

20 May 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Second Asia-Pacific Water Summit “Water Security:
Leadership and Commitment”**

Madam Prime Minister,
Esteemed Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct honor to address the Second Asia-Pacific Water Summit here in beautiful Chiang Mai.

At the onset of my remarks, allow me to thank the Royal Thai Government for their kind invitation and exceptional hospitality.

I would like to acknowledge their strong commitment to focusing the world’s scrutiny on the challenges posed by the lack of water security, as well as their leadership in seeking innovative solutions to water-related disaster prevention.

Water is fundamental to our very existence, as King Bhumibol Adulyadej has emphasized time and again. In a landmark address at the Chitralada Palace, His Majesty spoke of the transcendental value of water and its indispensability to development: “If there is no water, we cannot survive,” the King said.

In commemoration of His Majesty’s Seventh Cycle Birthday Anniversary, I take this opportunity to emphasize that he has been the driving force behind a great range of water management initiatives across Thailand for more than 60 years. These have included flood prevention, drainage and irrigation projects, construction of dams and reservoirs, clean water retention ventures, and many others. In 2006, UNDP recognized his outstanding contributions to environmental conservation by awarding him with the inaugural Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award.

Excellencies,

As President of the UN General Assembly, I had the pleasure of convening its High-Level Interactive Dialogue, which took place on March 22nd World Water Day.

I also had the honor of participating in the formal launch of the International Year of Water Cooperation, established on the basis of a General Assembly resolution. It affirmed that access to safe, secure, and reliable supply of water is essential for alleviating poverty, promoting health, raising living standards, and achieving sustainable development.

More than ever before, this finite yet indispensable resource, covering 70 percent of the Earth's surface, is under threat. It is beset by an expanding set of dangers caused by rising populations, reckless methods of stimulating economic growth, climate change, and human-induced environmental devastation.

The situation in the economically and geographically diverse Asia-Pacific region is especially complex.

High natality coupled with rapid industrialization and unplanned urbanization has resulted in unsustainable consumption patterns, pollution, and poor management, with potentially destructive consequences. This generates increasing strains on food production and agricultural security. Water-related disasters have led to the loss of livelihoods, large-scale migration within and across borders, and heightened economic and geopolitical tensions and instabilities.

As President of the UN General Assembly, I fully support the aims of this Summit to provide a launch pad to spread knowledge about the grave challenges posed by water insecurity amongst decision makers, public and private sectors, civil society and the general public.

I hope that today's discussions will help set the tone for upcoming water-related events, such as the High-Level International Conference on Water Cooperation to be hosted by the Republic of Tajikistan in August.

Excellencies,

As the historic "Future We Want" document that world leaders endorsed last June in Rio underscores, "water is at the core of sustainable development as it is closely linked to a number of key global challenges." Addressing these will stretch the imagination, resourcefulness and fortitude of UN Member States as never before.

In establishing the framing principles of the post-2015 agenda, Member States agreed for the first time on measures to comprehensively integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development namely economic, social, and environmental into a single, fully coherent whole.

They mandated the General Assembly to conceive and adopt the SDGs, design options for financing them, and create a workable intergovernmental arrangement for monitoring their implementation in essence, assigning that body with the strategic aim of crafting a new, ambitious global framework that will define much of the UN's work for decades to come.

There is no doubt that ensuring water security is a global priority, and that this issue cannot be addressed by the efforts of individual nations. The growing stress on resources can only be ameliorated if UN Member States commit to participate in a common endeavor, whilst recognizing that ensuring water security is a core national interest for each of them.

Excellencies,

An increasing number of water-related disasters pose a significant risk to the Small Island Developing States, the Least Developed Countries, and the Landlocked Developing Countries.

Regretfully, Thailand has not been spared, either.

A few months ago, I was privileged to listen to Deputy Prime Minister Kittirat Na Ranong speak eloquently before the General Assembly about his country's decisive response to the "mega flood" of 2011.

He described the severe physical ruin and economic devastation in excess of US \$10 billion.

The Royal Thai Government's reaction was swift and comprehensive.

Citizens who were directly affected by the flooding were provided with humanitarian and financial support, while various rapid recovery programs helped get businesses and factories quickly up and running again.

Disaster prevention measures were also upgraded and state-of-the-art flood alleviation systems were introduced, as a result of \$11.5 billion US dollar investment in the integrated water management infrastructure.

I believe that Thailand's leadership and commitment to water security issues can serve as a model for others to emulate.

Excellencies,

Mankind is pressing hard against the planet's ecological boundaries, as the draft Chiang Mai Declaration underscores.

We must think outside the box as we consider how to both harness natural resources more effectively, and alleviate risks in the period before us. We need innovative, practical solutions that make use of new technologies, in order to achieve universal sustainable development.

Galvanizing the political will of leaders across the world is a herculean effort and I am afraid that we are not moving forward boldly enough. We still do not approach the monumental challenges we face with a sense of urgency required to save the planet from the devastating consequences of the uncontrolled exploitation of the environment.

The window of opportunity to prevent the effects of climate change from spiraling out of our control is closing.

I hope that the Second Asia-Pacific Water Summit will achieve the goal set by its organizers: to identify specific areas of enhanced collaboration, as well as the appropriate mechanisms for follow up action by the countries represented at this Conference, and the wider world.

Excellencies,

There is a traditional Thai proverb that says “you never miss the water until the well runs dry” [แกงจืดจึงรู้คุณค่าเกลือ]. I understand it is often employed by His Serene Highness, Prince Bhisadej Rajani, in illustrating the dangers of wastefully using this indispensable resource.

The Prince serves as the Director of the Royal Project, which has since 1969 worked to preserve the natural environment and promote sustainable agricultural practices in Northern Thailand. It is headquartered in Chaing Mai, and has been a leading authority on water and watershed conservation for decades.

It was also one of the first institutions to identify the link between efficient water management, sustainable agricultural production, and poverty alleviation a nexus that the draft Chaing Mai Declaration recognizes as critical to achieving the goals of the Asia-Pacific Water Forum.

In wishing everyone a productive and successful Summit, allow me to conclude with what Prince Rajani once said in explaining the initiatives of the Royal Project.

I believe that it encapsulates in many ways what we can learn from Thailand’s experience in raising living standards in rural areas through innovative, hands-on approaches to ensuring water security: “We focus on obtaining knowledge, through research, avoiding bureaucratic entanglements and swift action to respond to villagers’ needs, while listening to their problems and promoting self-reliance.”

Thank you very much for your attention.