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

**Region's fragile freshwater resources threatened by Climate Change**

Water problems in the Asia Pacific region are severe, with one out of five people in the region not having access to safe drinking water, and half of the population without access to adequate sanitation. In addition, the region has increasingly suffered from water-related disasters.

Unless something is done soon, the severe water problems across the Asia-Pacific region will considerably worsen under the influence of climate change. This was the message from several Heads of State attending the first day of the 1<sup>st</sup> Asia-Pacific Water Summit.

Climate variability and change is already affecting water resources and their management in many parts of the region, as notably illustrated by the large-scale retreat of Himalayan glaciers and the growing threat of sea level rise to small island countries and low-lying areas.

Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonpo Dr. Kinzang Dorji, raised the effects of climate change faced by his country and brought about by global warming. "Our glaciers are rapidly receding thereby posing grave threats to human settlements in the downstream valleys caused by events such as the glacial lake outbursts and flash floods", he explained.

The specific vulnerability to climate change for small islands was highlighted by the President Federated States of Micronesia, His Excellency Mr. Emanuel Mori. In his speech he emphasized: "While we are blessed, with our natural surroundings, we are also faced today with daunting challenges that have now come to characterize how we, as small islands developing states, interact in the global arena. Climate change is the new buzz word around the globe, and it has now taken its rightful place at the forefront of the global agenda. There is no longer doubt in anyone's mind that the adverse impacts of climate change are real and already happening".

Representing another small island country, the President of the Republic of Palau, His Excellency Mr. Tommy Esang Remengesau, illustrated "how every country, no matter how large or small, depends for its very existence and livelihood on the availability of fresh water. Just as we must carefully manage our marine resources, we must carefully protect and manage our freshwater sources" he said, adding that "while it seems to rain a lot in Palau, we simply cannot count on freshwater literally falling from the sky and solving our water management problems."



President Ludwig Scotty of the Republic of Nauru, a country frequently plagued by water shortages due to the occurrence of extended periods of droughts, pointed out that studies and assessments to identify alternate water sources and the formulation of a master sanitation plan were examples of initiatives taking place in his country, as part of its wider strategy to improve water resources management and protection of the groundwater. He stressed that “although these activities have helped to strengthen and improve the overall governance of water on Nauru, much more needs to be done, particularly in the area of adaptation and mitigation to climate change”.

Palau is also aware of the necessity to prepare for natural disaster emergencies involving water. The large number of drought and tropical storms hitting small islands in recent years has significantly increased the need and demand for services of our National Disaster Management Offices. Mr Tommy Esang Remengesau said explained that this office works closely with the private sector and civil society to ensure that national water rationing would be effectively enforced during times of drought. We need greater capacity in this area, as management of water resources in times of natural disasters must be addressed at the earliest possible time.

Mr. Remengesau concluded that “there is no more important topic than assuring an adequate and safe water supply to our region. The Summit’s priority themes, water financing, water related disaster management and water for development and ecosystems, encompass the urgent water issues and needs of the region well”.

Niue’s Premier Mr. Young Vivian strongly urged “those countries that are still yet to ratify the Kyoto Protocol to do so. It is the only means that is currently in place to address Adverse Impacts of Climate Change particularly on the small island states and low lying coastal areas of most developing countries”. He further exclaimed that “already we have approximately 655 million people in the Asia Pacific Region that have no access to safe drinking water. To add more to that number as a result of the adverse impacts of Climate Change will pose a very difficult challenge for our governments to address now and in the future”.

The Asia-Pacific is the most vulnerable region in the world with regards to water-related disasters that hinder sustainable development and poverty reduction. Between 1960 and 2006, over 600 thousand casualties were recorded, accounting for over 80% of casualties from water-related disasters worldwide, in addition to US\$ 8 billion worth of economic damage during the same period. Severe water-related disaster events such as floods, droughts, tsunamis, windstorms, landslides,



storm-surges, water-born diseases and epidemics have escalated since the turn of the 21st century.

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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