



Conference: Sustainable Water Management in Cities Engaging Stakeholders for effective Change and Action

Zaragoza, Spain – 13 to 17 December 2010

Press release

Zaragoza, Spain, 14 December 2010 – The conference ‘Sustainable Water Management in Cities - Engaging stakeholders for effective change and action’ brings together over 200 international participants to Zaragoza, Spain. During this week participants will share their experiences on water management in an urban context. Finally, the conference serves as a roadmap leading to World Water Day 2011.

The conference is co-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), the City of Zaragoza, Spain, the SWITCH project Consortium for the conference on Urban Water Management, and UN-Habitat.

Water and Cities

Sustainable, efficient and equitable management of water in cities has never been as important as in today's world. Many cities cope with severe water uncertainties, such as floods, droughts and upstream activities on transboundary rivers. Climate change and water-related disasters will place increasing demands on urban systems and will result in increased migration to urban areas. The most vulnerable are the urban poor, since they often live in hazardous locations, such as flood plains, and in poor quality housing and infrastructure. A lack of safe drinking water and sanitation results in fecal-oral diseases such as diarrhea and outbreaks of malaria and cholera.

“One out of four urban dwellers does not have access to improved sanitation facilities,” says Ms. Josefina Maestu, Director of UNO-IDfA/UNW-DPAC. “Water has definitely not yet received the place it needs to have in the international debates. Good management of water resources and the provision of drinking water and sanitation are prerequisites to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.”

Half of humanity now lives in cities and, within two decades, nearly 60% of the world’s population will be urban dwellers. Urban growth is most rapid in the developing world, where cities gain an average of 5 million residents every month. In Africa and Asia, the urban population will double between 2000 and 2030. Cities are growing because of: natural increase in urban population (50%), reclassification of rural areas as urban areas (25%) and rural-to-urban migration.

The Conference

Policymakers, media representatives, technical experts and members of international organizations from across the globe have come together to share their experiences in sustainable urban water management, practical political engagement and the role of the media in this process.

The conference focuses on how to put sustainable urban water management into practice. The discussions and sessions in the conference focus on the experiences in water management in cities worldwide, analyzing the tools and approaches and concentrating on practical politics and analyzing the role of the media in reporting on these issues and shaping public opinion.

"The meeting is also a preparatory step in the preparation for World Water Day 2011. This year the theme focuses on the issue of urban water management," states Bert Diphooorn, Director of the Human Settlements Financing Division of UN-Habitat.

Conference Programme

The programme of the five-day international meeting and conference includes field trips to various technical installation such as the Casablanca Water Treatment Plant, the Water Cycle Municipal Board, and demonstrations of landscape interventions at the Ebro River side.

Today, at the opening of the Conference, city experiences in sustainable water management will be shared with concrete examples from Poland (Lodz), Brazil (Belo Horizonte), and Spain (Zaragoza) and over 20 city examples from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America will be discussed. Strong focus is put on learning alliances and social inclusion for successful change towards sustainable water management. Emphasis is put on the importance of stakeholder experience in putting into practice the appropriate actions and to promote and strengthen the development capacities of local organizations and communities.

On Wednesday, 15 December, the conference focuses in plenary discussions and working groups on analyzing tools and approaches in stakeholder engagement, the strengthening of public participation, engaging grassroots and neighbourhood organizations.

The focus on concrete and practical political engagement will be discussed on Thursday, 16 December, as water issues deal with both technical and political challenges. Engaging local political leaders and other stakeholders in debates on the political opportunities and threats to sustainable water management in cities opens up dialogue and to find ways to overcome some of the complex challenges.

The final day of the conference focuses on the role of the media in the process of change in urban water management which includes discussion with international journalists and stakeholders. Further to this the outcome of the conference is debated and discussed in United Nations discussion round with UN-Water representatives focusing on the upcoming World Water Day 2011.

The conference week also includes side events open to the public to engage local leaders and audience. A special international session organized by the Spanish development cooperation agency "Casa Asia" focuses on water management in Asian cities.

"We hope this conference will improve stakeholder engagement and provide a platform to find and share innovative ways of addressing this pressing challenge," Maestu states. "Engaging all for effective action makes change possible!"

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For further information please visit:

Conference website

www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/swm_cities_zaragoza_2010/index.shtml

Conference blog

<http://sustainableurbanwatermanagement.wordpress.com/>

Twitter

<http://www.twitter.com/SUWMZaragoza>

Facebook

The conference has an event page and a conference page on Facebook: "Conference: Sustainable Water Management in Cities". Become a fan and follow us to receive up-to-date information, take part in the online discussions and see images from the Conference.