

World Water Council

PRESS RELEASE

Local Actions for a Global Challenge

Speech by William J. Cosgrove, WWC President, on World Water Day

Mexico, March 22, 2004 - On World Water Day this year, the World Water Council, together with the Mexican National Water Commission, co-organizer of the 4th World Water Forum, has assembled in Mexico to celebrate the kick-off of the next Forum, to be held in March 2006. This also marks the formal handing over of the Forum from Japan, which hosted the 3rd World Water Forum in 2003, to Mexico, in the person of President Fox as host of this Mexican Water Week.

In his speech at the presidential residence, Los Pinos, William Cosgrove acknowledged the growing success encountered by the World Water Forum since its inception in 1997. With 24,000 people participating in Japan, thousands of articles written about it, hundreds of hours of international media coverage and the leaders of the G-8 dedicating a large part of their time to water issues at their meeting in Evian, France in May, referring specifically to the following up on the Forum, "those who challenge the need for another Forum and argue that the objective of awareness raising has been reached, do have a point", as Cosgrove admitted.

"Unfortunately, in the countries of the South there is little evidence that our efforts have had any significant impact," William Cosgrove continued. "In many countries there is less investment in water than in previous decades. All countries committed at the UN Millennium Assembly in 2000 to meeting a set of goals designed to reduce poverty. Yet there is little recognition at the country level that hardly any of these goals can be met without water infrastructure and services."

Building on the experience of previous Forums, the World Water Council wants to send a strong message to the international community. This includes the need to tackle water problems at the local level.

"We tend to talk about the investments required for water and sanitation infrastructure as if the only way the needs of these people will be met is by external intervention and financing. Experience in both the developing and developed worlds shows that this is not the case.

Progress is made only when there is solidarity within the local community and the support of national authorities to address the problems.”

As a clear demonstration of the importance of local action, the co-organisers of the Forum have based part of the guiding principles of the Forum on the “valuing of local experience and enabling of local action and capacity-building as paramount for pursuing effective and democratic solutions to water problems” . The series of regional meetings that will be organized as part of the Forum’s preparatory process during the upcoming two years should also contribute to draw the attention to the most successful efforts made to bring solutions to the water problems that have emerged locally.

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