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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

On the Way to the 1st Asia Pacific Water Summit

Remarks by

Mrs. Margaret Catley-Carlson (Chair, Global Water Partnership & Steering Committee member, 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit)

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Mrs. Margaret Catley-Carlson (Chair, Global Water Partnership & Steering Committee member, 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit)

Good morning. Thank you for coming out on a very early and very wet morning in Kyoto. In many parts of the world this rain, this wetness would be a welcomed sign connected with good crops, reservoirs filling up, etc., so we must remember that when we look at water, rain is not simply an inconvenience.

I have had the honor to be asked by former Prime Minister Mori, President of the Asia-Pacific Water Forum, to serve as a member of the Steering Committee of the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit (1st APWS), to help bring about international participation to Beppu City, Oita Prefecture, 3-4 December 2007.

Why the Asia-Pacific Water Summit?

First of all, the need is very real. With 60% of the world's population and 60% of the irrigated land, Asia also has some of the most difficult water management problems in terms of disaster events (600,000 deaths since 1980), and in terms of unmet needs in water and sanitation. If you turn that coin over, Asia

has had some of the most impressive and stunning growths in economic development, has had huge gains in education, in health status, in GNP growth. If for no other reason, the argument to press on with the remaining water problems is that the solution to these problems will also accelerate economic growth. When one examines the history of economic growth in industrialized countries, it is very often the case that the solving of water problems, adding storage, adding flood protection, adding water infrastructures for cities was one of the keys unlocking economic growth so this isn't simply a story about finding more equitable, more environmentally-safe ways to manage water, it is also a story about accelerating economic growth in this region which is already the motor and the engine for economic growth for the whole world, with the accelerated growth of the big Asian countries.

The main purpose of the 1st APWS is to give the opportunity to Asian leaders to talk together about how they have met, faced and solved water issues in their own areas, how one can profit from the other, to create a sense of "hydro-solidarity" in the sense of learning about the possible expertise which can be used, to bring to bear on Asia-Pacific water issues and to create possibly a council of ministers to carry this work forward. We do not know what the heads of governments will decide as a result of this Summit, but it is very clear that water issues do not get solved or addressed until there is a very high-level of political commitment to address them. And so the purpose of the Summit is first and foremost to raise these water issues to the level of the highest governmental authorities so that water can move up in national priority, in the priorities accorded in the budget, in the priorities accorded in the 5-year plans, in the planning processes of governments. So that we can begin to move forward in Asia and the Pacific with more attention to water and some solutions to the water problems that exist – and to continue to support high-levels of Asian growth. The 1st APWS is a first in a series of events which will bring together Asian political leaders to understand and to give some commitments allowing for more attention to water and more attention to finding solutions.

Dr. Frank R. Rijsberman (Director, Water and Climate Adaptation Initiatives, Google.org)

As former director of the IWMI, the pre-eminent research institute on water, food and environment in the world, headquartered in Sri Lanka, I base my comments on a recently released report, called "Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management for Agriculture" (www.iwmi.cgiar.org/assessment/). The first and foremost conclusion from the work of these 700 or so scientists that studied water issues over the course of some 7 years, is that Asia has invested massively in the past 50 years into making water available to cities, and to farmers in particular. While most are aware that it was the Green Revolution in Asia that helped prevent the famines of the 1970s, few realize that water was a critical ingredient of the Green Revolution. The poster child of the Green Revolution were the high-yielding varieties, but those low food prices, and those stores full of grains were in fact due to the simultaneous application of fertilizers and the enormous investments that governments throughout Asia made in providing water for irrigation. So water was a critical component of the success of the Green Revolution and it has brought wealth to farmers throughout the region.

Some very clear drawbacks have emerged in the process: while in Africa for instance the effort is still very much to make more water available for agriculture, in Asia we are clearly seeing the limits of what has been possible. So the debate in Asia has shifted, and many political leaders in the region whom until recently were still advocating the need to build another dam are now more and more aware that groundwater levels have fallen dramatically. In northern India, I have spoken to farmers who in their youth were drawing water from some 10 feet deep with a bucket, now, have to pump the water out from maybe 600 feet down with a 50 horse power diesel pump. If that pump fails they realize they will have to move to the city and live with their children, who have in the meantime profited from a university education that the wealth of that water brought. So, yes, they have used up the water resources in one generation.

Similarly, around many of the cities in Asia, the rivers are dead or dying. I was recently in Hyderabad, one of the high-tech capitals of India and just south of Hyderabad, the mighty Musi river has become a dwindling black wastewater stream; yet the cows that produce the curd and the dairy products for Hyderabad are bathing in that black and stinking water and that water is pumped straight out of the water canal back onto fields where farmers are growing leafy vegetables and fodder for those animals. So whether it is the increased wealth of Asians who would like to recreate in an environment that is healthier or whether it is realizations that a very large percentage of the food produced this way is not very healthy to eat, water quality concerns are much higher on the agenda in Asia now than until recently. So the debate in Asia has shifted quite dramatically.

Another point is that we still do not have solutions to sanitation that make sense. We are attempting to give people water closets which are devices through which we mix our excreta in very unhealthy forms with presumably clean drinking water and then release that back into the environment. So we need to rethink sanitation to come up with a drastically new approach, because the paradigm that we are pursuing – to try to give everybody a water closet – is simply going to hit the wall before it reaches its objective.

We also absolutely need major investments to increase the productivity of water and that was a key message of this “Comprehensive Assessment”. We simply can no longer expand the area under irrigation. There is no more water in Asia. We simply can not just expand the area under arable land because that would take away more forests. So the only real solution is to increase the productivity of water – produce more crop per drop. That is a major challenge for science and technology. Of course, also, for the institutions and governance in our sector. And finally, climate change which is on everybody's mind is of course also intricately linked to water. Most people think about climate change leading to warmer climates and that is an important issue, but they also lead to increased floods and droughts – more variability in climates. And that directly impacts all those farmers, particularly those farmers that do not have access to irrigation.

Science and technology – which is the subject of the STS Forum we are attending in Kyoto this week – promise to be very helpful, whether it is in providing information platforms that give people access to data, or whether it is seasonal weather forecast, drought early-warning systems, or maps of water uses – there are a lot of very promising technologies. And those people that say, well we cannot live by technology alone and that institutions and governments are the key, that is right, but even some of the most intractable governance issues, like corruption, stand to be solved by things like transparency. And providing people equal access to information through technology is in fact one of the key opportunities for helping to solve the problem.

The Asia-Pacific Water Forum (APWF) www.apwf.org 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 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.