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Press Release

JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS FOR GLOBAL ACTION ON WATER ISSUES

World Water Day 2002 highlights urgent need for initiatives on water supply

22 March, 2002 – To mark World Water Day 2002 (Friday, 22 March), the leader of this year's World Summit on Sustainable Development called on governments, community organizations and businesses to develop initiatives that will bring clean water to the more than one billion people who currently lack it.

"Poor management of water resources is one of the primary causes of disease and environmental degradation in both developing and developed countries," said Nitin Desai, Secretary-General of the Summit, which will take place in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September.

"Moving forward with decisive action to preserve water supplies, reduce water pollution and increase global access to safe water supplies will be a central focus of the Johannesburg Summit. Ensuring adequate supplies of safe drinking water and sanitation for individuals, as well as efficient use of water in agriculture and industry, will lead to historic improvements in health and economic well-being for millions, or even billions, of people worldwide."

World Water Day 2002 will highlight the critical importance of advancing worldwide access to clean water and sanitation at commemorations supported by several UN organizations and coordinated by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Promoting the clean water agenda is an important objective for the Johannesburg Summit, which will focus on accelerating global implementation of Agenda 21, the blueprint for action on sustainable development. Sustainable development is an approach to managing the world's resources that integrates economic, social and environmental decision-making to improve the quality of life of people today while preserving natural resources for future generations.

Key Facts on Global Water Issues

Several facts underscore the urgent need for global commitments to action on water:

- About 1.1 billion people, or 18 percent of the world's population, lack access to safe drinking water, and 2.5 billion are without proper sanitation. While overall freshwater

supplies are sufficient for the world's population, poor management and distribution of water resources restricts access to these resources.

- More than 5 million people die each year from diseases caused by unsafe drinking water, lack of sanitation, and insufficient water for hygiene. In fact, over 2 million deaths occur each year from water-related diarrhea alone. At any given time, almost half of the people in developing countries suffer from water-related diseases.
- Insufficient supplies of water and sanitation disproportionately affect women, children, and the poor. The majority of deaths from water-related diarrhea are among children under 15, and women in many developing countries spend significant proportions of their waking hours obtaining water from distant sources.
- Agriculture accounts for more than 90 percent of global water consumption. The inefficient use of water for irrigation has led to depletion of groundwater resources in many of the world's most important agricultural regions, and is the primary source of groundwater pollution in parts of Europe, the United States, and Asia.
- During the 1990s, about 438 million people in developing countries gained access to improved drinking water, demonstrating the possibility for major improvements in safe water access worldwide.

At the Millennium Summit in September 2000, world leaders agreed to the goal of halving, by 2015, the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation. To meet this goal, an additional 1.6 billion people will need access to adequate water, and 2 billion will need improved sanitation. The annual investment required to meet the goal is estimated to be \$20 billion, nearly twice the current level of investment.

For More Information on the Johannesburg Summit

Press releases, logistical information, and other background materials are available on the Summit website, www.johannesburgsummit.org, under *Media Info*.

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