

"Water for Life" 2005-2015

World Water Day 2005 and Launch of the International Decade

**Keynote Address by Mme Josephine Ouedraogo,
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**22 March 2005
Addis Ababa Ethiopia**

Your Excellency Ato Girma Wolde-Giorgis, the President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,
Honorable Ato Jarso, Minister of Water Resources of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,
Representative of the African Union
Honorable Ambassadors
Representatives of UN Agencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we begin a ten-year journey during which we must do all in our power to halve the proportion of people who do not have sustainable access to safe drinking water.

Inadequate access to water forms a central part of people's poverty, affecting their basic needs, health, food security and basic livelihoods. Therefore, if we are serious about poverty eradication, we must improve the access of poor people to water.

For us in Africa, the situation is more critical because a review of the UN water and sanitation decade 1980-1990 shows that Africa was the only region which fared worse at the end of the decade than it began in terms of water and sanitation. It is partly why, in February 2004, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution declaring the period 2005-2015 the International Decade for Action: "Water for Life".

This new decade offers Africa a chance to take vigorous action in ensuring that the objectives of the African Water Vision 2025 and the Millennium Development Goals are achieved.

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

In proclaiming the International Decade for Action "Water for Life", the General Assembly emphasized that water is critical for sustainable development and indispensable for human health and well being. It is hoped that during this decade, greater focus on water issues would be generated and sustained spatially and functionally at all levels. We must give more attention to implementation of water-related programmes and projects. We must promote international cooperation and partnership for achieving the various international targets.

And finally, and most important for Africa, we must take steps to ensure active, effective and fruitful participation and involvement of women in all aspects of water-related development efforts, including decision making. In this regard, I will like to quote Secretary General Kofi Annan who said "We need to free women and girls from the daily chore of holding water over a great distance".

To achieve these goals, the General Assembly calls on all UN bodies, specialized agencies and regional Commissions such as ECA, to deliver a coordinated response, utilizing existing resources and voluntary funds to make "Water for Life" a decade for action.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

The progress we have made in elevating the importance of water for Africa's development from a purely technical affair to one of the major policy challenges on our continent is revealed in various commitments embodied in the Africa Water Vision 2025 and the various sub-regional and basin-specific Visions such as the West African Vision, Lake Chad Basin Vision, the Nile Basin Vision, and others.

Within the UN family, there is a firm commitment to move the process along and support Africa in attaining the objectives set out in the resolution.

At the global Level, UN-Water/Global has been tasked with the implementation of the resolution in partnership with member States and all stakeholders including inter-governmental organizations such as the Global Water Partnership, World Water Council.

At the Africa level, UN-Water/Africa which coordinates UN water activities in Africa has taken the lead in launching the decade.

Your Excellency Mr. President
Honorable Minister,
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and gentlemen,

We have made modest but significant achievements since our Ministers committed themselves to broad water issues at The Hague in 2000. The African Minister's Council on Water (AMCOW) which we collaborated in forming is providing policy guidance toward achieving the goals set in the African Water Vision 2025 and the MDGs.

To finance the actions embodied in the framework of the African Water Vision, we collaborated in setting up the African Water Facility and the African Network on Water to spearhead our engagement with the civil society.

But more still needs to be done. No society can speak of equality without equal access to water and sanitation. Today, poor people in peri-urban communities in Africa pay 3-10 times more for water than people in urban centers who have access to piped safe water. Women and girl children still walk miles daily to fetch water for domestic use while millions of our children die needlessly from water-borne diseases which have been eradicated elsewhere.

These, therefore, are the critical challenges we face in this decade. These are the true barometers which we must use to measure our success at the end of this decade. Today, as we begin this journey, let us re-commit ourselves to these challenges in the interest of millions of our people who face poverty and hunger daily.

In all African countries, let leadership at all levels propel action towards making our water resources tools for development and regional peace. If we acknowledge water as critical for life, then we must treat the resource as if our lives depend on it. We must truly make this decade one of action and implementation.

I thank you for your attention.
