

Statement by H.E. Mr. Tahir Iqbal, Minister of State for Environment, Local Government and Rural Development in the Twelfth Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (30 April 2004)

Mr. Chairman,

The themes of CSD 12, namely water, Sanitation and Human Settlements, focus on important challenges faced by developing countries. The three issues are also closely inter-linked and required to be addressed in an integrated manner.

Water, is the lifeline of Pakistan's economy. However, like many other countries, Pakistan is faced with issues of acute water shortage and water quality. The current estimated deficit is about 15 MAF which, over the next 25 years, is projected to increase many folds. Pakistan may become a water deficit country shortly if this trend is not arrested.

At present, 63% of Pakistan's population has access to safe drinking water, while 39% has access to proper sanitation facilities. Resultantly, the incidents of waterborne diseases in the country are on the rise. Another emerging issue is prevalence of arsenic concentrations in the drinking water. A recent study has found existence of excess concentrations of arsenic in more than 30% of districts tested.

Government of Pakistan is seized with the situation and has taken a number of steps. These include implementation of watershed projects to reduce silting of reservoirs, formulation of water sector strategy, development of a marshal plan "Water Visioin-2025", water quality monitoring in selected cities, construction of water and wastewater treatment plants and expansion of water supply & sanitation coverage. A comprehensive programme to establish a network of water treatment plants in the high priority districts of the country is also underway.

In order to expand sanitation coverage, the Government has taken a number of steps, which include construction of filter plants in areas which are dependent on exposed water sources and in districts with a high priority need for water treatment. Provincial governments have embarked on sanitation acceleration programmes and building up the capacities of the lowest tiers of government to deliver this programme as part of a comprehensive devolution package.

In the area of Human settlement, Pakistan is faced with the challenges of urbanization. Out of its around 150 million population, the urban population constitutes about 33%, and is increasing at a rate of 4% per year. This process of rapid urbanization has resulted in overcrowding of cities and deterioration of environment. It has also taxed the already inadequate civic amenities and services to a considerable extent. It is estimated that 35-40% of the total urban population are living in informal squatter settlements. Currently, there is a shortage of over 5.4 million housing units alone, with an annual shortfall of 270,000 units every year.

Government of Pakistan is fully cognizant of the problem and has adopted various long and short term policy measures including the development of programmes to cope with housing and human settlement issues. A set of National Policy guidelines on Katchi Abadis (squatter settlements) Urban Renewal and Slums Upgradation have been formulated on the recognition that katchi abadis are an integral part of the urban fabric. The key focus of the policy is towards upgrading katchi abadis at their existing locations as well as grant of ownership rights, besides voluntary resettlement of residents of those katchi abadis the land of which is needed for operational purposes. For this purpose, re-settlement plans are being finalized in consultation with the communities involved.

In Islamabad, a “Model Urban Shelter Project” has been prepared and its implementation is on-going. Proprietary rights are being granted on emergency grounds and development of physical infrastructure in the katchi abadis to be up-graded at present site is at its full swing. All such work is being implemented in collaboration with the local communities.
Mr. Chairman,

Government of Pakistan is endeavoring to take all possible measures to address the issues of water, sanitation and human settlements. We hope these initiatives would go a long way in improving the life of our people. We also hope that in this endeavour, we would have the full support of the international community.

I thank you.