



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WATER AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 19-21 MARCH 1998

The International Conference on Water and Sustainable Development commences today, Thursday, 19 March 1998 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. The conference, sponsored by the Government of France, will gather approximately 600 participants, including Ministers and high-level officials from public bodies in charge of water management in 84 countries and representatives of civil society, UN agencies, international organizations and development banks involved in the water sector. The objective of the conference is to contribute to the elaboration of strategies necessary for improving freshwater resources conservation and management in rural and urban areas to ensure better-controlled drinking water supply, sanitation and irrigation, while integrating desertification control into these objectives.

Over the course of the three-day conference, participants will convene in three parallel experts' workshops -- on improving knowledge of water resources and uses for sustainable management, favoring the development of regulatory tools and institutional capacity building, and defining strategies for sustainable management and identifying appropriate financial resources -- from Thursday morning, 19 March to midday Friday, 20 March. Two special workshops will also be convened, by the Global Water Partnership on Thursday, 19 March, and by the International Network of Basin Organizations on Friday, 20 March. A Ministerial session will take place from early afternoon on Friday, 20 March to mid-afternoon on Saturday, 21 March.

Building on results already obtained during many previous international water policy meetings, the ministerial recommendations and the experts' proposals, to be elaborated by conference participants, will provide matters for discussion during the 6th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-6) in April.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RECENT WATER-RELATED DECISIONS

UNGASS

At the 19th Special Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGASS) in June 1997, delegates adopted a Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, which contains recommendations for action in the area of freshwater. The text notes that, in view of growing demands, water will become a major limiting factor in socio-economic development unless early action is taken. It identifies an urgent need to, *inter alia*: formulate and implement policies and programmes for integrated watershed management; strengthen regional and international cooperation for technology transfer and the financing of integrated water resources programmes and projects; provide an environment that encourages investments from public and private sources to improve water

supply and sanitation services; recognize water as a social and economic good; and call for a dialogue under the aegis of the CSD, beginning at its sixth session, aimed at building a consensus on the necessary actions, means of implementation and tangible results in order to consider initiating a strategic approach for the implementation of all aspects of the sustainable use of freshwater for social and economic purposes.

A decision taken at UNGASS regarding the CSD work programme for 1998-2002 deemed that "strategic approaches to freshwater management" would be the sectoral theme for CSD-6. In his address to the Assembly during UNGASS, the President of France proposed to host an international conference in France in March 1998, gathering all the actors involved in water policy.

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO FRESHWATER MANAGEMENT

In preparation for the CSD's Intersessional *Ad Hoc* Working Group (ISWG) and CSD-6's consideration of strategic approaches to freshwater management, an Expert Group met in Harare, Zimbabwe from 27-30 January 1998. The Co-Chairs' summary of the meeting notes that integrated water resources management, within a national economic framework, is essential for achieving efficient and equitable allocation of water resources and for promoting sustainable economic development and poverty alleviation. The summary includes several recommendations for action on capacity building, information management, environment and development, economics and finance, participation and institutions and international cooperation.

CSD INTERSESSIONAL AD HOC WORKING GROUP

The CSD's Intersessional *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Strategic Approaches to Freshwater Management met from 23-27 February 1998 at UN Headquarters in New York. Delegates exchanged views on freshwater issues and offered comments on two iterations of a Co-Chairs' draft report. The revised report includes remarks on the second iteration and will provide the basis for negotiation at CSD-6. Following is a brief summary of the Co-Chairs' report.

INTRODUCTION: The introduction notes that the ISWG based its discussions on the reports of the Secretary-General and the January 1998 Harare Expert Group Meeting. It states that the March 1998 Ministerial Meeting on Water and Sustainable Development in Paris will provide a further opportunity to consider strategic approaches to freshwater management. It notes that the ISWG's outcome is not a negotiated text but focuses on key issues and suggests policy options for further consideration and negotiation during CSD-6.

BACKGROUND: This section outlines the various functions of water; highlights the importance of integrated planning of water resources development and management; calls for prioritization of the social dimension of freshwater; states that Chapter 18 of Agenda 21 continues to be a basis for action; highlights insufficient progress to reduce trends toward deteriorating water quality, increasing stress on freshwater ecosystems and water shortages;

emphasizes that potential crises can be averted if action is taken toward an integrated approach to freshwater resources development, management and use; notes increasing competition for freshwater between agriculture and other uses; highlights UNGASS's recognition of the need to strengthen international cooperation to support local and national action; and says the dialogue on freshwater will be fruitful only with a proven commitment by the international community to provide new and additional financial resources.

KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES: This section states that the CSD process on water should focus on: fostering and supporting national and international action; identifying gaps and emerging issues; building global consensus; and promoting greater cooperation. It identifies areas that require further attention and international cooperation and action, including: awareness of the scope and function of freshwater resources; human resource development and participatory approaches; the role of ecosystems in providing goods and services; explicit links with socio-economic development; conservation of freshwater ecosystem biodiversity; capacity to assess water resource availability and variability; and mobilization of financial resources.

The section further states that implementation of integrated water management strategies requires action at all levels, but most decisions and actions must occur at the local and national levels and be closely related to other areas of natural resource management. It emphasizes the need to: ensure that local and national management plans can generate productive and sustainable interactions between human activities and the ecological functioning of freshwater systems; minimize impacts from human activities; reduce potential losses from droughts, floods, erosion, desertification and natural disasters; and address pollution prevention, sanitation and wastewater treatment. Riparian States are encouraged to cooperate on matters related to international watercourses, and this important issue requires further consideration in the CSD and other relevant fora.

ACTIONS AND MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION: This section invites governments to intensify efforts to develop integrated water resources development programmes and set target dates for adopting or updating implementation plans. Governments are called on to address the need to achieve universal access to water supply and sanitation, as called for in the 1994 Noordwijk Action Programme. A paragraph notes the report of the Harare Expert Group meeting and invites governments to consider its key recommendations in formulating policies.

Information for decision making: This section outlines the different types of information governments should maintain for policy formation, planning and investment decisions and management. Governments are encouraged to, *inter alia*: establish and maintain monitoring networks; encourage harmonization of data collection at the basin/aquifer level; facilitate public access; and improve the understanding of hydrology and the function of ecosystems. Governments are also encouraged to: implement national water-related indicators; conduct water quality and quantity inventories for surface and groundwater; and establish consultation mechanisms on drought and flood preparedness. The international community should support national efforts and the UN should play a central coordinating role.

Institutions, capacity building and participation: This section describes the actions governments could take to strengthen institutions and build capacity. Governments are urged to establish national coordination mechanisms, providing for the involvement of all relevant parts of governments and public authorities, as well as major groups. They are also urged to: establish legislative and regulatory frameworks to facilitate integrated water resources management strategies; strengthen institutional and human capacities at national and local levels; and facilitate partnerships between public and private sectors and NGOs. The international community, particularly UN organizations, is called upon to strengthen capacity building programmes.

Technology transfer and research cooperation: This section encourages governments to stimulate and remove impediments to research and development cooperation, and, along with industry

and international organizations, to promote technology transfer and research cooperation to foster sustainable agriculture. Efforts to help increase freshwater supplies, public and private sector partnerships, and best use of national, regional and international environmentally sound technology (EST) centers are also encouraged. The CSD should call on relevant parties to implement best practices and appropriate technologies. Donor countries and international organizations are urged to intensify their efforts to facilitate EST transfer.

Financial resources and mechanisms: This section notes that new and additional financial resources for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, will need to be mobilized, and existing resources currently allocated to the freshwater sector should be used effectively. ODA should complement and focus on programmes aimed at meeting basic human needs, and donors should support poverty reduction programmes and try to meet international development targets. Private sector involvement should be encouraged through public/private partnerships and enabling financial framework conditions. Governments are urged to strengthen consultative mechanisms. Cost recovery should be phased in gradually. Governments, when using economic instruments for guiding the allocation of water, are urged to consider environmental, efficiency, transparency and equity issues. The international community could give consideration to creating a financial mechanism to promote developing countries' efforts in the development, management, distribution and use of water resources.

FOLLOW-UP AND ASSESSMENT: This section invites governments to report to the CSD in 2002 regarding national integrated water resources development and management policies. It calls on the CSD to consider possible specific modalities of an intergovernmental dialogue on freshwater to take stock of progress and give further guidance, and outlines possible options: addressing freshwater during a CSD *ad hoc* intersessional group in 2000; subject to ongoing reform discussions, consolidating the work of the Committee on Natural Resources into the Committee on Sustainable Development to provide the capacity for continuing intergovernmental dialogue on freshwater issues; and organizing a special intersessional meeting in 2000.

The UN system, acting through the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources and collaborating with international institutions, is invited to elaborate an International Implementation Programme on freshwater for consideration by the CSD in 2000. Such a programme should: systematize objectives identified for the UN system in Agenda 21 and other international action programmes; suggest ways to enhance coordination to improve support for implementation of Chapter 18; define a division of responsibilities and how to increase efficiency in programme delivery; explore the potential of basin-level arrangements where appropriate; identify benchmarks and time frames for implementation; and identify possible sources of finance for its implementation.

UNEP should effectively contribute to the CSD and ACC by providing policy, technical and scientific advice on environmental aspects of sustainable development of freshwater resources. At the country level, the UN system should enhance coordinated efforts in freshwater. UN organizations, through the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, are invited to develop and submit to the CSD in 2002 a consolidated UN Guidebook on Integrated Water Resources Management to replace existing sectoral guidelines.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

OPENING PLENARY: The opening Plenary will convene from 9:00-10:00 in Salle I.

EXPERT WORKSHOPS: The three experts workshops will meet from 11:00-13:00 and from 15:00-19:00; workshop 1 in Salle IV, workshop 2 in Salle II and workshop 3 in Salle I.

SPECIAL WORKSHOP: Global Water Partnership will convene a special workshop from 15:00-19:00 in Salle X.

DRAFTING COMMITTEE: A drafting committee will meet in Salle XI from 15:00-19:00.