

Opening Address
1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit

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Good Morning, honoured guests, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to address you at the opening of the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit. I would like to express my profound gratitude to His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince of Japan, and His Royal Highness Prince Willem Alexander of The Netherlands, chairman of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, for attending. I would also like to thank President Emomali Rahmon of the Republic of Tajikistan; President Tommy Remengesau Jr. of the Republic of Palau; President Anote Tong of the Republic of Kiribati; President Ludwig Scotty of the Republic of Nauru; President Emmanuel Mori of the Federated States of Micronesia; Prime Minister Mititaigimene Young Vivian of Niue; Prime Minister Apisai Ielemia of Tuvalu; Prime Minister Kinzang Dorji of the Kingdom of Bhutan; Vice Prime Minister Dosbol Nur ulu of the Kyrgyz Republic. Thank you as well to Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, who is here on behalf of Japan, the host country.

I am also grateful to all the people involved, for their efforts and cooperation towards the success of the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the conveners of the sessions, organizers of the open events held in Oita and many other places across Japan, members of the Oita Committee of the 1st APWS, concerned local governments, NGOs, and members of the public.

The 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit is a historic event, dedicated exclusively to the resolution of water issues. This summit, focusing on the theme "Water Security: Leadership and Commitment", is expected to provide a good opportunity for governments and other national leaders to raise the awareness of water issues and share a determination to take concrete actions towards the resolution of water issues.

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 have no 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 worldwide deaths resulting from water-related disasters have occurred in this region.

In areas where there is no access to safe drinking water, women and children are forced to spend hours collecting water, wasting precious time which could be used for education and social activities. In places where there is no adequate sanitation, people are susceptible to epidemics and other health problems. In places vulnerable to water-related disasters, people tend to lose their desire to work, hampering economic development. With regard to infectious diseases, an area in which I have been involved for a long time, babies who are healthy at birth later contract HIV from breast milk due to the lack of safe drinking water required to prepare baby formula.

In areas of rapidly growing economies and populations, it is necessary to allocate limited water resources appropriately between agriculture, industry, households, environment users, and other sectors. Needless to say, it is critical to secure close coordination of the use of international rivers among riparian countries. In this context, water is a key factor that affects not only local stakeholders but also the survival of the countries themselves. Therefore, national leaders must be in the forefront of water-related initiatives.

In order to focus our discussions during the preparatory meetings for the summit, water issues in this region have been classified into three priority themes: *water financing and capacity building*, *water-related disaster management*, and *water for development and ecosystems*. The outcomes of the discussions will be presented at sessions devoted to working out concrete initiatives.

In recent years, climate change has sparked great controversy across the world. Its serious impact will be revealed to us through water. While damage caused by water-related disasters such as floods will increase, it is predicted that desertification and water shortages will also become more serious. Intensive discussions will take place on climate change and water in Asia and the Pacific region, especially on glacial melting and the breaking of glacial lakes in the Himalayas, as well as the problem of rising sea levels in the small Pacific island states. Now that we cannot avoid the negative impacts of climate change, our strategy must be to focus on how to adapt to these impacts.

The year 2008 has been declared as the International Year of Sanitation by the United Nations. Among sanitation issues, toilets poses a particular challenge to human dignity. In order to save as many children suffering from water-borne diseases as possible, it will be necessary to discuss seriously the improvement and development of sanitation systems, based on the new idea of human waste as a sustainable and recyclable resource.

The initiative of the Asia-Pacific Water Summit was first presented at the 4th World Water Forum in March, 2006. Shortly after that, former Prime Minister of Japan Ryutaro Hashimoto suddenly passed away. He had dedicated all his energies to the resolution of global water issues and was also the founder of the summit.

I decided to carry on with Mr. Hashimoto's strong determination to contribute to the resolution of global water issues. I have made the greatest possible effort to ensure the success of the summit. I hope my knowledge and long experience in politics including as a prime minister will be of some help in the resolution of global water issues. I believe my mission is to become foster father of Mr. Hashimoto's legacy

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to government leaders and all those who have traveled far to attend this summit. I trust these two days will yield valuable results, and I sincerely hope that we will be able to hand over this rich and beautiful planet to our children by overcoming our serious water problems.