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Leading Water Experts of 26 UN Agencies to Meet in Hamilton, Canada Feb. 2-4, Plan Strategy for Coordinated Response to Looming World Crisis

*UNU-INWEH Director assumes Chair of UN-Water:
“The greatest impacts of climate change are all about water”*

More than two dozen leading United Nations water experts will convene in Hamilton, Canada Feb. 2-4 to plan fresh strategy for a coordinated approach to the global water crisis that increasingly threatens both human health and international security.

At its first-ever meeting in Canada, the group known as UN-Water will also formalize international ceremonies to mark the World Water Day 2010 (March 22) and help set both direction and UN agency contributions for the next triennial World Water Development Report in 2012.

The meeting is being convened by UN-Water’s new Chair, Zafar Adeel, Director of the United Nations University’s Hamilton-based Institute for Water, Environment & Health.

Elected at a UN-Water meeting last August in Stockholm, Dr. Adeel formally assumed the two-year post in 2010, taking over from Pasquale Steduto of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome.

UN-Water was created in 2003 to coordinate global water-related work of 26 relevant UN agencies, and to interact with 17 major partners such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The full list of UN-Water members and partners is appended below (and online at www.unwater.org).

“This meeting of UN agencies comes at a crucial time, just two months after the UN’s historic Copenhagen conference on climate change and four months before leaders of the G8 and G20 nations meet in Ontario,” says Dr. Adeel.

“The global importance of water issues cannot be overstated,” he adds. “Virtually all climate change impacts are expressed through water in one form or another, including more severe storms and extreme floods, and rapidly disappearing glaciers, often called ‘Earth’s water towers’.”

“Meanwhile, nearly 3.5 million people die each year due to water-related diseases like cholera and diarrhea. Likewise, water scarcity and drought in many parts of the world is directly linked to poverty and high public health costs. And the UN’s Intergovernmental

Panel on Climate Change predicts worsening impacts in immediate decades to come.”

“My goal as the UN-Water Chair is to demonstrate the significance of water issues in global policy debates, including the ongoing financial crisis as well as food security, climate change, international peace and stability. Water is central to each of those debates but typically isn’t seen as such.”

“UN-Water members and partners help assure better, more cohesive delivery of water services in several countries. It does this through guidance to world policy makers and the collection of case studies of best practices for mitigating water problems that can be prevented and adaptation to those that can’t. UN-Water also helps establish strategic priorities and eliminate overlap and duplication in order to make fullest possible use of scarce international resources.”

Anticipating local impacts of a global problem

Dr. Adeel notes that, while science can predict the average impact of climate change with relative confidence, its implications are far less clear at the level of countries or even world regions, especially with respect to future precipitation patterns.

He predicts that helping policy makers navigate questions surrounding local and regional water-related impacts of climate change will assume growing importance for UN-Water members and partners in years to come.

Background

UN-Water (www.unwater.org/discover.html) is an inter-agency mechanism established by the United Nations High Level Committee on Programmes to foster synergies and information-sharing between UN agencies and outside partners.

UN-Water focuses on:

Providing policy briefs and other information or communication materials for the public, as well as policy and other decision-makers with an influence on how water is used;

Building the knowledge base on water issues through efficient monitoring and reporting systems and facilitating easy access to this knowledge through regular reports and the Internet.

Providing a platform for system-wide discussions to identify challenges in global water management, analyze options for meeting these challenges and ensuring that reliable information and sound analysis informs the global policy debate on water.

Flagship Reports

* Global Annual Assessment on Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS), led by the World Health Organization.

* WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP), the official UN monitor of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals for drinking-water and sanitation.

* The World Water Development Report, a triennial joint effort of 26 UN agencies, coordinated by the UNESCO-based World Water Assessment Programme.

UN-Water Members:

United Nations University (UNU)
UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)
UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)
UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
UN Development Programme (UNDP)
UN Environment Programme (UNEP)
UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)
UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)
UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC)
UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA)
UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)
Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO)
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
The World Bank Group (WB)
World Health Organization (WHO)
World Meteorological Organization (WMO)
UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD)
Secretariat of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)
Secretariat of UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

UN-Water Partners:

AquaFed
The Global Compact
Global Water Partnership (GWP)
International Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH)
International Association of Hydrological Sciences (IAHS)
International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID)
International Water Association (IWA)
International Water Management Institute (IWMI)
Public Services International (PSI)

Ramsar – Convention on Wetlands

Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)

UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB)

Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC)

World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

World Conservation Union (IUCN)

World Water Council (WWC)

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)