



ICELAND

Statement

by

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Water and sanitation are basic foundations of human life and health.

Lack of water and adequate sanitation is the world's single largest cause of illness. Over half of the people in the developing world suffering from diseases are affected by unsafe water and poor sanitation. And almost three million people, most of them children, die every year from waterborne diseases.

No measures give higher returns than investments in improving freshwater supplies and , sanitation. Water, sanitation and hygiene education programmes will also have a profound impact on the health of children.

The new report on the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment focuses on the linkages between ecosystem services and human well-being. The report argues that ensuring healthy ecosystems is a fundamental key to alleviating poverty and meeting other objectives of the MDGs (Millenium Development Goals).

According to the report there is still a considerable scope for action to reduce the severity of the problems related to the degradation of the ecosystem. Finding solutions is a common challenge for , and decision-makers and the international community in the years to come.

The first UN decade for water (1981-1990) brought water to over a billion people and sanitation to almost 770 million. Today, there are still 1,1 billion people without adequate access to water and 2.4 billion without appropriate sanitation.

It is very important that the "Water for Life" decade (2005-2015) will be a decade for action with a stronger focus on water related issues.

Allow me, in that context, to underline the importance of women's role.

Women and girls usually fetch water for their families and are most often the caregivers for those who fall ill. Therefore education, involvement and empowerment of women are a key to success.

Water is crucial for preserving biodiversity from freshwater lakes and rivers to mountain regions, wetlands, coastal zones and oceans.

Nearly half the world's population lives within 60 kilometres of the coast and the proportion will increae in this century.

Coastal zones are the most productive ecosystems on earth. They are today particularly at risk due to pollution from land-based activities. Such pollution causes local health problems and affects the marine ecosystem as a whole.

Improvement in sanitation in rapidly growing coastal cities can bring a double dividend: Enhancing health in the cities and preventing the deterioration of their environment.

Iceland is surrounded by water and we are heavily dependent on living marine resources, and the oceans are an integral part of the water cycle. The same applies for most coastal and islands states including Small Island Developing States.

In 1995 108 governments and the European Commission adopted The Global Programme of Action for Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA).

The GPA is the only global mechanism explicitly addressing the linkages between freshwater and coastal and marine environments.

The JPOI (The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation) reiterates the value of GPA as a tool for achieving internationally agreed goals and targets, including those associated with the Millenium Declaration.

Bearing this in mind Iceland urges governments, who have committed themselves to the GPA, to further strengthen the effective implementation of GPA.