



**Michel Jarraud, Chair to UN-Water,
Secretary-General of the World Meteorological
Organization (WMO)**

The importance of water and water issues

Excellencies, distinguished guests, colleagues,

It is a real pleasure to be here with you to participate in this special celebration of the International Day of Biological Diversity, with a special focus on water.

As highlighted by the Rio+20 outcome document, “water is at the core of sustainable development because it is linked to a number of key global challenges.”

Water is closely tied to food and energy security, human health, climate change, natural disasters, and ecosystems integrity. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation also opens opportunities for education and to advance the status of women.

However, 783 million people – one in every nine people in the world - still do not have access to improved sources of drinking water and 2.5 billion do not have improved sanitation facilities.

1.5 million children who die every year of waterborne diseases could be saved if they had access to sanitation, practiced good hygiene, and had a safe water supply.

Though there is better access to these services in urban areas, cities struggle to keep up with rapid urbanization, especially since nearly 40% of the world's urban expansion is growing slums.

Urban settlements constitute an important source of water pollution, with most of the wastewater flowing untreated directly into rivers, lakes and highly productive coastal zones. This is not only a threat to the environment, economic development and human health, but this is also a waste of valuable resources.

Indeed wastewater is a precious resource in a world that has to feed a population of 7 billion today – expected to reach 9 billion by 2050 - within the boundaries of its limited natural resources.

Agriculture is the biggest water user, with 70% of global withdrawals going to irrigation, against 20% for household's consumption and 10% for industry. If the global food production increases by 60% by 2050 like projections suggest, the pressure on freshwater resources will only increase.

At the same time, the demands for energy will more than double while extreme events, droughts and floods will also increase.

In many areas of the world water scarcity is already a reality and by 2025, 1.8 billion people will be living in areas of absolute water scarcity.

Cooperation and partnerships: the International Year of Water Cooperation and the place of nature

Acknowledging these challenges, the UN General Assembly declared 2013 the International Year of Water Cooperation, to remind leaders and stakeholders in all sectors that dialogue and cooperation is the only way to water security, equality, peace and sustainability.

The working definition of water security proposed by UN-Water in a brief launched on World Water Day, this last 22 March 2013, includes the preservation of ecosystems as one of its core elements.

If ecosystems are not protected and sustainably managed, there is no water security.

Nature, ecosystems and their biodiversity are therefore integral part of the cooperation chain.

The post-2015 development agenda and the SDGs

What better time to highlight what nature can do for humanity, than now that world leaders are discussing the future development agenda, an agenda that should have poverty reduction and sustainability at its core?

Now is the moment to finally realize that nature, if protected and preserved, holds the solution to sustainable development.

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