

SPEECH BY UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE MR. BJORN LJUNGQVIST IN HONOR OF WORLD WATER DAY 22 MARCH 2005

Your Excellency President Girma Wolde-Giorgis,
Your Excellency Minister of Water Resources, Ato Shiferaw Jarso,
Representatives of UN agencies,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Development Partners,
Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honor for me to be here today on this important occasion the Africa-wide Launch of the 2005-2015 International Decade for Action, "Water for Life" and have an opportunity to express what World Water Day 2005 means for the UN agencies UNEP, UNDP, WMO, UNESCO, WFP, UNAIDS and UNICEF whom I am asked to represent.

Allow me, on behalf of the United Nations and UNICEF, to thank the Ethiopian Government and the Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Health for hosting such a momentous launch.

Your Excellencies,

Today, 22nd March is the start date for, the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life" (2005 to 2015), as declared by the UN General Assembly in its 58th Annual Session. The slogan, "Water for Life" which can be taken to mean "Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Life", is a broad one embracing all health, social and economic aspects of life.

The Goal relevant to this slogan is MDG 7, which states, "Halve by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation." Where does the World, the Sub-Saharan region and Ethiopia stand with regard to achievement on this Goal?

Region/Country	Remaining Gaps in %	
	Without water	Without Sanitation
World	17	42
Sub-Sahara	42	64
Ethiopia	66	82

These figures make an announcement not only identifying the gaps but also of the great challenges that each of us is facing ahead; the most concerning one being for Ethiopia. Let me dwell for a minute on the Ethiopian situation. According to the above gaps if simply put into numbers of people, Ethiopia is expected to provide clean safe water for 3.6 million people and latrines for 4.5 million people each year of the Decade.

How can these challenges be effectively overcome and what can each one of us here do to accelerate coverage and meet the needs of the people.

Excellencies, ladies and Gentlemen,

Recognizing the immense task that lies ahead of us, all UN agencies have been and are committed to join hands with the Ethiopian Government to see that Millennium Development Goals, “Water for Life” are realized.

UNDP, based on its multi-sectoral cooperation with the Government provides substantial assistance that positively contributes to the achievement of the MDGs. It is committed to support projects that promote Good governance, partnership and in the development of policies, strategies and Programs of the Water and Health Sectors

UNESCO through its various programs and institutions devotes financial and technical assistance to many countries to enhance sustainable management of water. As the secretariat of the World Water Assessment Program is responsible for producing the World Water Report and will make sure that the national water assessment report of Ethiopia will be fed into the next World Assessment Report.

Other UN agencies such as WFP, UNAIDS, UNFPA and FAO are also involved in Water and sanitation related projects.

UNICEF firmly believes that improvements on water supply, sanitation and hygiene will dramatically improve the lives of children. 21% of children in developing countries are severely water deprived and a staggering 2.6 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation. These deprivations cost many lives and account for at least 1.6 million preventable child deaths each year. Hence UNICEF greatly prioritises water and sanitation within its programmes as it see it as a major contributing factor to child survival.

UNICEF’s response to this situation is to cooperate in the implementation of such improvements with our Government partners by supporting and promoting access to water and sanitation as a basic human right, with children & women receiving the highest priority. Promote integrated implementation of water, sanitation and hygiene education and Link the WES sector with health, nutrition, education and HIV/AIDS, so as to enhance overall child survival. As Berhane has just stated water and sanitation is fundamental not just to child survival but also to girls education, gender equity, maternal health, etc.

Excellencies, ladies and Gentlemen,

Last but not least, since we all know that there is no life without water and no better life without sanitation nor food security without water security, on behalf of the UN agencies I am now representing, I pleased to reiterate our commitment to the Ethiopian Government to work closely with you through the Decade until your MDGs “Water for Life” are fully met.

With this new decade we must recommit ourselves with renewed energy to improve the lives of children all over the continent.

Thank You!