



Ministerial Declaration
adopted by ministers meeting in the
Ministerial Session of the International Conference on Freshwater
Bonn, 4 December 2001

We, ministers with responsibilities for water affairs, environment and development from 46 countries throughout the world, have assembled in Bonn to assess progress in implementing Agenda 21 and to discuss actions required to increase water security and to achieve sustainable management of water resources.

We consider that the World Summit for Sustainable Development, scheduled for August 2002 in Johannesburg, needs to demonstrate renewed commitment to sustainable development and political will to action.

We consider the equitable and sustainable use and the protection of the world's freshwater resources a key challenge facing governments on the road to a safer, more peaceful, equitable and prosperous world. Combating poverty is the main challenge for achieving equitable and sustainable development, and water plays a vital role in relation to human health, livelihood, economic growth as well as sustaining ecosystems. The outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development must include decisive action on water issues.

We express our deep concern that at the beginning of the 21st century 1.2 billion people live a life in poverty without access to safe drinking water, and that almost 2.5 billion have no access to proper sanitation. Safe and sufficient water and sanitation are basic human needs. The world-wide struggle to alleviate poverty must bring safe and decent living conditions to those who are deprived of these basic requirements.

We confirm our resolve to reach the International Development Targets agreed by the UN Millennium Summit, in particular the target to halve, until the year 2015, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water. We also confirm our resolve to stop the unsustainable exploitation of water resources by developing water management strategies at regional, national and local levels.

Water is needed in all aspects of life. For sustainable development, it is necessary to take into account water's social, environmental and economic dimensions and all of its varied uses. Water management therefore requires an integrated approach.

We emphasise that ten years after the UN Conference on Environment and Development and the Dublin Conference, and several years after the global water conferences in Paris and The Hague, there is still a need for greater commitment to implement commonly agreed principles on water resource management. Pressures on the world's scarce freshwater resources and aquatic systems have increased. Water pollution and unsustainable patterns of water consumption are among the causes. Water use efficiency needs to improve.

We agree that governments, the international community, the private sector, the nongovernmental organisations and all other stakeholders need to base their actions on the following:

(Governance)

The primary responsibility for ensuring the sustainable and equitable management of water resources rests with the governments.

Each country should have in place applicable arrangements for the governance of water affairs at all levels and, where appropriate, accelerate water sector reforms.

We urge the private sector to join with government and civil society to contribute to bringing water and sanitation services to the unserved and to strengthen investment and management capabilities. Privately managed service delivery should not imply private ownership of water resources. Service providers should be subject to effective regulation and monitoring.

We encourage riparian states to co-operate on matters related to international watercourses.

(Funding Gap)

There is an enormous gap in funding investments in water infrastructure, maintenance, training and capacity building, research, and data generation.

It is urgent to close this gap using existing resources more efficiently and with additional financial resources from all sources: public investment budgets, capital markets, and community based finance, user and polluter charges; as well as increased international development financing from public and private sources particularly for developing countries to reflect the acute needs in the water sector.

The lack of financial resources for water infrastructure investment, operations and maintenance is particularly hurting the poor in Least Developed Countries and in other countries with people living in extreme poverty.

Critical actions for closing the financial gap are poverty alleviation and the improvement of opportunities for trade and income generation for developing countries.

Resources also need to be made available to assist developing countries to mitigate the effects of natural disasters and to assist in adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Water development programmes, to be successful, should be based on a good understanding of the negative impact desertification causes to people living in affected areas.

(Role of the international community)

We call on the international community to strengthen its commitment and its efforts to enable developing countries to manage water sustainably and to ensure an equitable sharing of benefits from water resources.

We call upon the Secretary General of the United Nations to strengthen the co-ordination and coherence of activities within the UN system on water issues in an inclusive manner.

We recall the agreed UN target for official development assistance of 0.7% of GDP. Developed countries which have not yet reached the target should exert their best efforts to do so.

(Capacity Building and Technology transfer)

We recognise that capacity building and innovative technologies including the improvement of indigenous technologies are needed to efficiently utilise water, control pollution and develop new and alternative water sources in water stressed countries. We will support capacity building programmes and information exchange to ensure the effective use of human, financial, and technical resources for water management. We will facilitate technology transfer initiatives to

enable technologically less developed countries to acquire capacity to manage water with the best available knowledge and equipment.

We need improved and coherent assessments of state and trends in the world water situation.

(Gender)

Water resources management should be based on a participatory approach. Both men and women should be involved and have an equal voice in managing the sustainable use of water resources and sharing of benefits. The role of women in water related areas needs to be strengthened and their participation broadened.

(Next steps)

We urge the World Summit on Sustainable Development to take account of the outcome of this International Conference on Freshwater.

We expect that the International Year of Freshwater in 2003, and the 3rd World Water Forum in Japan will be a good opportunity to further discuss on the roles and actions for all players in international society on the issues of sustainable development of freshwater.

We thank the government of Germany for its hospitality and its determination to promote dynamic action on water issues.