

The Third World Water Forum

From 16-23 March 2003, some 24,000 participants from 182 countries attended 351 separate sessions on 38 interlocking themes dealing with water during the Third World Water Forum. The major event, part of ongoing efforts to commemorate 2003 as the International Year of Freshwater, was held in three Japanese cities - Kyoto, Shiga and Osaka.

Key issues discussed by the participants included balancing increasing human requirements for adequate water supplies and improved health and sanitation with food production, transportation, energy and environmental needs. Other countries stressed the need for more effective governance, improved capacity and adequate financing. More than 100 new commitments on water were made, 20 of which focused on climate, and 13 on gender issues. Global agreements include the:

- Establishment of the International Flood Network (IFNet) – this will launch the “Global Flood Warning System” project, which will have the capacity to create the precipitation maps all over the world

every 3 hours. The project aims to improve flood warnings around the world and thus benefit up to 4.8 billion people.

- Development of an international consortium of concerned organisations to produce a programme that will precisely identify and highlight the benefits brought by sound water management and provide governments with appropriate tools to enhance priority setting, planning, development, management, and budgeting for the water sector.



- Memorandum of Understanding between UN-HABITAT and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to create a programme to build the capacity of Asian cities to secure and manage pro-poor investments and to help the region meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of halving, by 2015, the proportion of people without safe drinking water and basic sanitation.
- Commitment by UNESCO and the World Water Council to promote, develop and

support the establishment and operation of an independent, easily accessible facility that can help solve problems related to trans-boundary waters by providing experienced technical advisers, tools, training sessions and mediators.

- Formation of an “International Water and Climate Alliance” that will build bridges between the climate and water sector, and develop activities to better cope with climate impacts.
- UNDP development of a Community Water Initiative, aimed at building on the power of the local community to solve water and sanitation challenges. Its aim is to provide innovative communities with small grants to expand and improve their solutions to the water and sanitation crisis.

Some of the regional commitments include:

- Funding from Australia amounting to over AUD\$80 million for water conservation activities, primarily in countries in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Preparation of a navigation strategy and programme by the end of 2003 by the Mekong River Commission (MRC) with the governments of Cambodia, Laos PDR, Thailand and Vietnam and other partners. The long-term goals of the strategy are to develop sustainable, effective and safe navigation on the Mekong, and to increase the international trade opportunities for the mutual benefit of the member countries of the MRC.

Other key issues focused on governance, capacity-building, financing and local community participation. Details on the Third World Water Forum is available on www.worldwaterforum.org. ■



Pollution from industrial and other sources is causing the death of rivers and lakes.