



**HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON FRESHWATER
MONDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2001**

The International Conference on Freshwater opened on Monday, 3 December 2001, at the International Congress Centre Bundeshaus in Bonn, Germany. Delegates met in the morning to hear opening and welcome addresses and keynote speeches, which were interspersed with four modern dance pieces. In the afternoon, delegates met for the first multi-stakeholder dialogue on equitable access and sustainable supply of water for the poor.

OPENING SESSION

In his remarks, Jürgen Trittin, Opening Session Co-Chair and Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany, urged delegates to develop recommendations for sustainable use of water resources, sending a clear message to governments to take action. He voiced support for those fearing privatization of water services, but said industry partnership is needed. He noted that consumption patterns in the North affect water use in the South, and that inadequate water quality or quantity creates refugees. He urged, *inter alia*, implementing the Kyoto Protocol, establishing international liability mechanisms, and forging a global pact for sustainable development.

Uschi Eid, session Co-Chair and Parliamentary State Secretary, Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany, stated that although access to water is a fundamental human right, about 1.2 billion people lack access to safe water, while 2.5 billion lack decent sanitation, in particular women and children. She noted that recent terrorist attacks demonstrate that living conditions in other countries affect everyone's security and prosperity, and that peace and sustainability require cooperation and investment in development. She called for practical tools for implementing the principles developed in the 1990s through international consensus.

In her welcoming address, Pia Heckes, Deputy Mayor of the City of Bonn, highlighted the important role of the city as host to several convention secretariats. She also noted the city's yearlong water campaign and a recently released book on local water issues.

In a keynote address, Nitin Desai, UN Under-Secretary-General and Secretary-General of the Johannesburg Summit, underscored the importance of water for sustainable development, describing it as a strategic resource, and stressed the significance of the Freshwater Conference in the context of WSSD preparations. Desai urged the Johannesburg Summit to emulate several organizing elements of the Freshwater Conference, such as: presenting scientific and professional inputs; integrating social, economic and environmental dimensions; and focusing on concrete steps to achieve conference goals in an open and transparent process. Describing Johannesburg as part of a broader process to strengthen the international system, Desai noted the links being made between the meetings in Doha, Monterrey and Johannesburg, and said that these events are the test of multilater-

alism. In defining the Johannesburg agenda, Desai stressed the need to make connections between issues of resource management and poverty, and addressed institutional deficiencies at all levels. He emphasized the three "P's" necessary for achieving sustainable development, namely, political will, practical steps, and partnerships, and expressed hope that the spirit of the Johannesburg Summit would be that "humanity has taken decisive steps towards sustainable development, linking not just governments, but peoples from all countries."

In his keynote address, Klaus Töpfer, UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director, stated that water and energy issues are interrelated, citing the lack of electricity in Kenya during droughts. Töpfer highlighted the importance of water in all sectors of social and economic development, poverty eradication, and cultural diversity. He underscored the role of global cooperation, urged building upon the progress achieved at previous conferences, noted the Second World Water Forum's success, and called for Johannesburg to be a "summit of implementation not of declaration."

In her keynote speech, Maria Mutagamba, Minister of State for Water, Uganda, thanked the German Federal Government for making Uganda's participation possible, mentioning she was chosen to speak on behalf of her country, Africa, and the developing world. She highlighted the importance of water as a critical natural resource, particularly for rural communities. Acknowledging water as key to social development, she emphasized the role of women and described the ten-country Nile Basin Initiative, which forges regional cooperation toward water safety and sanitation, and safe water coverage. She called for a critical review of public funding and an assessment of market distortions, and said this Conference should chart the way forward.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

Co-Chair Trittin opened the first Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue (MSD) on equitable access to and sustainable supply of water for the poor, emphasizing the importance of interaction between governments and other stakeholders. Session Facilitator David Hales of Sustainability Science and Technology, followed by stating that the purpose of the MSD is to initiate and enrich the conference output, by raising issues and suggesting directions and actions.

On behalf of BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY, Alain Mathys elaborated five points on: solving the water problem, creating an enabling environment, removing water barriers, fostering partnerships, and valuing water. Sekou Oumar Tall, representing FARMERS, elaborated upon the water challenges and the potential global effects of climate change. Underscoring the state as guarantor of water access, he noted reluctance among farmers for water privatization. He suggested instead: development of local entrepreneur initiatives; empowerment of women; investment in infrastructural development and maintenance; appropriate technology; capacity building; involvement of user groups; and providing access to water to combat poverty.

Violeta Corral, for TRADE UNIONS, said public-private sector partnerships are fundamentally flawed and do not reflect the needs of communities. She suggested that financial resources be invested in public systems and cover the costs of social equity. She called for partnerships with public-owned companies, as public-private partnerships direct the flow of resources into private hands and do not address the needs of the poor.

DISCUSSION: Hales opened the session by focusing discussions on the role of states in water provision. IRAQ noted problems from projects developed without regional consultation and urged states to accede to the Convention on the Non-navigational Uses of International Water-courses. FARMERS said displacement of peasants and indigenous populations affects water access. SWEDEN proposed establishing a target percentage of official development assistance (ODA) for water projects and greater coordination between fragmented UN agencies. The NETHERLANDS said governments alone could not provide water. BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY underscored the need for transparent regulatory frameworks. BANGLADESH considered contamination and seasonal water availability as beyond government control. The US and LOCAL AUTHORITIES said ODA should focus on increasing capacity to understand regulatory frameworks and to allow communities to participate actively. EGYPT said privatization often fails to secure funds for infrastructure development and highlighted difficulty in attracting private investors to the agriculture and irrigation sectors. YEMEN noted pressure on developing countries from donors to adopt partnership projects.

In regard to partnerships, FARMERS said they were not involved in stakeholder consultations. FRANCE explained the need for private sector investment to enhance water access for the poorest and said business partnerships should include: the community, a mediator, and the private company. NGOs said that community is vital to public-private partnership and called for capacity building for communities and local governments. GLOBAL WATER PARTNERSHIP asked whether a regulatory framework could be adequately established where there is a very low resource base. GREECE called for more efficient investment in the water sector.

On the nature and substance of partnerships, some urged equality, which: LOCAL AUTHORITIES said demanded capacity building in efficiency and water harvesting of local authorities; SOUTH AFRICA said depend on strong and democratic local government institutions; and GLOBAL WATER PARTNERSHIP said necessitated social mobilization for community participation. Based on experience, WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS noted water improvements in the UK that resulted from moving water from private to public hands and expressed doubt in privatization addressing water concerns, in light of recent challenges from privatization. PARAGUAY supported privatization, noting a difference between ownership and service provision; and MOROCCO stressed the role of partners in transfer of knowledge and know-how and proper resource management. The GENDER AND WATER ALLIANCE called for gendered partnerships with government, women's training and the allocation of some ODA percentage to women's initiatives. The BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY said the question of partnerships should rather address the appropriate models, learning from those that work well.

On the issue of corruption, government representatives noted that the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention now ratified by 14 countries removes one incentive, by closing the loophole allowing companies to claim bribe payments as a tax deduction. SOUTH AFRICA stressed the need for cooperation from agencies and

governments, suggesting that putting on CEO in jail for one month would do more to end corruption than five years of conferences. WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS noted the high temptation for corruption in large projects. A representative of BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY noted that his company had developed a code of business principles to manage this issue. MAURITIUS underscored the need for a level playing field, noting that "big players" have greater experience in partnerships and capacity to corrupt than most developing states. NAMIBIA highlighted its anti-corruption policies, while GHANA noted that corruption at lower levels of government needed consideration. NGOs ended the discussion on corruption by suggesting public hearings to provide community pressure to combat corruption.

The WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION underscored the importance of collecting and sharing data. Regarding privatization, the ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK noted successful examples where regulatory systems took all players into account, while WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS cautioned against potential neo-colonialism.

In their concluding remarks, NGOs noted a lack of discussion on the role of women, stressed the need for more interaction and urged further attention in implementation and action. LOCAL AUTHORITIES thanked Yemen, South Africa and the US for their support and said local governments would never be free from water related problems. FARMERS expressed interest in security of land tenure and water rights, and in the discussion on the proposed WSSD multi-stakeholder forum. BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY said existing knowledge on partnering is vast and needs to be transferable, and called for its further discussion, along with water valuation and pricing. Summarizing the discussion, Co-Chair Eid noted public-private, public-public, and public-private-community partnerships, and commended the attempt by governments and private sector to develop codes of conduct to combat corruption.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Plenary convenes at 9:30 am to hear a statement by HRH Prince Willem-Alexander the Prince of Orange, the Netherlands, and for the second multi-stakeholder dialogue on developing strategies for sustainable and equitable management of water resources, with presentations by NGOs, Local Authorities, Workers and Trade Unions, and Business and Industry. In the afternoon, Plenary will convene from 2:30 – 4:00 pm to hear a report on the conclusions of the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues and a report of the conclusions of the Ministerial Session.

WORKING GROUPS: Three working groups will meet in parallel from 4:00 – 5:30 pm. Working Group A, chaired by Rougatién Biaou (Benin), will meet in the Plenary Hall to consider Governance, Integrated Management and New Partnerships; Working Group B, chaired by Jacobus Richelle (European Commission), will meet in the Wasserwerk Building to consider Mobilizing Financial Resources; and Working Group C, chaired by Lars Engfeldt (Sweden), will meet in the Bundesrat Building to consider Capacity Development and Technology Transfer.

MINISTERIAL SESSION: A closed-door ministerial session will take place from 9:30 am to 1:00 pm, in parallel with the morning Plenary, to consider the equitable and sustainable use of water resources and the mobilization of financial resources for infrastructure investment. Discussions will kick-off with presentations by Ministers from Lithuania, Egypt, China, Benin, UK and South Africa.