



R E P U B L I C O F
B U L G A R I A

STATEMENT

by H.E. Mrs. Dolores Arssenova

Minister of Environment and Water
of the Republic of Bulgaria

at the High Level Segment
of the 12th Session of the
Commission on Sustainable Development

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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Enhancing the opportunities for providing sufficient and safe drinking water for the population, adequate sanitation, as well as an overall improvement of environment in human settlements are among the main priorities of Agenda 21, the Millennium Declaration and the decisions of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.

In this context the Republic of Bulgaria welcomes the commitment of the Commission on Sustainable Development to devote this first two-year cycle of its new multi-year program of work to these issues, which play an important role in achieving sustainable development on a global scale.

I have the pleasure to report that my country has considerable achievements in this area. With central water supply for 98.8 % of the population and large-scale programs for construction of adequate sewerage and wastewater treatment infrastructure under implementation, long before 2015 Bulgaria has already reached the water and sanitation related Millennium Development Goals on a national scale. Still, bringing down water losses in the pipeline system remains a problem. The 1999 Water Act envisages a series of economic incentives and provides a good basis for private sector initiative and public-private partnerships in the form of water supply concessions for the big cities, which are expected to help solve this problem.

Aware of the significance of water for the quality of life and economic development, Bulgaria gives priority to integrated water resources management. With this goal in mind, together with the provision of an adequate legal basis, institutional capacity building measures are being undertaken. Thus, four River Basin Management Directorates were set up in 2002 as the main bodies responsible for the implementation of water policy at the basin level and being able to address specific social and economic issues related to water in the respective regions in the best possible way. River Basin Councils have also been set up to provide a platform for wide stakeholder involvement in water management, integrating priority issues for the private sector, municipalities, farmers, the general public, etc.

Currently, River Basin Management Plans having the key features of integrated water resources management plans as conceived in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation are being developed. In accordance with Bulgaria's foreign policy priorities targeting the country's accession to the European Union we are committed to complete by year 2009 the preparation of River Basin Management Plans consistent with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) and based on improved information and monitoring systems.

The recognized need for an integrated approach to water management and the existing political will provide a sound basis for Bulgaria's contribution to the joint efforts of the riparian countries aimed at achieving good ecological status of water in the international Danube River Basin, as well as to bilateral cooperation with neighboring countries on trans-boundary watercourses management issues.

In addition to the social and economic function of water, its significance for aquatic ecosystems is an important aspect of sustainable water resource management. In this respect, by relying on both international support and domestic resources, Bulgaria is implementing programs for wetland restoration and conservation of water related ecosystems, which constitute part of the measures for significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010.

Bulgaria supports the International Decade for Action "Water for Life" declared by the General Assembly and calls for targeted and coordinated action-oriented measures, which will bring practical results through various international programs and initiatives in this area.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Access to water is a basic human right and our mission as politicians and human beings is to conduct a responsible policy with regard to the management and rational use of this resource in the spirit of international solidarity and cooperation. Our goal should be not only to avoid possible water-related conflicts in the future but also to provide future generations with opportunities for a better life.

Thank you.