

22 March 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on World Water Day**

Ten years ago the international community designated 22 March as World Water Day to draw attention to the need for husbanding our water resources. As we all know, water is the fountain of life on our blue planet. Water plays a crucial role in the generation of energy, in agriculture and the production sector of all societies. Water has shaped our past and we know that it will be no different in the future. Therefore the chosen theme of this year's World Water Day - Water for the Future - is highly appropriate. This year we also celebrate the International Year of Freshwater, thereby providing an added emphasis on the management of this precious commodity.

The Millennium Declaration pledged to halve, by the year 2015, the number of people unable to reach or afford safe drinking water. It also resolved to stop the unsustainable exploitation of water resources by developing water management strategies at the regional, national and local levels that promote both equitable access and adequate supplies. The World Summit on Sustainable Development has reiterated the goals and made a clear commitment towards strengthening water-related management capacities.

Better water management is needed because currently more than 1 billion people lack access to safe drinking water, 2,5 billion people have no access to proper sanitation and more than 5 million people die each year from water related diseases. Estimates show that by the year 2025, two thirds of the world's population will live in countries with moderate or severe fresh water shortages. Therefore supporting and ensuring access to clean water and sanitation are absolutely essential. The international community and the United Nations need to continue to address different aspects of water management.

One important area for the United Nations is to provide information to the public and help set up environmental standards for preservation, conservation and protection of water resources. In this regard, I am pleased to see the first-ever UN system-wide effort to monitor and assess the global and regional water situation, as it relates to health, food, energy, disaster risk management, ecosystems, cities, and other aspects in its World Water Development Report, which will be issued this month at the Third Water Forum in Kyoto.

To secure water for the future, there must be increased multilateral and bilateral cooperation on the management of shared water resources because two thirds of the world's rivers flow through more than one country. The depletion of water in shared rivers or seas can damage relations between neighboring states, therefore measures need to be promoted to prevent conflict. Furthermore, the importance of managing risk has been gaining far greater recognition in recent

years, as the incidence and impact of water related disasters becomes more frequent and wide spread, due to the increased vulnerability of societies and change in global climate patterns. Strong international solidarity and commitment by the international community on this issue has still to be harnessed.

We all know that we cannot afford to fail in protection of water, the most important resource on Earth. Therefore we have to intensify our efforts to promote a culture of "caring, sparing and sharing" to protect our environment and to ensure clean water for everyone, now and in the future.