

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
OPENING STATEMENT BY H.E. JOHN ASHE
CHAIRMAN, THIRTEENTH SESSION
11 April 2005

Mr Under-Secretary-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We are now beginning our first Policy Session under the new programme of work agreed at the 11th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in 2003. We will therefore be setting a precedent for the Commission. In fact I would note that other Commissions are also moving toward the new organization of work and will be watching our process with great interest. It is incumbent upon us to set a good example for them.

Let me run through a brief review of where we have been since CSD-11 and where we stand today.

At the **CSD-12 Review Session** in 2004, the Commission examined constraints and obstacles, best practices and possible approaches for implementation of the goals and targets set out in Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation for the thematic cluster of water, sanitation and human settlements.

At that session, delegations reported many impressive initiatives, often involving cooperation between governments and other stakeholders. The Partnerships Fair and the Learning Centre, which were for the first time integral parts of the session, also contributed to a rich exchange of information on innovative approaches and best practices.

However, the CSD-12 Review Session also concluded that efforts to date are still far below what is needed to reach the goals and targets agreed to in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, as well as in the relevant Millennium Development Goals for water, sanitation and human

settlements. The challenges, particularly those facing developing countries, are still immense. The persistence of poverty and the lack of financial resources, technology and capacity were cited as major challenges and constraints.

The CSD-12 Review Session also noted that delivery of water and sanitation services, as well as development and maintenance of other infrastructure, were largely a responsibility of local authorities. Lack of financial and technical capacity at the local level is therefore a major constraint. Improving cooperation and partnerships among stakeholders and enhancing the role of women in managing water and sanitation systems, and in urban development in general, remain as continuing challenges. In rural areas and in urban slums and informal settlements, improved cooperation between governments, local authorities and community organizations is critical for expanding services to poor people.

At the **Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting**, in February-March of this year, we examined policy options and possible actions for overcoming those key constraints and obstacles impeding implementation. That meeting identified a range of policies and activities that have proven effective in implementation, as reflected in the Chair's summary of the discussions, as well as in the accompanying user-friendly matrix prepared by the Secretariat. The IPM outcome can be seen as a valuable resource from which countries can draw as they develop implementation strategies that meet their specific conditions, needs and priorities.

Our charge now at **CSD-13**, with the productive outcomes of CSD-12 and the Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting in hand, is to decide on measures that will move us forward, that will have a measurable impact and that will prove that we can fundamentally make a difference. [particularly in terms of international cooperation].

At CSD-11, I would remind delegates, we agreed that the Policy Session of the two-year action-oriented, implementation cycle would take policy decisions on practical measures and options to expedite implementation. The goals and targets agreed in Johannesburg for water, sanitation and human settlements, which are largely included in the Millennium Development Goals, include reducing by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water or basic

sanitation, developing integrated water resource management and water efficiency plans, and improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers. My vision for CSD-13 is to take decisions on substantial practical measures – perhaps just a few – with real commitments of resources to implement them. Not only would this be a major contribution to the September MDG Summit but it would set a strong precedent for the future work of this Commission in the years to come, as well as setting an example for other functional Commissions of the United Nations.

International cooperation is another area where we could make some decisions. In particular, we might look at how the United Nations system can be more effectively organized to support the efforts of Member States, particularly the developing countries, to ~~make the most efforts to~~ make the most effective use of the resources that can be made available, both nationally and internationally. I believe that we have established, in our consideration of water, sanitation and human settlements over the past year, that international efforts to address the increasing water scarcity are fragmented, that insufficient international attention and resources have been given to sanitation, hygiene and wastewater treatment, and that the urgent problems of the cities of the developing world – where virtually all future population growth will occur – are not being adequately addressed. I would invite delegates to consider what decisions or recommendations we might make that would ensure that the United Nations system, including our own secretariat in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, better serves the Member States.

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We have a daunting challenge ahead of us during these next two week. But, we also have an opportunity to make a real difference in expediting the implementation of sustainable development. My contacts with governments and delegations over the past year have convinced me that the members of the Commission are prepared to make a break with business-as-usual; they are prepared to focus on practical and achievable decisions; and they are prepared to make commitments.

I am looking forward to working with you all over the next two weeks to achieve these goals.