



Casa Solans Avda. Cataluña, 60
50014 Zaragoza, SPAIN
T +34 976 478 346
T +34 976 478 347
F +34 976 478 349
water-decade@un.org
un.org/waterlifedecade

The First International Conference of the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance: Raising Awareness and Communicating the Urgency to Act

Zaragoza, Spain – 3 to 4 December 2009

- *International Water Operators take part in the 2-days International Conference organized by the United Nations on the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance on awareness raising and communicating the urgency to act.*
- *The conference points out that the role of water operators as information and education communicators is paramount to public advocacy and awareness-raising and key for reaching the Millennium Development Goals.*
- *Launch of "Water Smart" – the United Nations communication campaign for water operators*

Zaragoza, 1st December 2009. The First International Conference of the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance with the title "Raising Awareness and Communicating the Urgency to Act" invites up to 60 water operators from all parts of the world to come together in Zaragoza on 3 and 4 December 2009 to exchange experiences and build new partnerships.

The conference is jointly organized by the United Nations Office to Support the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015 (UNO-IDfA), which implements the UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC), and the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance, hosted by UN-Habitat, with the support of the regional platforms of Water Operators Partnerships (WOPs) and the water operators from 5 continents (Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Middle East and Europe), the Municipality of the City of Zaragoza, the Government of Aragon, the Spanish Ministry of the Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs, and the Ebro River Basin Authority.

The objectives of the International Conference are to bring together water and wastewater utilities to discuss and exchange experience on the modalities of different legal and financial mechanisms, to support and collaborate in the south-south and north-south Water Operators' Partnerships as a corporate social responsibility and communications tool. Good practices on communication will be presented and discussed and collaboration and cooperation channels will be analyzed.

The conference will be the platform to introduce and launch "Water Smart", the United Nations communication campaign for Water Operators on the Urgency to Act with special focus on the World Water Day 2010 which concentrates the water world in March next year on water quality.

The two day conference will take place in the SEMINARIO, the seminary building of Zaragoza, and include in the program experience exchange with the Water Institute of Aragon and a technical visit to the Zaragoza Purification Plant.

Background

As providers of drinking water for the majority of the world's population, water operators have great power to communicate, show by example, and inspire their customers about the urgent need to act in solidarity towards common sustainable environmental and development goals.

“Increasingly, water operators are engaging in awareness raising campaigns, international development, and corporate social responsibility efforts and sharing their skills through Water Operators’ Partnerships”, states Ms. Josefina Maestu, Director of UNO-IDfA/Coordinator of UNW-DPAC, “They are key in achieving sustainable development”.

The operators in the world face different realities in each of their regions, countries and population needs. Some have to inform their clients on health risks and water quality as in Ghana where water born diseases caused by, for example, fluoride in water. The *Community Water and Sanitation Agency* in Ghana also deals with basic sanitation and hygiene projects or inform about water projects, mainly about water pumps. According to the situation in some regions of the country the water operator does not charge small rural communities.

Water Operators also launch campaigns on how to deal with extreme events like droughts while providing information and education about water efficiency use and water quality like the Moroccan *Office National de l’Eau Potable du Maroc*, which covers 96% of the urban and 86% of the rural population in Morocco.

Some educational campaigns have created animation games and films like the *Empresa Pública de Medellín de Agua, Energía y Gas* de Colombia, which has created a virtual home for efficient water use via interactive films or the game *world citizen legion (la legión ciudadmundos)*, combined with special educational activities.

Other water operators are involved in international water operators’ networks and assist in the north-south dialogue and cooperation as the French Water Operator *Eau de Paris*, among others.

“All the water operators are in contact with the population, with the water users, to communicate and to raise awareness. They are key agents”, states Ms. Maestu, “Twinning between the WOPs as will be practiced in the International Conference will help to reach the Millennium Development Goals”.

UN-HABITAT is the United Nations agency for human settlements. It is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. UN-HABITAT’s Water and Sanitation Programme is concerned with improving access to safe water and helping provide adequate sanitation to millions of low-income urban dwellers. UN-HABITAT hosts the **Global Water Operators’ Partnership Alliance**, an international network of actors working to promote and implement not-for-profit water operators’ partnerships to improve the capacity and performance of water utilities, with the ultimate objective of improving service to the poor.

Water Decade 2005-2015. The primary goal of the ‘**Water for Life’ Decade** is to promote efforts to fulfill international commitments on water-related issues by 2015. These commitments include the Millennium Development Goals to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2015, to stop unsustainable exploitation of water resources. The Water Decade also promotes the development and implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management and water efficiency plans.

The United Nations Office to Support the International Decade for Action ‘Water for Life’ 2005-2015 (UNO-IDfA) in Zaragoza implements the UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC). The 26 member entities of UN-Water, the United Nations interagency coordination mechanism on water, support Member States worldwide, in their efforts to achieve water and sanitation goals and targets. UNW-DPAC facilitates and implements communication, information and awareness raising activities in the framework of the ‘**Water for Life’ Decade**. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) hosts and leads UNO-IDfA/UNW-DPAC.