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Water for the Poor – Sustainable Solutions to the Water Crisis

3–7 December 2001 in Bonn

The Conference and Rio + 10

At the 6th meeting of the UN Commission for Sustainable Development, in April 1998, the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany announced that it would host an International Conference on Freshwater in Bonn in December 2001. The Conference is intended to be one step on the way to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (Rio + 10), related to freshwater issues.

Rio + 10 will review the implementation of Agenda 21, the programme of actions to reach global sustainable development in the 21st Century.

The conveners of the Conference expect water to be one major area of global concern. The International Conference on Freshwater will focus on practical solutions. The question how to improve freshwater management and utilisation is going to be at the centre of the Conference discussions.

The International Conference on Freshwater 3–7 December 2001 Bonn, Germany

The Conference is hosted by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. The Conveners are the **Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU)** and the **Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)**.

Rio + 10 – The World Summit on Sustainable Development

The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg will identify the accomplishments and areas where further efforts are needed to implement Agenda 21 and other outcomes of the historic United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio in 1992. The Rio + 10 agenda will focus on poverty, development and the environment. Poverty and underdevelopment are seen as the main threats to environmental security and sustainable development. The summit meeting will seek consensus on the assessment of current conditions and on priorities for further action. Decisions will aim to strengthen commitment to achieving the goals of Agenda 21.

Welcome Address

The German government will be hosting the International Conference on Freshwater in Bonn from 3 to 7 December 2001 in close cooperation with the United Nations. Germany wishes to make a contribution to solving global freshwater problems and to support preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (Rio + 10) in 2002.

The Conference will be concerned with:

- pointing out solutions which could contribute to halving the number of people without access to clean drinking water by 2015, and to preventing the overexploitation of limited water resources.
- taking stock of the progress made in implementing Agenda 21, and
- identifying obstacles, drawing the necessary conclusions and deciding on appropriate measures.

We invite all participants in the conference to contribute towards solving these urgent problems and achieving concrete progress.

We welcome all participants to the International Conference on Freshwater 2001 in Bonn, Germany.

Heidemarie Wiecek-Zeul, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development,
Jürgen Trittin, Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety



Water for the Poor Aims and main Issues of the Conference

The aims of the International Conference on Freshwater are to review the progress achieved in the implementation of freshwater related objectives set out in Agenda 21 (Chapter 18), identify remaining obstacles, and define necessary actions that contribute to fulfilling of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

The Conference also serves as a preparatory step on freshwater issues for the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg 2002.

Conference participants will come from national governments, international organisations as well as non-governmental organisations.

The Sub-Themes of the Conference are:

- Innovative Strategies for Water and Sanitation for the Poor: Access and Affordability
- Protecting Water Resources: Pollution Prevention (Industry, Agriculture, Human Settlements), Eco-Systems
- Competing Water Uses: Water for Food/Agriculture and Water for Nature
- Transboundary Water Issues: Lessons Learned

- Floods and Droughts: Prevention and Management

The Cross-Cutting Issues are:

- Governance, Management, Stakeholder Participation
- New Partnerships between the Public Sector, Private Sector, Civil Society, and Science
- Mobilising Financial Resources
- Technology Transfer
- Capacity Building
- Gender Perspective.

Issue Papers on the Sub-Themes will be drafted by international renowned consultants, representing international institutions and networks on water issues such as the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), and the Global Water Partnership.

The Issue Papers will build on consensus of the recent debate and conferences, and concentrate on various matters of prior importance. They will serve as a basis for discussions at the Conference, in December 2001, in Bonn.

Sustainable Solutions to the Water Crisis

An Organising Committee is in charge of all organisational matters with regard to the Conference. At present, the following German institutions are contributing to this work: The Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (BMU), the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AA) and the City of Bonn.

Preparing the Conference

The preparation of the International Conference on Freshwater will involve consultation with regional groups and major stakeholders, close cooperation with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Water Resources, as well as with International Financial Institutions such as the World Bank.

An international Steering Committee was set up to advise the host country in all organisational and content-related matters in the course of conference preparations. The Steering Committee comprises representatives from governments, international organisations and non-governmental organisations, and ensures that specific regional and sector views and experiences are considered during the preparation phase.

The theme of the International Conference on Freshwater is "Water for the Poor – Sustainable Solutions to the Water Crisis", and it will highlight a number of topics ranging from sanitation to natural disasters such as floods and droughts.

With the emphasis on the poor, an immediate question that arises is how to ensure their access to water and sanitation. Most available freshwater is found in industrial countries, which have a fifth of the world's population. But nearly all of the three billion increase in global population expected by 2025 will be in the developing countries, where water is scarce.

Here, innovative strategies are clearly required.

Preventing pollution is of considerable importance in all sectors where water is used. Pollution has a profound effect on our ecosystems, presenting a hazard not only to drinking water but to water in general as a fundamental prerequisite for life. The chief sectors of relevance here are industry, agriculture and human settlements.

This is true also for irrigation.

While irrigation is a necessity to feed the growing population in many places of the world it has brought about severe negative effects on soils, groundwater, and ecosystems in general. The issue here is as to how a balance can be maintained in allocating water to food and other agricultural production on the one hand and water that nature itself requires to maintain the self-purifying power of water and protect aquatic ecosystems on the other.

More than 300 river and lake basins are shared by two or more countries. What are the lessons that have been learnt evaluating cooperative efforts so far? How can water unfold its poten-



tial as a catalyst for cooperation?

Finally, water plays a role in two extreme conditions that have brought no end of devastation to countries across the world in recent years: floods and droughts. The Bonn Conference will address the issue of preventing and coping with these natural disasters in the light of future developments due to climate change. This topic will be taken up again by the 3rd World Water Forum in Japan in 2003.

All these themes relate closely to a number of cross-cutting issues. Aspects such as governance, management and stakeholder participation are key factors in the contexts of how to use water efficiently and concepts for integrated water resources management. Another area the Conference will explore is new partnerships between the public and private sectors, civil society and science that are playing an increasingly important role in a wide range of topics. What kinds of partnerships between the different stakeholders can generate sustainable solutions and benefit the poor? Of course, finance is crucial to coping with the water crisis. The issue of mobilising financial resources will be addressed at the Conference, the focus being on social equity schemes, the private sector and public investment and external aid.

The Conference will also take up the issues of technology transfer and capacity building, emphasising education and awareness-raising, as well as the gender perspective.

The Conference and the Millennium Declaration

Growing pressure on water resources owing to increased consumption and pollution is having a particularly serious effect on the poor. Addressing this situation in its Millennium Declaration, the United Nations General Assembly pledged that by 2015 the number of people unable to reach or afford safe drinking water would be halved. The United Nations General Assembly went on to declare that unsustainable exploitation of water resources would be

stopped by developing water management strategies at regional, national and local levels. These strategies would promote both equitable access and adequate supplies. One focus of the Conference will be on identifying and implementing practical solutions for the water crisis. It aims to contribute to the fulfilment of the Millennium Declaration target and to identify remaining obstacles in the implementation of Agenda 21 (Chapter 18).

Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue

The International Conference on Freshwater will be enriched by a Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue (MSD). The conveners of the Conference have asked the United Nations Environment and Development Organisation UK (UNED) to organise this Dialogue to make sure that all relevant groups of Civil Society, the non-governmental organisations (NGO), the business sector, trade unions, local authorities, and grass-roots groups will be able to give their input into the Conference. The Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue will play an important role in the decision making process of the Conference.