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Water deserves higher priority on development agenda – UN official



The UN trucks water in Haiti

16 March 2009 – Water must be given higher priority on the development agenda, a top United Nations official told a global gathering that opened today in Istanbul, stressing that the problems the world faces with regard to this precious resource are enormous. “Developing countries themselves need to increase investment in water, and systematically integrate water in poverty reduction strategies,” Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) told the opening of the [5th World Water Forum](#).

“The international community must also dramatically scale up its support. [...] I urge leaders in all sectors to use this report as a guide and impetus for bold and sustained action to meet the world’s water needs,” he told the meeting, whose theme is “Bridging Divides for Water.”

Mr. Matsuura presented the latest UN World Water Development Report, which warns that the surging growth in global population, climate change, widespread mismanagement and increasing demand for energy have tightened the grip on the world’s evaporating water supplies.

As the world’s population has swollen to well over 6 billion people, some countries have already reached the limits of their water resources, according to the report compiled by over 20 UN agencies.

“Chronic underinvestment and poor governance in many parts of the world has left hundreds of millions of people deprived of their right to safe water and basic sanitation, vulnerable to disease and extreme hunger, and exposed to the risks of water-related disasters, environmental degradation and conflict,” stated the Director-General.

“After decades of inaction, the problems we face are enormous. If left unattended, they may become insurmountable,” he added.

Also addressing the meeting, which runs until 22 March, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Sha Zukang said that water and sanitation issues are critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the internationally-agreed targets to slash extreme poverty and other ills by 2015.

Mr. Sha, who is representing Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the Forum, reminded participants that the world is lagging behind in reaching its MDG target to reduce by half the proportion of the population without access to basic sanitation services.

The Istanbul meeting comes ahead of International World Water Day, observed annually on 22 March to focus attention on the importance of freshwater and advocate for the sustainable management of freshwater resources.

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