



THE DEPUTY-SECRETARY-GENERAL
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**REMARKS TO THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT
OF THE THIRTEENTH SESSION
OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**
New York, 20 April 2005

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to have an opportunity to address this, the first policy session of the Commission on Sustainable Development since the World Summit on Sustainable Development nearly three years ago in Johannesburg.

The main issues you have been discussing – clean water, adequate sanitation and decent housing – are among the most basic of human needs and aspirations. We, as an international community, have a responsibility to do whatever we can to support Governments in their efforts to meet these needs and build safe, healthy, and prosperous communities.

You are all well aware that this is a momentous year for the United Nations. We are not only looking back at 60 years of history. Much more important, we are looking ahead, seeking to adjust our policies and institutions to the needs of a new century.

With his report “In Larger Freedom”, the Secretary-General has placed before the membership proposals for far-reaching action to defeat poverty, strengthen collective security and promote respect for human rights. As if to reinforce his message, the newly released Millennium Ecosystem Assessment gives us yet another warning signal about the perils of continuing on the current, unsustainable course of human activities. And this September’s summit offers us, as the Secretary-General puts it, “the perfect opportunity for world leaders to bring together the work their representatives are doing in different fora, and enshrine it in a form clearly stamped with their unique authority”.

Distinguished delegates, you bear a heavy burden. For it is here, in this Commission more than anywhere else in the United Nations system or, indeed, the wider constellation of international organizations, that the imperatives of global economic growth, poverty reduction and ecosystem protection converge. It is here that ways must be found to make them compatible and mutually reinforcing. It is here that the complex interdependence of the Millennium Development Goals can be seen most profoundly.

Last month marked the launch of the “Water for Life” Decade. We should take full advantage of this initiative to raise awareness, mobilize resources and help community-based organizations and small-scale private providers build up their capacity and expertise. At every step of the way, we should be working with women’s organizations, water users’ associations,

indigenous peoples and others, to tap the reservoir of knowledge and to blend it with the best expertise that scientists, engineers, and businesspeople can offer. And we should be fostering strong domestic and international partnerships for sharing technologies and knowledge.

The work of the water decade should give equal prominence to sanitation. Providing safe drinking water without adequate sanitation and sewerage is becoming an increasingly costly, if not futile, exercise in the ever more densely crowded cities of the developing world, and especially in the rapidly expanding urban slums. Rural areas need support in extending sanitation coverage, which lags far behind that in urban areas. Too little attention has been given until now to waste-water treatment and re-use, and to developing, transferring and applying environmentally sound, low-cost technologies for both. That will have to change if human settlements are to be sustainable.

Indeed, the effective governance and management of human settlements is one of the biggest challenges the developing world faces. According to UN projections, by 2030 the urban population of the developing world will reach four billion – roughly double what it was in the year 2000.

Well-run cities do not run themselves. Citizens must be free to live their separate lives, of course, but they also need to come together and act collectively – in running their businesses; in building, operating and maintaining the infrastructure that makes urban life possible; and in enforcing the laws and maintaining peace and order. Much of the knowledge needed is local knowledge, but there are also many areas – from transport, energy and waste management to medicine and public administration – where valuable lessons can be learnt from the experience of other countries. This Commission should be identifying where such cooperation needs to be strengthened, and how.

As you move into the final phase of your deliberations, I hope you will focus on what is at stake: nothing less than the lives of millions of people around the world who labour each day to provide enough water for their families to drink; who suffer and often die from diarrhoeal and other water-related diseases; who live in slums where every aspect of existence can be uncertain and insecure, from the roof above one's head to the land beneath one's feet.

It would be irresponsible to pretend that any of this can be done without mobilizing additional financial resources. Too many countries, especially in Africa, are still being forced to choose between servicing their debts and making the investments in agriculture, health, education and infrastructure that would allow them to achieve the MDGs.

If we are to meet the water and sanitation targets by 2015, we will need to provide safe drinking water access to an additional 1.5 billion people, and basic sanitation to an additional 1.9 billion people. Based on recent estimates, this could require as much as \$30 billion a year – roughly double the present level.

Meeting the target of significantly improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 would require an estimated \$5 billion per year. More ambitiously, if we were to provide the many millions of new city dwellers who are expected over the next few decades with an alternative to slums, that figure could quadruple.

Given the stakes and the needs, we must be bold, we must be innovative, and we must persevere. We must determine exactly what is needed of Governments and of the international community, and decide how best to deliver on our commitments. It would be tragic and shameful if, come 2015, we were to find ourselves scrambling to explain our failures.

That need not happen. Let's remember that there has been real progress in the past two decades. Hundreds of millions of people have lifted themselves out of poverty, found decent jobs or started their own small businesses, gained access for the first time to safe drinking water and sanitation, and been able to build or buy decent shelter for their families. It is not impossible to reach the goals we have set ourselves, if only we collectively focus our minds, our energies and our resources on what needs to be done.

I thank you very much for your attention and wish you a very productive session.