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Topic: Turning Political Commitments into Action

STATEMENT

by

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Mr. Chairman, Mr. Deputy Secretary General, Distinguished Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me take this opportunity, Mr. Chairman, to congratulate you and Bureau members for excellent preparation of this Session. I wish to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his reports on the major challenges we are facing in the areas of water, sanitation and human settlement.

Indeed, the quantity and quality of water supply determine our life, our health, productivity and well-being. Lack of water leads to hunger, to migration of millions of people, biological diversity loss and soil degradation conducive to desertification. Contamination of available water resources negatively affects our health. Waterborne diseases are one of the major threats in many countries all over the world. Millennium Development Goals and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation stated that until 2015 we have to halve number of people having no access to water resources of adequate quantity and quality and to sanitation.

Political commitments were already adopted in New York in the year 2000 and at the World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002. Johannesburg Plan of Implementation still remains purely political document, but UN CSD is a right forum to translate political declarations into concrete activities, leading to practical implementation of Johannesburg commitments and achievement of MDGs.

Mr. Chairman, Dear Colleagues,

Poland confirms its support to all proposals made by my Colleague from Luxemburg on behalf of the European Union. We wish to emphasize the importance of preparation, adoption and implementation of national Integrated Water Resources Management strategies and plans.

We do believe that there is no universal formula for such a strategy. Each country has a sovereign right to decide how to manage its natural resources and to develop its own Strategy taking into account local circumstances: water resources, existing infrastructure, natural resources, biological diversity, regional development programmes, and, what we consider as the most important, local ambitions.

Poland has already drafted its National Integrated Water Resources Management Strategy, which is now under very

comprehensive public consultations with all stakeholders. We have already adopted our 2nd National Environmental Policy and National Sustainable Development Strategy until 2025, where sustainable water resources management received the highest priority. In line with our EU Accession Treaty and EU Framework Water Directive, until 2015, Poland will spend approximately 20 billion EUR for water management investments, which means spending about 2 billion EUR each year. The majority of funds will be generated domestically, however we expect some assistance from EU cohesion and structural funds. We also believe that innovations, technology development and educational programmes on changing consumption and production patterns will help us to reach national targets sooner and at lower costs. We can promise, that all our experiences as well as possible savings in expenditures will be directed for assistance to poorer countries.

Mr. Chairman, Dear Colleagues,

When the financial resources are inadequate to cover all expenditures, we have to establish the list of priorities: the list of tasks that need urgent tackling, the list of regions and countries being the most vulnerable. This approach is valid also in the case of water supply and sanitation. Some regions, such as Africa, are particularly affected by droughts and desertification. Catastrophic floods, hurricanes and other natural disasters threaten other regions and countries, such as South and East Asia. In other regions, such as in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia countries, despite adequate water resources, due to economic recession and political problems, water supply infrastructure has been damaged and available water resources contaminated. We have to define what political declaration of "halving by 2015 population having no access to water and sanitation" means. How can we draw such a line across the world? Where do we have to undertake action first? This question seems to be very important when establishing the list of priorities.

The first priority should be to assist countries that have no adequate water resources, including those with very low rainfall. In such circumstances every drought may cause further soil degradation leading to desertification, hunger and, consequently, to death of many people. In case of the least developed countries, most indebted countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, they lack capacity to address these problems by themselves. Without external assistance they may not survive. They urgently need assistance due to purely humanitarian reasons, without discussions on the public-private partnership,

investment climate and so on. We are obliged to do our utmost to provide them with water supply. EU "Water for Life" initiative is a first step in this direction.

The second priority should be given to the countries, which have more or less enough natural water resources, quite developed infrastructure, but due to different reasons mentioned before, this infrastructure may be completely destroyed within next few years because of dramatic lack of resources to maintain existing facilities. This situation is widespread in the EECCA countries, particularly in Central Asia. An external assistance, also in the form of PPP and Foreign Direct Investments, may lead to accelerated improvement of water management in these countries and moreover we can win new well-experienced allies and partners for our assistance activities in a very short time. Poland is ready to transfer our experience, knowledge and technologies to these countries both within EU "Water for Life" partnership initiative and through bilateral assistance.

The third priority should be given to countries experiencing seasonal catastrophic floods and, simultaneously, catastrophic contamination of surface and ground water resources. I see two parallel ways to resolve these problems. First one is to educate, build the capacity and public awareness, which is indispensable for reaching our sanitation targets. There is no chance to implement sanitation policies and maintain the infrastructure without well-educated and aware individual users. The second one is to invest in sanitation and water supply infrastructure. This should be done through PPP and FDI, providing that interested countries will create enabling climate for foreign and domestic investments.

Mr. Chairman, Dear Colleagues,

The information for decision-makers, for politicians, should be uniform, certain, and comparable, thus based on the same set of different sustainability indicators. Many organizations, including UN CSD, UNEP, OECD, European Union, and research institutes have undertaken work on indicators for sustainable development. We, as politicians need a core set of the same indicators to monitor the progress in achieving Millenium Development Goals and Johannesburg targets. I thank you, Mr. Chairman.