

WORLD WATER DAY

Water for the Future

The idea for World Water Day was first discussed during the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro - the Earth Summit, after which the United Nations General Assembly dedicated the 22nd of March to activities related to the conservation and development of water resources. This year's theme, "Water for the Future", calls on everyone to observe sustainable approaches to water use for the benefit of future generations. This year's celebration aims to inspire worldwide political and community action and encourage greater global understanding of the need for more responsible water use and conservation.

World Water Day 2003 provided one of the highlights of the Third World Water Forum held from 16-23 March 2003 in the cities of Kyoto, Shiga and Osaka, all in Japan, and was

a key event of the UN International Year of Freshwater. In a speech commemorating the event, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stressed how much we have taken freshwater resources for granted. Though freshwater is essential for healthy ecosystems, for sustainable development and for human survival itself, all too often pollution, over consumption and poor water management all over the world have led to the decreasing quantity and quality of available water.

The demands of agriculture have taxed freshwater resources and overall demand for water already far outpaces population growth. If current trends continue, two out of every three people on earth will suffer moderate to severe water shortages in little more than two decades. Freshwater problems unfortunately cause the most suffering among the world's poorest communities, who lack access to safe

drinking water, adequate sanitation, and fall victim to water-related diseases. The Secretary General urged everyone to work together to secure the world's water for the future.

To mark the event, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN's lead agency in this year's celebrations, provided a World Water Day website (<http://www.waterday2003.org/>) to help governments, key partners such as education ministries and schools, civil society organisations, communities and individuals worldwide achieve their goals in freshwater conservation.

The site provides links to the world's best online water information and practical water conservation advice, suggestions for local and regional activities, and high-resolution posters, logos and photos to help groups and individuals to promote and participate in the day. The site also includes information on Water Programmes conducted by the UNEP and other agencies in the UN System, news concerning water conservation across the globe, as well as links to relevant publications. ■

2003 is International Year of Freshwater

The United Nations General Assembly last year passed Resolution No. 55/196 proclaiming 2003 as the International Year of Freshwater. The resolution encourages governments, the United Nations system and all other stakeholders to take advantage of the Year to increase awareness of the importance of sustainable freshwater use, management and protection.

Over the years, the deteriorating quality of the world's water has wreaked havoc on people's health. According to a study by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), each year more than five million people die of water-related diseases. About 2.3 billion suffer from diseases linked to dirty water. Some 1.2 billion people lack access to safe water and more than 2 billion lack adequate sanitation. By 2025, about 2.7 billion people – nearly one-third of the expected world's population – will live in regions facing severe water scarcity, with Asia and sub-Saharan Africa to be most severely affected. The world's



six billion people already access 54% of all available freshwater. The demand for water rises as global population increases, making access to freshwater one of the most important issues humanity faces today.

Throughout 2003, a number of events, including the Third World Water Forum as well as the celebration of World Water Day, will be conducted to stress the importance of conserving the world's freshwater resources. The website of the International Year of Freshwater is hosted by UNESCO at <http://www.wateryear2003.org>, and provides

information on various aspects of freshwater concerns, activities in various countries designed to protect fresh and groundwater sources, ways to get involved in conservation efforts, as well as links to important publications focusing on freshwater issues. Hopefully ongoing efforts to increase awareness on the matter will lead to increased protection, better management and sustainable use of our remaining freshwater resources. ■