

**Speech by  
Prof Tommy Koh for the  
Opening Ceremony of the 1<sup>st</sup> APWS**

Your Imperial Highness, the Crown Prince of Japan,

Your Royal Highness, the Crown Prince of Orange of the Netherlands,  
Chairman, UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and  
Sanitation

Your Excellency, Prime Minister Fukuda,

Your Excellency, former Prime Minister Mori,

Your Excellencies, the Heads of State and Government,

Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Welcome by Governing Council

On behalf of the Governing Council of the Asia Pacific Water Forum, it gives me great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all of you, especially to the many friends from outside Japan. It is an honour for me and for my two Vice-Chairs, Ambassador Erna Witoelar of Indonesia and Mr Ravi Narayanan of India, to welcome you all to the first Asia Pacific Water Summit.

This historic event would not have been possible without the tireless work of a number of people from across our vast and diverse region. Such a level of intra-regional cooperation is a remarkable achievement of the Asia Pacific Water Forum and of its ever-growing network of members and friends.

### What is the Asia Pacific Water Forum?

But what exactly is the Asia Pacific Water Forum or APWF as it has come to be called?

It is an open, inclusive, non-partisan, non-political, multi-stakeholder network. Every government, local and municipal authorities, academic and civil society organization, which has an interest in water, is welcome to join the Asia Pacific Water Forum.

### Thank the JWF and the Secretariat

We want to thank former Prime Minister Mori for allowing the Japan Water Forum to serve as the Secretariat of the Asia Pacific Water Forum. I want to thank three particularly outstanding members of the Secretariat: Mr Hideaki Oda, Ms Noriko Yamaguchi and Ms Taeko Yokota. Please join me in giving them a warm round of applause.

### Homage to PM Hashimoto

Some of you will recall the Joint Declaration issued by the Water Ministers of the Asia-Pacific Region, on 21 March, 2006, during the Fourth World Water Forum held in Mexico City. The Joint Declaration called for the creation of the Asia Pacific Water Forum and provided in its mandate, to work “*in complete solidarity to identify and adopt solutions to water issues in the region.*” The fact that this Summit is being held less than two years after the adoption of that declaration is a testimony to the hard work and effort put in by all the APWF members. The founding of the APWF was an initiative of the late Prime Minister Hashimoto and I would like to dedicate this Summit to his memory.

#### Meeting the MDG Target 10

The Asia Pacific Water Forum aims to contribute to sustainable water management and the achievement of the UN's Millennium Development Goals and Targets in the Asia Pacific. Target No. 10 is to reduce by half the number of people in the world without access to safe drinking water and modern sanitation by 2015. ASEAN, at its recent Summit in Singapore, committed itself to “endeavour to reduce by half of the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2010”. In the Asia Pacific, in spite of our growing prosperity, 700 million people do not have access to safe drinking water and 1.9 billion people do not have access to modern sanitation. The situation is unacceptable. We have the means to make safe water and modern sanitation a basic human right of all the peoples in this region. Our collective ambition is to ensure that water policy, reform, investment and performance are high on the agendas of our region's leaders.

### APWF's Two Objectives

The APWF's objectives are: (i) to provide countries and organisations in the Asia-Pacific region with a common platform and voice to articulate the region's strategies and promote its achievements in solving water problems and (ii) to showcase leadership in decision-making, excellence in practice and innovation, and results that have had a substantial impact at the grassroots level.

### Three Priority Themes

In order to meet its objectives, APWF has focused its efforts on three Priority Themes:

- Water Financing and Capacity Development;
- Water-related Disaster Management; and
- Water for Development and Ecosystems.

Progress towards each priority theme will be presented here at the Summit. I would like to set the stage by highlighting the key messages and recommendations from each of the Priority Themes. My speech is based upon the excellent Policy Brief which has been prepared by the whole APWF family, under the supervision of my two Vice-Chairs. I have also drawn inspiration from a new publication by ADB, entitled "Asian Water Development Outlook". I want to thank Mr Kuroda, President of the Asian Development Bank for this important contribution to the Summit.

## Water Financing and Capacity Development

Under the First Priority Theme, Water Financing and Capacity Development, APWF members have arrived at the conclusion “*that water problems of developing countries are manageable.*” What this means is that the knowledge base required to evolve proper solutions in the Asia Pacific region is currently available. However, in order to formulate and implement solutions in a timely, cost-effective, pragmatic and optimum manner will require significant additional investment, strong political will, and appropriate capacity development at all levels. The principal challenges are not technological – the hardware of water sector development – but rather the soft issues: sound policies, legal and regulatory reform; planning and technology choices; financing mechanisms; institutional reform and capacity development.

Water and sanitation must be given a higher priority on the national, regional and international agendas – and this requires a firm and continuing commitment from all our decision-makers and political leaders.

A regional investment of just US\$8 billion a year would ensure that the Asia-Pacific will meet the MDG Target on water and sanitation. This, in turn, would go a long way towards meeting the combined and complementary objectives of development and poverty reduction, economic growth and social equity in the region.

## Water Related Disaster Management

The second Priority Theme, Water-Related Disaster Management, has been seeking to create a new momentum for achieving a positive change in the way water-related disasters are managed in the Asia-Pacific region. As recently highlighted by the IPCC, the increasingly extreme climatic events, such as, floods, droughts and coastal flooding, induced by global warming is likely to further aggravate the impact of disasters in the region. Heavy rainfalls, which are very likely to increase in frequency, will augment the risk of floods. In the course of the next century, the volume of water stored in glaciers and snowcaps, which are melting, are projected to decline, reducing the availability of water that will affect more than one-sixth of the world's population. And, at the other end of the geographic spectrum, the vulnerability of small island states to water shortages, tropical cyclones and sea-level rise continues to increase dramatically.

These climatic projections illustrate the importance of recognizing "adaptation" to increasing risks from climate variability and change as one of the "highest" priority issues. It is, therefore, important to integrate water-related disaster risk reduction into national development plans and to link disaster reduction to national Integrated Water Resources Management plans. Establishing local and national targets for water-related disaster reduction, increasing capacity for monitoring and for early warning systems, and the development of preparedness indices are among the key recommendations that will be presented during this Summit.

## Water for Development and Ecosystems

The third and final Priority Theme focuses on Water for Development and Ecosystems. The challenge here is to secure water for long-term, multi-sectoral needs, generating both development and environmental dividends. This includes adopting practical tools to improve the economic, social and environmental outcomes of water management. Water management must recognize that ecosystems themselves require certain levels of water flows in order to remain productive and provide for the needs of all stakeholders in society.

This Priority Theme recommends: (i) the protection and restoration of urban environments, (ii) the modernization and management of irrigation systems and (iii) the adoption of environmental flows in water development planning and policies.

## Guiding Principles

The APWF has also developed a series of Guiding Principles to achieve our objectives and these include:

- Empowering the local authorities to which delivery of basic water services has been delegated, and strengthening their capacity to fulfill their role;
- Promoting partnership approaches between local authorities, Non-Governmental Organisations and community-based groups, as well as public and private sector service providers; and

- Providing resources for capacity development to ensure that the knowledge, skills and behavior changes are in place at the levels where these matter most.

### Five Key Results Areas

In order to achieve tangible and concrete progress towards each of the priority themes, and towards water and development in general, the APWF also developed five Key Result Areas (KRAs): (i) Developing knowledge and lessons; (ii) Increasing local capacity; (iii) Increasing public outreach; (iv) Monitoring investments and results; and (v) Supporting the work of the Forum and Summit, each of which encompasses a specific set of related activities.

Each of these Key Result Areas has generated a set of Concrete Initiatives. Some of these initiatives are well under way, while others are in the planning stages. However, every single one of these initiatives provides another piece to the puzzle of water security and developmental sustainability. These include the creation of platforms for knowledge coordination, sharing and management as well as monitoring at the regional and country levels.

### Impact on People at Grass Roots

All of these messages, recommendations and initiatives are good and commendable. However, our challenge is to implement them. With greater support from leaders and key decision-makers, we can achieve

progress on the ground that will make a real difference to the lives of hundreds of millions of people in our region, especially our poor people.

### Relationships with Other Major Events

The outcomes of the 1st APWS will feed directly into other high profile international events such as the thirteenth United Nations Climate Change Conference which begins in Bali today, the 2008 G8 Summit in Japan and the 5th World Water Forum. With 2008 earmarked as the International Year of Sanitation, this Summit will help to focus the region's attention on the equally challenging problem of sanitation.

### Conclusion

On behalf of the Asia Pacific Water Forum, its lead organizations, and of its many members from throughout the region, I thank you for participating in the 1<sup>st</sup> Asia Pacific Water Summit and committing to implement its deliverables. Let us agree to embrace our shared vision of raising water and sanitation to the top of our local, national and global agendas. With political will and the support of all the stakeholders, we can make the dream of providing all the peoples of our region, sustainable access to affordable safe drinking water and modern sanitation a reality.

Thank you.

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