by one-third, according to the World Water Assessment Programme, issued by the UN earlier this month.

"The dream of pure water for all is within the reach of humanity," says Michel Camdessus, Chairman of the World Panel on Financing Global Water Infrastructure and former Managing

Director of the International Monetary Fund. “Financial flows will need to at least double for us to reach this goal by 2025. They will have to come from financial markets, from water authorities themselves through tariffs, from multilateral financial institutions, from governments, and from public development aid, preferably in the form of grants.”

Dr. Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, Egyptian Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation and President of the World Water Council, explains: “Increasing scarcity, competition and arguments over water in the first quarter of the 21st century will dramatically change the way we value and use water and the way we mobilise and manage water resources. Innovative ways of using this precious commodity have to be found to protect ecosystems and ensure food for the billions on this planet.”

The **3rd World Water Forum**, to be held in Kyoto, Shiga and Osaka from March 16-23, will highlight actions being taken to implement solutions to key global water problems. The Forum’s secretariat has initiated the “Water Voice” project aimed to solicit grass-roots views on water problems and solutions, which has so far drawn an estimated 30,000 messages from both individuals all over the globe who suffer from water problems as well as those who value water resources. The innovative web-based program “Virtual Water Forum” collected more than 160 topics and has seen 5,400 participants. Another initiative. The Forum will also consider some of the outstanding success stories among the 3,000 water actions of communities and other stakeholders to address the global water crisis that were collected for more than two years by the World Water Council for its new “**World Water Actions**” report. Many of these demonstrate that local communities implement their own solutions when governments fail to act,. This supports the argument that governments should encourage bottom-up solutions.

Some 10,000 government officials, representatives of international organizations such as the World Bank, and UN organizations such as UNESCO and UNEP, along with water experts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media are slated to attend the meeting, many more than the number of participants at the 2nd World Water Forum (The Hague, 2000). More than 1,300 journalists have already registered to cover the Forum. In a break with the traditional approaches to such meetings, the organizers are asking participants to come not to debate issues, but to describe actions they have taken and make concrete commitments to future actions.

Hideaki Oda, Secretary General of the secretariat of the **3rd World Water Forum**, adds "I am very proud of the fact that the Forum's program was shaped by many around the world through the Water Voice Project, the Virtual Water Forum, regional and international meetings - this has been a true "ground-up approach" in organizing this event.

Nowadays, 800 million people are going hungry because they cannot afford to buy food. More than 1.2 billion people currently lack access to safe water and 3 billion have inadequate sanitation. This leads to diseases that kill more than 5 million people each year, more than 2 million of them children under the age of five who succumb to diarrhea-related illnesses.

Poor residents have few options but to live in squalid, unsafe environments. In addition, the circumstances of these poor communities contribute to environmental deterioration, through water pollution and floods in neighboring areas caused by blocked drainage systems.

The 40 worst water-famished countries in the world, in many of which people live on just two gallons a day for all uses, can never escape poverty and achieve sustainable development without first addressing their water scarcity, global water experts say.

This amount is far less than the 50-liter (13.2 gallons) per day level that the United Nations says constitutes the absolute minimum for water needs. The daily per capita water requirements include 5 liters for drinking, 20 for sanitation and hygiene, 15 for bathing and 10 for food preparation, per person.

"Only about 60 percent of the 680 million people in Sub-Sahara Africa have access to safe water supplies," says Professor Albert Wright, Chairman of the African Water Task Force and Co-chairman of the UN's Task Force on the Millennium Goals for Water. "Incredibly, people in 13 countries, nine of them in Africa, must try and live on an average of less than 10 liters (2.6 gallons) per day, a truly desperate situation. Poverty and lack of water is inextricably linked for these people (in countries such as The Gambia, Haiti, Djibouti, Somalia, Mali, Cambodia, Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Albania and Bhutan)." In this context, one of the eight United Nations Millennium Goals (MDGs) from September 2000 to "Ensure environmental sustainability," mentions as one major objective "to reduce by half the proportion

of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water" by 2015. (on MDG see: www.un.org/millenniumgoals/index.html)

“If current trends continue, the shortage of water will extend well beyond the semiarid and arid regions,” says Professor Frank Rijsberman, Director-General of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI). “Expanding demand for water will drain some of the world’s major rivers, leaving them dry throughout most of the year. Urban centres will experience severe water shortages. But the rural poor will suffer the most serious consequences. Many already lack access to potable water and to the quantity and quality of water needed to grow food and generate income.” IWMI has conducted the global study that predicted that one-third of all people by 2025, or 2.7 billion, will face water scarcity.

The debate on the use of water is sharply divided. Agricultural scientists say that farm water use, especially irrigation, must be increased 15-20 percent in the coming 25 years to maintain food security and reduce hunger and rural poverty for a growing world population.

Environmental scientists, on the other hand, say that water use will need to be reduced by at least 10 percent to protect the rivers, lakes and wetlands on which millions of people depend for their livelihoods and to satisfy the growing demands of cities and industry. Many of these ecosystems have already been eliminated or severely damaged over the last decades.

**Floods and Droughts**

From 1971 to 1995, floods affected more than 1.5 billion people worldwide, or 100 million people per year, according to experts. This total includes 318,000 killed and more than 81 million left homeless. Major floods that left at least 1,000 people dead and caused $1 billion in damages per episode have been the most destructive.

The number of people affected by floods came to 31 million during the 5-year period from 1983 to 1987. For the 5-year period from 1993 to 1997, it increased to more than 130 million, that is, four times more than during the period from 1983 to 1987.

Economic losses from weather and flood catastrophes have increased ten-fold over the past 50 years, says the World Water Council.

Many parts of the world are seeing more intense rainy seasons, longer dry seasons, stronger storms, shifts in rainfall and rising sea levels. More disastrous floods and droughts have been the most visible manifestation of these changes.

“Extreme weather records are being broken every year and the resulting hydro-meteorological disasters claim thousands of lives and disrupt national economies,” says Bill Cosgrove from the WWC, “The big problem is that most countries aren't ready to cope adequately with the severe natural disasters that we get now, a situation that will become much worse as storms and droughts become more pervasive. Ignoring the problem is no longer an option.”

“The minimum consequences will be higher food prices and expensive food imports for water scarce countries that are predominantly poor,” says Mr. Cosgrove, referring to the consequences of droughts. “The populations of the poorest countries will face hunger if they cannot get the resources to import food they cannot grow. It’s intolerable to think that billions of our children and grandchildren will face these deprivations because we fail to act today.”

According to climate experts, the expected climatic change during the 21st century will further intensify the hydrological cycle – with rainy seasons becoming shorter and more intense in some regions, while droughts in other areas will grow longer in duration, which could endanger species and crops and lead to drops in food production globally. Evidence of the link between climate change and increasing climate variability is mounting rapidly. For example, scientific research has linked the recent droughts in the USA and Afghanistan to the effects of global warming.

In addressing the challenge how to balance increasing human requirements for adequate water supplies and improved sanitation with food production, energy and environmental needs, most countries will require more effective governance, improved capacity and adequate financing. Community level public participation is fundamental to achieving these goals. Examples of actions dealing with all of these problems will be presented during the Forum.

**Rich and poor nations both need better water management --** The newly developed international **Water Poverty Index** (WPI), by the UK's Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, finds that some of the world's richest nations such as the United States and Japan fare poorly in water ranking because they consume more than they need and still deal inadequately with pollution. At the same time, some developing countries score in the top ten, because they either have a great deal of water or have good plans in place in how to use it.

The **Water Poverty Index,** developed by a team of 31 researchers in consultation with more than 100 water professionals from around the world, grades 147 countries according to five different measures – **resources**, **access**, **capacity**, **use** and **environmental impact --** to show where the best and worst water situations exist.

According to the WPI, the top 10 water-richest nations in the world are, in descending order: Finland, Canada, Iceland, Norway, Guyana, Suriname, Austria, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland. The 10 countries lowest on the **Water Poverty Index** are all in the developing world -- Haiti, Niger, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Malawi, Djibouti, Chad, Benin, Rwanda, and Burundi.

The new index demonstrates the strong connection between 'water poverty' and 'income poverty', a link that will be a prime subject of the **3rd World Water Forum**.

Forum meetings will demonstrate how improved water management can make the livelihoods of poor people more productive and sustainable. The reason is that water is a key input into many livelihood activities, such as agriculture and home-based enterprises, and is critical to large-scale economic development. Water management plays a critical role in conserving and sustaining the natural resource base and is pivotal in reducing the vulnerability to hazards such as floods and droughts that impoverish so many.

**Water Success Stories** -- The Forum will also consider some of the outstanding success stories among the 3,000 water programs put into action in recent years to address the global water crisis.

Some of these programs include:

**Case study #1:** Central Asia -- International Water Management Institute – Central Asia and Caucasus Sub Office (IWMI-CAC).

The "Best Practices" project of IWMI-CAC was designed to promote programs that both save water and bring water to wider circles of users. These principles were applied in Central Asia, where economic development has not been strong enough to implement programs of improvements to irrigation -- drainage infrastructure in the context of counteracting the Aral Sea Crisis. The primary strategy was to encourage water users themselves to apply inexpensive technology and measures to save water. During the first stage of the project, 11 district water management organizations, eight water users' associations, and 42 collective farms, joint-stock companies, private farms located in the upper, middle, and low reaches of the Syr-Darya River basin were participating in the project.

**Case study #2**: Honduras -- Water supply in provinces of Cololaca, Gualcea, La Quesera, San Isidro, San Marcos and Santa Rita.

The objective of this project is to improve the health and lives of the communities through the construction of a sustainable, potable water system, with user participation, training in community-level participation and organization. The project included the installation of a complete and functioning water system, latrines, health and hygiene education, and protection of the watershed supplying the new water system. Proper use of chlorine in the system was instituted. All beneficiary families in the construction of the system participated in the installations. The organization and training of the entire community in administration and maintenance of the community's potable water system was also undertaken

One requirement was that women would form part of the project's water and sanitation committee. The community was also required to maintain a daily project diary, as well as books of income, expenses, and balances, along with monthly financial reports.

The project, at a minimum, will assure the protection of the existing forest in the recharge area of the spring in the region, while the people will receive sufficient water in the dry season from the supply.

**Case study #3**: Senegal -- Sustainable management of wetlands in the Saloum delta.

The project was undertaken because of the persistence of drought, development of tourism, extension of urban areas and high demography, which threaten this region.

Specific objectives of the project are:

- raise awareness of local people using traditional beliefs and current knowledge
- develop and implement local management plans for community wetlands in three pilot villages;
- establish a training center.

Other water innovations include new crops, including:

**Hardy Corn:** Researchers at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, known as CIMMYT, one of 16 CGIAR centers, have created hardy new breeds of tropical corn that can increase harvests by 40 percent in the tough environments of the developing world.

**New Rice:** New, water-saving techniques are being developed that could save up to 25 percent of the water now used to grow rice, according to scientists at two CGIAR centers -- the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), based in Manila, the Philippines, and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), based in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

**Durable Wheat --** Researchers have been able to modify wheat, once mostly restricted to temperate and subtropical zones, to make it productive even in hot climates. One main reason for growing wheat is it requires less water than rice.

## Key Topics and Expected Actions at the 3rd World Water Forum

**Governance** – who decides how water is utilized – may be the most important topic for the Forum. Many water experts say that the world faces a governance crisis rather than a water crisis.

"Good water governance" requires effective socio-political and administrative systems that use an integrated water management approach with an open process in which all can participate.

Forum participants are expected to conclude that primary responsibility rests with governments to make water a priority.

**Supply and Quality** will be one of the major topics at the Forum.

Water experts say that increasing water use efficiency and improved demand management are essential, but environmental and social costs must also be addressed in order to make water advances "sustainable."

"Accelerated groundwater development over the past few decades has resulted in great social and economic benefits for many people," says Dr. Abu Zeid. "But excessive depletion, combined with uncontrolled urban and industrial waste, have caused widespread degradation of surface waters and aquifers, which has hurt economic and social development, poverty alleviation and sustenance of ecosystems."

**Capacity Building** means not only to increase a country's ability to tap more water, but to manage it effectively. **The Forum will address how t**his critical element of the water development process is often treated as an add-on to programs, with scant regard to local capacity-building institutions, or to long-term commitment. Such efforts would be much more efficient if they are an integral part of community-driven investment programs.

**Financing** is crucial. Water experts say that developing and transitional countries will require $180 billion annually in order to produce global water security over the next 25 years. Current levels of investment are estimated at only $80 billion. The Forum will debate how greater efficiency, better financial management, risk reduction and the creation of new models for combining public, donor, NGO and private funding can help meet this goal.

**Participation** – The Forum will debate how to give large segments of society, especially women and the poor, a voice in water issues. Many regions, countries and local communities have come to realize that water issues should allow partnerships of all interested and affected parties in order to make water management viable.

**Monitoring**

Objectives to improve access to water and water management will not be met unless a system is put in place that assesses the current situation and what progress is being made. While a global "watchdog" may be required to highlight findings, such systems must be built from the bottom up and involve parties independent of governments and implementing agencies.

The Forum organizers will ask all participants to return home and work on a wide variety of programs to bring water security to all, in the fields of *alliances, partnerships, networking, participation and dialogue; financing and investment; policy and strategic planning; institutions and legislation; data gathering and sharing; public private partnerships; and international trade.*

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**History of the World Water Forums**

*The World Water Forum is a global meeting every three years of governments, international organizations such as UN agencies and donor organizations, scientists, water experts and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to deal with growing worldwide water issues.*

*To deal with the world water crisis, governments, international organizations, scientists and non-governmental organizations formed an international think tank on water in 1996, the World Water Council (WWC). The Council proposed that a World Water Forum should be held every three years to discuss the world's important water-related issues.*

*At the 1st World Water Forum held in Marrakech, Morocco in 1997, the Marrakech Declaration was adopted and it was decided to draw up a 'Vision for Water, Life and the Environment' in the 21st Century. The World Water Vision was presented at the 2nd World Water Forum held in The Hague, The Netherlands in March 2000, and the concurrent Ministerial Meeting adopted the Declaration of The Hague.*