



ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR. KAMAL ALI MOHAMED, MINISTER OF IRRIGATION AND WATER RESOURCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE SUDAN, CHAIR OF THE GROUP OF 77, AT THE FIRST GROUP OF 77 MINISTERIAL FORUM ON WATER (Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, 23 February 2009)

Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Distinguished Guests,

1. I am deeply honoured and privileged to welcome you all at this important gathering "The First Group of 77 Ministerial Forum on Water Resources" and to extend to you, Ministers, and special guests, my most sincere and heartfelt greetings. I would also like to express our most earnest gratitude to the Sultanate of Oman for the warm reception we have all received upon our arrival in Muscat. The hosting of this meeting is yet another eloquent testimony to the remarkable, dynamic and pragmatic leadership role played by the Sultanate of Oman in the developing world in general and on issues related to sustainable development in particular. We pay special tribute to the Government and the people of the Sultanate of Oman.
2. As you all know, water resources are under extreme pressure today in developing countries especially as growing urbanization and global warming are affecting access to drinking water and sanitation. Countries of the South face daunting water resources challenges as the needs for water supply grows and water becomes more and more scarce, its quality declines and environmental and social concerns increase due to climate change. According to a 2008 report of UNICEF and WHO, an estimated 884 million people are without access to safe water and 2.5 billion people lack adequate sanitation.
3. Water is implicated in 80 per cent of all sicknesses and diseases in the world and especially in developing countries, 90 per cent of wastewater is discharged into rivers and streams without any treatment. The emerging lack of adequate availability of water resources is more and more recognized as a major focus in the efforts to improve the quality of life of southern countries and achieve socio-economic development.
4. Therefore we must seek innovative solutions which by improving the immediate environment will gradually allow populations of the South to sustain access to water and sanitation the first basic step for economic development. This Forum is taking place in accordance with the relevant mandate of the Thirty First Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Group of 77 held in New York on 27 September 2007 and its aim is to encourage South-South collaboration on integrated water resources management and environment in order to achieve a better understanding of solutions that can be enacted appropriately. The importance of this meeting cannot be over-emphasized as water increasingly becomes a precious resource on which the well-being of future generations depends. Issues of easy access to water, water quality, underground water, management and planning as well as other related topics are essential to the future of our populations.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

5. Water, the engine of economic growth, is such a resource that not a single human being or any other form of life can exist without it. In this context, water scarcity and water natural disasters are dilemmas that our countries cannot disregard as water related challenges are widespread throughout the whole world, particularly severe in the developing countries. Since lack of access to water and water predicaments occur disproportionately across the South and they rigorously affects our populations, there is a strong need for the whole South to cooperate and address the emerging environmental issues that are caused by water stress and water scarcity as well as degradation of the environment.

6. Therefore, the Forum will present socio-political, scientific and technologically advanced approached for the management of water and environment. The Forum's goal is to bring together researchers, scientists, policy makers, institutes, international organizations and interest groups who are focusing on and associated with water management and environment issues in the developing countries. These groups of experts will be able to exchange information, experiences and best practices. The central aim of the Ministerial Forum is to serve on an annual basis, as the main arena for exchange of views and know-how between policy-makers, scientists, business and civil society communities in order to improve endeavours of water in relation to environment, livelihoods and poverty reduction.

7. Numerous United Nations conferences have been held to tackle the different water resources challenges such as scarcity, storage, irrigation and waste treatment. Many plans of action and other consensus were forged about the fundamental role of effective water resources development and management in economic growth and poverty reduction. Despite these numerous agreements, evidence has shown that progress in implementing the decisions has been difficult, slow and uneven. Therefore, there is a need for southern countries to explore new ways and avenues among ourselves in order to tackle basic needs in terms of water resources. We must be active both in management and development of water resources infrastructures in order to, increase access and effective use to safe water for the populations of the South.

Excellencies,
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8. The Millennium Development Goals (point 10 of goal 7), recognized access to water and sanitation as being critical for human development and its aim is to "halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015". The 884 million of people who do not have access to safe drinking water are among the poorest and live in developing countries. Besides, 70 percent of the poor are living in rural areas and they rely mainly on agriculture for livelihoods. This means that water availability for agriculture in the rural based developing economies is crucial for the achievement of poverty alleviation. At this stage, it has become more and more difficult for most of our countries to pursue successfully agricultural productivity without causing breakdown in the ecosystems. In that regard, we must act on all factors and address the issue of water in a holistic and integrated manner to achieve positive results.

9. In this regard, the Forum is geared at:

- encouraging corporations and alliances between members of the Group, organizations and individual from various fields of expertise in a stimulating environment which offers liberal prospect for making new contacts and strengthening existing relationships,
- developing capacity for policy-makers in collaboration with various professionals to activate and influence constructive transformation by assisting them in their efforts to enhance the effectiveness

in the formulation and implementation of strategic plans for water resources management,

- promote an amplified know-how and broader comprehension of the connexion between water, environment, society and economy;
- reexamining the execution of actions, commitments and decisions in South-South practices and by different interest groups in response to the 21st century water pressures,
- shaping a progress that can be expediently attained through immediate willingness and implementation of sufficiently relevant strategies.

10. As we all know, there are similarities and differences between regions of the South as well as trends of development and climatic circumstances. We believe that a commonly shared vision and unified execution of such visions would inspire self-reliance and strengthen partnerships among our countries. We are gathering here to help facilitate the link between policy, decision making, science and practice in order to transcend the recurrent rhetoric between the reality and our desired goals and unify a variety of know-how and experience to attain development and environmental objectives in a meaningful mode.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

11. This first Ministerial Forum constitute an excellent opportunity to address the common challenges and strategies for the management of water resources, with a special focus on the promotion of the exchange of scientific and technological know-how and the sharing of experiences and best practice among the countries of the South. There is an urgent need for more intensive cooperation in water resources sector that has been long acknowledged by the scientific community in the South. Many examples of subregional, regional and interregional scientific networking of water institutions have proven to be a strong tool for knowledge exchange and capacity building.

12. Our primary objective is to support our countries in their efforts to improve the management, conservation, and sustainable use of water resources by promoting social and economic growth. Specific actions involve the promotion of water governance, infrastructures for water supply, assistance in the development of policies, laws and regulations for integrated water resource management, capacity building in subregional, interregional, regional, national and local institutions, and promotion of the exchange of information among our institutions.

13. We are expecting policy makers, the researchers, scientists, institutes, international organizations and interest groups in the area of water to present their views and experiences in water resources management. We will commit special attention to highlight concrete work that matters and could benefit the poor, the environment and our common culture. Besides the share of experiences, we also need appropriate policies that include incentives, access to knowledge and technology, well targeted public investments as well as private initiatives and the development of institutional frameworks that guarantee fair access to water for farmers.

14. Water is a basic human need of vital importance in meeting food security needs and the alleviation of poverty as well as the protection of the environment. In conclusion, I would like to encourage us all to address in an efficient and practical way the challenges and predicaments of water resources management. Our decisions will crucially impact on the well-being of our peoples and of the entire human kind.

I wish all success to your deliberations.

Thank you.

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