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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
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Address by
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(UNESCO)

at the Closing Session of the
Second World Water Forum

World Day for Water:
“Water for the 21st Century”

The Hague, 22 March 2000

Your Royal Highness,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I accepted the invitation of the Government of the Netherlands to address the Closing Ceremony of the 2nd World Water Forum. I sincerely thank the organisers of this important event, especially the Government of the Netherlands. In addition to the well-known contribution of the Netherlands to humanity's "water wisdom", this Forum, the Ministerial Conference and Water Fair are yet further proof of our host country's dedication to the search for solutions to water problems. Having spent three days here at the Forum, I can attest to the remarkably high quality of the sessions.

We end this second World Water Forum on the World Day for Water. As you know, UNESCO has been appointed as task manager on behalf of the UN agencies for this World Water Day in the year 2000, whose central theme is "Water for the 21st Century". What is the situation as we start the new century? Water scarcity gives the gravest cause for concern. It is already a chronic problem in many areas, but with demand for irrigation and drinking water expected to rise sharply in the coming 25 years, it is likely to become critical. Water pollution, floods and drought add to the challenge facing us.

The action-oriented Vision presented at this Forum offers guidance on the response to this situation: we need a participatory, integrated and holistic approach aimed at sustainable solutions and involving the active participation of "new" stakeholder groups, including women, young people, the corporate sector and representatives of environmental groups. The World Water Vision Project, for which UNESCO hosted the Vision Management Unit, mobilised the creative spirit of the « water community ». Never before has the way forward been better indicated.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Water security in the 21st century is the goal we all share. I pledge that the Organization I represent will do all within its power to help attain it. Since its foundation, UNESCO - as a "knowledge organization" - has occupied a unique position within the UN family. It stands at the crossroads of human knowledge and human needs and in the complex "knowledge society" of the 21st century, that special position is

increasingly strategic. Science and education – and also communication and culture – will be, more than ever, the driving force for the process of attaining water security for all. UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme is a formidable instrument to this end. Water security cannot be guaranteed by decree. Water problems cannot be solved by treaties alone. Certainly, a treaty can always set the seal on an accord or a settlement. But problems of scarcity or conflicts of interest over water resources between upstream and down stream countries can only find lasting solutions in cooperative, integrated water management.

This means that water for the 21st century will rely first and foremost on science for the 21st century. Galileo's remark - made in the 17th Century - that we know more about the movement of celestial bodies than about the water that we see before our eyes - still holds true today. Many scientific challenges remain: accurate assessment of water resources, of groundwater recharge rates, floods and baseflows. Hydrology, the basic science of the water cycle, is to be nurtured not only for the sake of scientific curiosity, but in particular to provide policy-relevant knowledge. Interdisciplinary research, cooperation in data exchange, training and capacity-building, reliable databases, global resource assessment and scientifically agreed upon indicators: all of this forms the backbone of effective policy-making.

For quarter of a century at least, there has been recognition of the need for quantitative assessment of the world's freshwater resources, to protect communities and the environment through informed decision-making. The UN General Assembly, at its 19th Special Session, recognized the “urgent need ... to strengthen the capability of Governments and international institutions ... to facilitate the integrated assessment ... of water resources”. The UN system as a whole has agreed on the need for a project on integrated freshwater resources assessment leading to a biennial World Water Development Report.

That is why I have taken steps to ensure that the UN World Water Assessment Programme will soon be launched with its Secretariat housed at UNESCO, following intensive consultations with UN system partners. By ensuring the rapid enactment of this programme, not only UNESCO, but also the UN System as a whole, are responding to that challenge of finding the indispensable follow-on to the World Water Vision exercise. The programme will be responsible for producing a World Water Development Report published biennially; it will develop a Global Freshwater Assessment Methodology, and build up a Water Information Network. UNESCO, with its unique mandate to “build peace in the

minds” of all, through science, culture and education, sees as an integral component of this programme, the development of water-related conflict resolution tools. Science, including of course the social sciences, can and should be central in developing tools for resolving or mitigating water conflicts between water user groups and between sovereign nations for transboundary aquifers and rivers: thus this second, major component of the programme.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I invite all donors – governments, the international financial institutions, multilateral and bilateral donors, the private sector - and the NGO community, to contribute to this new and innovative effort. It offers us the prospect of a moving from vision to action. We must seize this chance together. The research community has a duty of policy relevance. Governments have a duty of commitment to policy enactment. International organisations, NGOs, the private sector, individuals and communities have a duty to mobilise. All together, we have to support science-based solutions that address the root causes and impacts of water scarcity, water pollution, floods, drought and, finally, of water conflicts. None of these phenomena are inevitable. No-one is prepared to stand by and accept – for example - the environmental deterioration of the Aral Sea Basin. UNESCO has been advising the Central Asian Republics on possible solutions to that water crisis. UNESCO's Aral Sea Basin Vision document, prepared with the active participation of the scientific community of the region, establishes mutually agreed targets for both people and the environment and identifies the necessary measures to meet those targets. When I met the ministers from the Central Asian Republic this morning, we reaffirmed our commitment on this.

But how are we to avoid any repeat of such a critical situation? One answer lies in strengthening the educational base for integrated water resources management and, more generally, for water education for the 21st Century. I am, therefore, delighted by the intent of the Government of The Netherlands to initiate the procedure to establish a major UNESCO facility for water education. Based on the world renowned International Institute for Infrastructural, Hydraulic, and Environmental Engineering, IHE, in Delft, it could, upon approval by UNESCO's governing bodies, become a major UNESCO resource for the water-related capacity-building needs of the developing countries. I visited IHE this morning and I am profoundly honoured by the trust in UNESCO's track record in education for development that this generous offer

displays. Time does not permit me to go into detail on another important aspect of water for the 21st century – the New Water Ethics that was called for at the 1st World Water Forum. I will just say that water ethics also constitutes a priority area for UNESCO's World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology.

This is essential. Hydrology alone cannot solve the world's water problems. When a person not only possesses great knowledge but uses it well, we call that person wise. Water for the 21st century needs knowledge used well. As I said in my message for World Water Day: the water supply will not run dry, if it is drawn from the well of human wisdom!