



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**14:00, 3 December 2007**

**\*\*\*\*\*PRESS RELEASE\*\*\*\*\***

**Asia-Pacific Heads of State meet to solve the region's water and sanitation problems**

The 1<sup>st</sup> Asia-Pacific Water Summit is being held 3-4 December 2007, in Oita Prefecture, Japan. The Summit supported by the Government of Japan and held in the city of Beppu, is organized as one of the key activities of the Asia-Pacific Water Forum (APWF), an independent, not-for-profit, non-partisan, non-political network dedicated to solving water and sanitation problems in the Asia-Pacific region.

Ten regional Heads of State and representatives from over 35 Asia-Pacific countries as well as leaders from some of the region's foremost institutions involved in water and sanitation, are meeting in a bid to mobilize the political will and commitment required to put water high up the region's national agendas.

The Summit was officially opened this morning by His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince of Japan, His Royal Highness Prince Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, His Excellency Mr. Yasuo Fukuda, Prime Minister of Japan, His Excellency Mr. Yoshiro Mori, former Prime Minister of Japan, and Prof. Tommy Koh, Chair of the Governing Council of the Asia-Pacific Water Forum.

Chair of the Steering Committee for the 1<sup>st</sup> Asia-Pacific Water Summit, His Excellency Mr. Yoshiro Mori, in his opening address highlighted: "Water problems in the Asia Pacific region are severe. This region is home to 3.7 billion people or 60 % of the world's population. One out of five (0.7 billion) people in the region do not have access to safe drinking water, and half of the population (1.9 billion) has no access to sanitation facilities. "We are faced with a critical situation. In addition, we have suffered tremendous losses caused by water-related disasters. Eighty percent of the worldwide deaths resulting from water-related disasters have occurred in this region", Mr. Mori said.

His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince of Japan, in his opening speech stated that he accepted the request of the United Nations Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-moon to serve on his Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation as its Honorary President . "I am aware of the responsibility that comes with this honor", the Crown Prince stated. "I will do my best to learn more about the global issues of water and sanitation, and to work with His Royal Highness Prince Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, the Board's chairman, and its other members to contribute to its activities."

His Excellency Mr. Yasuo Fukuda, Prime Minister of Japan, highlighted the rich experience and long history of international cooperation in the water sector, especially in the reduction of water-related



disasters. "In May this year, the Japanese Government set up a mechanism to give financial assistance to support developing countries, with the aim of achieving both economic development and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. This Summit will give a strong momentum to the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit in 2008.", he remarked.

The APWF was initially proposed by the participants of the 4<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum's Regional Preparatory Process under the coordination of the Japan Water Forum (JWF). The establishment of the APWF was announced by the late Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Ryutaro Hashimoto, during the Asia-Pacific Day at the 4<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum, held in Mexico City, March 2006. During the opening ceremony, Prof. Koh paid tribute to Mr. Hashimoto for laying the groundwork for the APWF and dedicated the 1<sup>st</sup> APWS to his memory.

"Over the next two days a series of thematic panel sessions are scheduled to discuss some of the specific issues of concern such as water financing and capacity development, water-related disaster management, and water for development and ecosystems, climate change, sanitation, developing knowledge and lessons, increasing local capacity, increasing public outreach, and monitoring of investments and results", Prof. Koh said.

In his opening address, Prince Willem-Alexander reiterated: "Human history is intimately intertwined with water. Social and technological progress can be linked to successful attempts to live with water. Solving water problems in rural and urban contexts is one of the keys to unlocking economic growth". "Integrated Water Resources Management is an internationally acknowledged approach that seeks to avoid the lives lost, the money wasted, and the natural capital depleted because of decision-making that did not take into account the larger ramifications of sectoral actions", the Prince of Orange emphasized. "Our Board believes IWRM is a flexible tool for optimizing water's contribution to sustainable development, while also ensuring water for ecosystems and environmental flows", he added.

United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, who addressed the Summit through a video message, expressed his commitment to support initiatives to solve the region's water and sanitation problems.

The Crown Prince of Japan shared with Summit delegates a series of water-related photographs he had taken during his travels which had eventually inspired him to become interested in water and sanitation problems. Referring to one of the images depicting women and children collecting water in Pokhara,



Nepal, he said: "As you can see, water just trickles from the tap. I recall thinking to myself, "My Goodness! How long will it take them to collect enough water? What hard lives they lead!".

The Crown Prince further stated that the recognition of this stark reality for so many of the poor of the world, deepened his interest in water. "[Access to water] has implications that reach far beyond my original field of study, regarding water transport", and concluded that "in fact, water impacts our lives in many more ways, not only for water supply and sanitation, but also for managing the environment and education."

In parallel to the Summit, an Open Event forum will be held in Beppu, 1-5 December 2007 in and around the B-Con Plaza, with a broad participation from civil society stakeholders, multilateral organizations, and many others.

The Asia-Pacific Water Forum (APWF) is working to increase the region's access to improved water supplies and sanitation, protect and restore river basins, and reduce people's vulnerability to water-related disasters. The APWF champions efforts aimed at boosting investments, building capacity, increasing public outreach and enhancing cooperation in the water sector at the regional level.

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