

# **Global Water Governance**

## **Improving Access to Safe Water and Sanitation**

Speech by H. E. Mr. Masahiko Koumura,  
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan,  
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### **Introduction**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the kind introduction.

Today, I would like to share with you my views on water and sanitation issues, as Japan will be hosting the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV) and the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit meeting this year.

### **1. Significance of water issues**

#### **Water as the basis of life**

First of all, let me say a few words about the importance of water and its multi-faceted nature. Water is the basis of all life and a resource indispensable not only for the maintenance of human life and health but also for the conservation of the ecosystem and all economic activities. Today, in the twenty-first century, water has become even more important than it was in the past due to the urbanization and rapid population growth that is taking place in developing countries, combined with the effects of climate change.

#### **Water: a cycling and unevenly distributed resource**

The Earth is a watery planet. Approximately 70 percent of its surface is covered with ocean and freshwater on land. It is said, however, that 97 percent of all the water available on earth is seawater, which is difficult for men to use, and that freshwater constitutes only 3 percent of the total. It is also said that 80 percent of freshwater exists in the form of ice, and that the remaining 20 percent lies underground. Thus river water, which is relatively easy for us to use, is only 0.0004 percent of all the water on earth. This is equivalent to the volume of Mt. Fuji, whose volume totals approximately 1,400 cubic kilometers. In other words, there is only about 200 tons of water available to each person on earth. Available freshwater will only last for three years supporting global requirement for water calculated at the average amount of use by a Japanese household. Although we may be using water every day without much thought, we need to recognize that it is indeed a very scarce resource.

Water is a resource that constantly cycles in nature. And it is purified in the course of its cycles. Just as waste-water is cleansed and becomes reusable, water is a cyclic resource which can be used in a sustainable manner. However, it is an unevenly distributed resource. A heavy rainfall can cause floods, while shortfalls of water can cause drought or desertification. By its nature, water is a resource that is not readily available when or where it is needed. At the same time, water is essential for sanitation facilities such as toilets, which are indispensable for our daily lives.

### **Water as a cross-sectoral issue**

Another feature of water is that it is correlated to various issues such as the environment/climate change, health, education, agriculture and food, economic growth, natural disaster risk reduction, and peace. In other words, addressing water issues in an appropriate manner would bring about a positive effect in many other areas.

## **2. Addressing water issues: the past efforts of the international community**

### **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

The MDGs, which Japan is working towards their achievements together with other countries of the world, include the target of "reducing by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation." This year marks the midway point for achieving the MDGs. While we Japanese do not suffer from a shortage of drinking water or sanitation facilities, 1.1 billion people around the world, one fifth of all those who are living in developing countries, lack access to safe drinking water. 2.6 billion people, almost half the total population of developing countries, still do not have access to basic sanitation facilities. While the proportion of people with access to basic sanitation facilities rose rapidly in East Asia, from 24 percent to 45 percent from 1990 to 2004, in sub-Saharan Africa there was only a marginal, 5 percent improvement, from 32 percent to 37 percent, in the same period of time. As a result and together with the lack of proper sanitation and hygiene practices in daily life, approximately 1.8 million children die every year because they have used un-clean water.

Water and sanitation are closely related to other issues, such as poverty, health, education, and gender, on which progress is needed in order to achieve sustainable development. When water supply and irrigation facilities stabilize agricultural production, a large and positive effect can also be expected on poverty alleviation. Behavioral change and developing clean and safe sanitation facilities are crucial for maternal and child health. Installing simple water supply facilities in local communities free children from the heavy burden of walking to a distant water source to get water for their families and allows them enough time to go to school and get an education. As these examples indicate, the resolution of issues relating to water and sanitation will significantly contribute to the achievement of other MDGs as well.

### **United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation**

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the international community has been intensifying its discussions on water. The Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation was set up in 2004 and charged with making recommendations to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In 2006, under the chairmanship of the late Mr. Ryutaro Hashimoto, the Board put forward what came to be called the "Hashimoto Action Plan," which was a compilation of recommendations to the international community on the action it should take on water and sanitation issues. The Crown Prince of Japan is now the Honourary President of the Board, while HRH Willem Alexander, Crown Prince of the

Netherlands, is the Chairperson. This coming May, the tenth meeting of the Board will be held in Japan on the eve of TICAD IV.

## **G8**

Within the framework of the G8, the action plan on water for the international community was adopted at the G8 Evian Summit in 2003 in France, stating that lack of water can undermine human security. Among other things, the action plan called for the promotion of good governance of water, optimization of financial resources, and social infrastructure development through the strengthening of cooperation between local government and local communities.

## **World Water Forum and the First Asia-Pacific Water Summit**

Civil society, too, has been working on water and sanitation issues. The World Water Conference (WWC), based in Marseille, France, has convened the World Water Forum every three years since 1997 in various locations around the world. This is a good example of all-around international effort on water that goes beyond the narrow constraints on action by governments and international organizations. In December 2007, the first Asia-Pacific Water Summit was held in Beppu, in Oita Prefecture in Japan, organized by the Asia-Pacific Water Forum and other organizations. It is still fresh in our memory that many leaders and ministers in the Asian-Pacific region, among them our Prime Minister, Yasuo Fukuda, attended and had very lively discussions on water and sanitation.

## **3. What needs to be done**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I mentioned earlier, the international community has recognized the importance of water and sanitation issues and has been working on them. Yet there are so much more to address. As we have just seen, progress in some areas of the world is not very promising. What is lacking? I would like to take up this question by looking back on Japan's experiences.

### **From Japan's experiences**

First of all, let us imagine together the broad stretch of water in the Japanese society. Serving as Foreign Minister, I often travel overseas. And every time I come home from those visits, I am struck by how rich Japan is in terms of its water resources, and I appreciate the scenic beauty of nature as the seasons change. With this wealth of water as well as the geographic and climatic conditions that surround Japan, we have traditionally accumulated considerable expertise and developed technologies that were useful in the field of water and sanitation.

For instance, in the ancient city of Kyoto, there is the Lake Biwa Canal constructed in 1890. This canal made it possible for local industries such as Nishijin Textiles to grow and local people to enjoy a stable supply of water. A 20 kilometer-long water transportation route was constructed later as part of the Lake Biwa Canal, running through the Kamogawa Canal to Fushimi region. Along with a hydro power plant that supplied electricity to Japan's first trams, the water transportation route too contributed greatly to the development of the city of Kyoto. Water taken from the Lake Biwa Canal also contributed to our unique appreciation of water, which can be observed in the designs of "water-flows" in Japanese traditional gardens. The aqueduct called Suirokaku in the Nanzenji Temple became an integral part of the scenery of this ancient city. The Lake Biwa Canal is a good example of making effective use of water by bringing modern technology into harmony with tradition.

Since the Edo era of Japanese history, the Japanese people have been practicing cyclic use of water for daily life. From the period of the post-Second World War reconstruction to the subsequent period of the high economic growth, Japan promoted stable water supply and better hygiene conditions through developing infrastructure that ensures enough water resources as well as provision of stable water supply and sewerage services on a regional scale in the heart of urban areas. Due to rapid urbanization in large cities in Japan, environmental degradation had occurred and caused floods, droughts, and worsening of water quality. In order to mitigate the damages caused by these problems, Japan has implemented measures, in both hard and soft aspects, to mitigate the damages caused by natural disasters, improve coordination mechanisms regarding water use, and prevent water contamination. As a result, Japan has achieved drastic improvements in providing stable water supply and realizing improved hygiene conditions. In addition, the quality of the water environment of rivers and lakes, which had been severely polluted during the high economic growth period, has been improved and fish has returned to rivers in urban areas.

Based on these technologies and know-hows, Japan has been contributing to the improvement of water and sanitation situation in developing countries. We have been the world's largest donor in the water and sanitation sector since the 1990s. We have implemented US\$ 4.9 billion of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the five years between 2001 and 2005. At the Fourth World Water Forum held in Mexico in 2006, Japan announced "Water and Sanitation Broad Partnership Initiative (WASABI)," a comprehensive approach to provide assistance to this sector in a more effective way, and further accelerated assistance on water and sanitation.

Despite all our efforts that have been made to date around the world, water and sanitation issues are still serious. For this reason, on this significant occasion of the International Year of Sanitation, I would like to highlight that the water and sanitation issues need to be addressed on a global scale, and I consider it crucial that Japan shows its determination to make further efforts to tackle them with the international community.

I would like now to return to the question I asked a moment ago: "what is lacking?" What follows are the key points I believe the international community must take into consideration if it is to address water and sanitation issues effectively.

### **Cyclic water resources management**

First, it is important that we be thorough in our pursuit of the sustainable use of water resources. To be specific, we need to make the idea of cyclic water resources management a reality. To this end, it is necessary to spread the recognition of good water governance, or good water resources management, at the international level, which is a cross-sectoral, integrated, region-wide approach that can be adapted to local conditions in every area.

### **Utilization of high-technologies and know-hows**

Second, we need to be aware of the necessity of accumulating and then making use of technologies and know-hows in this area. Japan possesses advanced technologies in the water sector and utilizes it to promote effective use of water resources. For example, my hometown is the city of Shunan in Yamaguchi Prefecture, where the Koudou Multi-Purpose Dam was constructed in 1940 and commenced its operation as Japan's first multi-purpose dam. It serves mainly for adjusting the volume of water flowing from the Nishiki River and, at the same time, providing water and the electricity generated by it to the Shunan Industrial Area. This is just one of many good examples to show that water could be used for various purposes. I would like to share our traditions, experiences

including the severe ones, advanced technologies, and the accumulated expertise which I have just mentioned with people in every part of the world, including developing countries.

## **Human security**

Third, I would like to draw your attention to the viewpoint of human security. Human security is a perspective that emphasizes both "protection" and "empowerment" of each individual in order to protect them from challenges, which threaten their existence, including environmental degradation and natural disasters, and to let them realize their full potentials. Access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation facilities are essential for anyone wishing to live a healthy, dignified life. Floods and droughts pose great threats to individual lives.

Our aim is not only to provide infrastructure and technology but also to empower and develop communities, for example, through organizing local committees to discuss water management issues and providing assistance to community residents, including women, to become self-sufficient. It will lead to ensure human security if empowered communities could achieve sustainable management of water and improved sanitation and hygiene practices, such as hand-washing.

We are also reminded by the humanitarian crisis in Darfur that limited access to water can lead to conflicts.

## **Global responses**

Fourth, water is a global issue. Generally, Japan has an abundant supply of water resources. However, in order to secure the lives of people in Japan, water from the other parts of the world is, indeed, necessary. For example, Japan imports much of its food supply from overseas. In order to produce food, a large amount of water is necessary. Thus, with its trade in food and other commodities, Japan, virtually or indirectly, imports a large volume of water from overseas. Hence, a global water supply-demand imbalance will directly affect Japan's food security. This indicates that water resources management around the world is no longer someone else's affair, but ours as well. It is clear that we must respond to the issue of water management globally. International cooperation is absolutely necessary. I, therefore, call for the international community to strengthen global responses to issues relating to water.

## **A participatory approach: Cooperation between central and local government, public-private partnerships**

Lastly, water is an issue that requires the involvement of all relevant actors. It is an issue that requires "a participatory approach" which Japan is promoting in addressing international challenges. Action by central government alone is not enough. I understand that the roles played by local governments, entities closer to local residents, are extremely significant in determining how well water supply, sewerage, and river management services are provided.

In Japan, construction of large-scale infrastructure falls under the central government's authority, while water supply and sewerage services are provided by local governments. High quality services as well as management technology and know-how possessed by local government are something that the Japanese people are proud to share with the rest of the world. For example, the Bureau of Waterworks of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government manages a 26,000-kilometer water supply network, long enough, if it were laid out in a straight line, to extend almost halfway around the earth. The leakage rate of the water network in Tokyo is as low as around 3.6 percent, which is astounding in light of the fact that the average water leakage rate of the major cities of the world is

around 30 percent. Local governments in Japan, including the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, have sent water specialists to developing countries to provide technical assistance. Japanese private firms also possess excellent technology. In particular, it possesses the world's highest standards with respect to membrane technology, which is used in the desalinization of seawater as well as in other forms of water treatment. Membrane technology allows us to utilize desalinated seawater for drinking and other purposes. These are examples of Japanese technologies and know-hows on water available from both government and the private sector, and, in cooperation with civil society, we are prepared to share it with the international community.

## **Conclusion**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the address he gave in Davos about a month ago, Prime Minister Fukuda stated that "health, water, and education" would be a set of the key areas to be raised at the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit. Water and sanitation issues will also be addressed from various perspectives at TICAD IV, which calls for a "Vibrant Africa". Seizing these perfect opportunities, it is my view that Japan should call upon the international community to take the following actions:

- a) pursue sustainable use of water resources through the application of cyclic water resources management;
- b) share Japan's advanced-technologies and know-hows on water with the people in the world;
- c) improve access to safe drinking water and dignified sanitation facilities as well as improved sanitation and hygiene practices such as hand-washing, in order to realize human security;
- d) strengthen global responses to water-related issues; and
- e) promote "a participatory approach" and facilitate cooperation between central and local governments as well as public-private partnerships locally and globally.

Japan appeals to all parties concerned to identify concrete actions that should be taken, and show a strong political commitment required to implement the measures and action identified in a cooperative way. In order to protect the future of the earth and to make steady progress towards a bright future, I would like to affirm, in concluding my speech, that Japan, as a hosting country of TICAD IV and the chair the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit, will play a leading role in the international community's discussions concerning water and sanitation.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**This speech transcript is available at**  
<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/environment/speech0802.html>