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PRESS RELEASE

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FIRST GLOBAL *WASH FORUM* OPENS

Dakar, 29 November 2004: The first Global WASH Forum opened in Dakar, Senegal today. The Forum brings together senior level country officials, donor agencies, research and training institutions, international organizations as well as professional associations and public health experts to focus on the need for accelerated action to meet the Millennium Development goals on water and sanitation. There is an estimated four billion episodes of diarrhea causing an estimated 1.8 million deaths every year.

At the opening ceremony, the delegates were united in their call for increased commitment, political, economic and social, to overcome the problems associated with the lack of clean water and adequate sanitation.

“The United Nations supports the principles behind the campaign in the hope that one day the world will no longer have to face the dire consequences of inadequate access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation: the burden of disease, the unacceptably high death toll, especially of children, the suffering and time lost by women in fetching water and the heavy economic and social costs borne by some of the poorest countries,” said Mr. Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General in his message to the Global WASH Forum.

“Achieving the MDG target for drinking water and sanitation is fundamental for achieving the goals of the Millennium Declaration,” said Dr Jong-Wook Lee, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), in his speech that was read out at the inaugural session by Regional Director for Africa, Mr. Ebrahim M. Samba. “The case for investing in water and sanitation makes economic sense, apart from the fact that it is a moral and ethical imperative; a recent WHO study demonstrated that US\$ 1 invested would give an economic return of between US\$ 3 and US\$34 in developing regions,” he added.

In his welcoming address, Sir Richard Jolly, the Chair of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), underlined seven critical steps for ensuring acceleration of action towards the goals of water, sanitation and hygiene:

- all countries need to put sufficient resources in their government budgets;
- steps must be taken to empower women and strengthen their influence in all matters of water and sanitation systems.
- Aid donors must provide their own catalytic support and encouragement, especially within a framework of long-term commitment;
- Synergy must be established with other MDGs, within a strong Poverty Reduction Strategy;

- School systems must be mobilized with children and youth as agents of change;
- New partnerships and coalitions are needed; and
- For any programme or initiative, the process of monitoring requires yardsticks against which to measure, with clear objectives, success indicators with ongoing monitoring and evaluation of human impacts.

In his welcome address to the Forum, Executive Director, Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, Mr. Gourisankar Ghosh, recalled how the Council had brought the focus on sanitation back on the global agenda at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. “WASH members and partners are committed to the accomplishments of the Millennium goals”, he said.

Dr. Anna Tibajuka, Under Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, who is the co-Chair of this Forum, thanked the WSSCC for their work in raising the profile of WASH issues. In her keynote address, she emphasized the close link between the two Millennium Development Targets under Goal 7, concerned with water and sanitation and improving the lives of slum dwellers. “The MDG on water and sanitation cannot be delivered in the abstract; it is closely linked to the state of human settlements,” said Dr. Anna Tibajuka. “This linkage was recognized by World Summit on Sustainable Development and more recently by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. We, therefore, call on all stakeholders, governments, local authorities, non-governmental organizations and communities to work hard to improve the living conditions in human settlements and to encourage pro-poor investments in shelter and slum upgrading. This is the road forward and one of the best ways to ensure that the poor will be provided with essential basic services such as water and sanitation.”

The Forum in Dakar has been organized by the Geneva-based multi-stakeholder organization, the WSSCC, in co-operation with the Government of the Republic of Senegal. Amongst those attending the Forum are Vice-President & Minister of Water Development, Cassim Chilumpha of Malawi, Minister Maria Mutagamba, Uganda, who is also Chair of the African Ministerial Conference on Water (AMCOW), and Minister John Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda, who will chair the 13th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in 2005. Other Ministers participating include, among others, Jose Botelho de Vasconcelos of Angola, Kamarou Fassassi of Benin, Shiferaw Jarso of Ethiopia, Khaketla Momphono of Lesotho, Prakash Man Singh, Nepal, Miguel Palomino De la Gala, Buyelwa Sonjica of South Africa, Issifou Okoulou-Kantchati of Togo, Patrick

Kalifungwa of Zambia, Jose Barragan of Bolivia, Carmen Arevalo-Correa of Colombia, Olav Kjørven of Norway and Suryakanta Mishra, West Bengal, India.

Besides the plenary sessions, the Forum has four sub-themes around which panel discussions, working groups and plenary sessions will be organized: Finance, Coalitions, Local Government and Policy. The parallel programme will involve, over the course of the week, 50 events organized by partners, including subjects as diverse as: cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis of WASH, social marketing, school sanitation, home hygiene, rainwater harvesting, public-private partnerships and operation and maintenance. The most current version of the main and parallel programme is available at the Forum website (www.wsscc.org/dakar)

For more information, check www.wsscc.org/dakar, or contact:

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