

1998 Paris Ministerial Declaration of the Water and Sustainable Development International Conference

We, Ministers and Heads of Delegation meeting in Paris for the International Conference on Water and Sustainable Development, 19 – 21 March 1998,

Convinced that freshwater is as essential to sustainable development as it is to life and that water has social, economic and environmental values that are inter-linked and mutually supportive,

Guided by the conclusions of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio 1992), in particular the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 and its Chapter 18, and of the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in June 1997,

Recalling previous deliberations on water by the international community, in particular the conclusions of the meetings at Mar del Plata (1977), New Delhi (1990), Dublin (1992) and Noordwijk (1994),

Noting the ongoing preparatory process to the VIth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, including the contributions made by the expert group meetings recently held in Harare and Petersberg,

Seriously concerned by a situation in which a quarter of the world's population does not have access to safe drinking water; more than half of mankind lacks adequate sanitation; poor water quality and lack of hygiene are among the primary causes of death and disease; and scarcity of water, flood and drought, poverty, pollution, inadequate treatment of waste and lack of infrastructure pose serious threats to social and economic development, human health, global food security and the environment,

Also concerned that constraints on access to water, in terms of quantity and quality, could become a major limiting factor in sustainable development,

Determined to take advantage of the opportunities to tackle these problems by promoting local and national systems for managing the sustainable use of water resources, based on an integrated approach linking development with protection of the natural environment, participation of all actors and interested parties, the involvement of both men and women, and recognition of the social and economic value of water,

Underline that

- water resources are essential for satisfying basic human needs, health, energy and food production, and the preservation of ecosystems, as well as for social and economic development;
- the protection of ecosystems is essential for the maintenance and rehabilitation of the natural hydrologic cycle in order to manage freshwater resources in a sustainable manner;

- water is a key natural resource for future prosperity and stability, which should be recognised as a catalyst for regional co-operation;
- it is crucial to improve knowledge and understanding at all levels of water resources in order to develop, manage and protect them better and to use them in a more efficient, equitable and sustainable manner;
- a high priority should be given to strengthening institutions, in particular local institutions, and improving training and awareness of professionals and users alike;
- the development, management, use and protection of water should be :
 - promoted by a partnership between the public and private sectors, thus mobilising good practice and long term financing,
 - based upon a participatory decision-making process open to all users, in particular women, people living in poverty and disadvantaged groups.

The role of NGOs and other socio-economic partners remains essential.

- international co-operation should play a key role in achieving these objectives, at national, regional and global levels.

Call upon the international community, public authorities at every level and civil society to give priority to providing access for all to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Also call upon the international community, to develop an agreed statement of the principles to be applied in developing and implementing local and national water management systems and international co-operation to support them, taking into consideration the outcome of the Harare Expert Meeting.

Commit ourselves to support the implementation of the following guidelines, where appropriate and in the framework of national and local strategies, taking into account each country's specific situation :

- **Promote the integration of all aspects of the development, management and protection of water resources**, by developing plans which set out to satisfy basic needs and to promote efficient and equitable allocation of water resources, the protection of ecosystems and the maintenance of the hydrological cycle.

To this end, the creative development and evaluation of a wide range of options and their benefits and risks, together with the ongoing co-ordination of watershed development, management and protection, are essential. Public authorities at every level and civil society should play their part in this process and related decision making.

Governments have a crucial role to play in creating enabling frameworks for local and national water resource management through legislative, economic, social and environmental measures.

Shared vision between riparian countries is important for the effective development, management and protection of transboundary water resources.

International conventions such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification⁽¹⁾ and the Ramsar Convention⁽²⁾ can make a contribution on the integration of their special interests in the sustainable use of water.

Thinking on approaches to integrated water development, management and protection should be facilitated by all relevant institutions, including the World Water Council, and supported by exchanges of experience through informal networking between stakeholders within the framework of existing institutions.

- **Mobilise adequate financial resources from public and private sectors** and, as an important part of that task, enhance the effective use of available resources.

To this end provisions for progressive recovery of direct service costs and overheads, while safeguarding low income users, should be encouraged.

Both the polluter-pays principle should be promoted and user-pays systems should be encouraged, at national and local levels, and measures should be adopted to facilitate private funding in the financing of water and sanitation projects, taking into account the specific conditions in each country and region.

Official development assistance should complement and focus on programmes designed for creating enabling frameworks, meeting basic needs, sustainable development, management and protection of water, protection of ecosystems and capacity building. Co-operation and co-ordination between bilateral and multilateral donors and recipient States should be strengthened. In this context, a range of international organisations, including the Global Water Partnership, could have a notable role to play.

- **Improve knowledge, training and information exchange** by encouraging increased transfer of technology and expertise, the development of monitoring and information systems related to water resources and their different uses, and support programmes for vocational and continuous training. In parallel, people living in poverty and disadvantaged groups, indigenous communities, youth, local authorities, leaders of local communities and NGOs should be enabled to become more involved in the decision-making process. Women should be enabled to participate fully in project definition and implementation.

In this spirit, **emphasise** the importance of following up the guidance contained in the Programme of Priority Actions developed by the experts workshops during the Conference, as set up in the annex to this Declaration.

Submit this Programme of Priority Actions to the CSD for consideration at its VIth session during its deliberations on a strategic approach for the sustainable use of freshwater resources.

Suggest that relevant international organisations and institutions follow up the actions derived from the recommendations contained in this Declaration and its annexe.

Stress the need to ensure that the problems of achieving sustainable development, management and protection, and equitable use of freshwater resources are kept under review, to improve co-ordination between UN Agencies and Programmes and other international organisations, to ensure periodic consideration within the UN system, in particular the Commission on Sustainable Development, of the proposed priorities of governments for action and to emphasise the role of UNEP in the field of environment.

Emphasise the need for continuous political commitment and broad-based public support to ensure the achievement of sustainable development, management and protection, and equitable use of freshwater resources, and the importance of civil society to support this commitment.