

# **High-Level Interactive Dialogue on “The International Decade for Action, ‘Water for Life’: Progress Achieved and Lessons Learned for Sustainable Development”**

30 March 2015

## **Panel Discussion one: Comprehensive Review of the ‘Water for Life’ Decade**

Introduction by the Chair,  
H.E. Ms. Katalin Bogayay  
Permanent Representative of Hungary to the United Nations

Your Excellencies,

In my introduction I would like to touch upon the topic of science diplomacy. Today, the international community turns to scientists for answers to some of the most pressing social, economic and environmental problems that transcend national boundaries. Whether it is the urgent task of halting climate change, an acute need to provide basic health care for large parts of the world’s population, or the shared responsibility to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, the science of the twenty-first century is expected to point to the effective solutions.

Science, driven by the curiosity of human beings to know the universe and to understand their place in it, is spreading new knowledge rapidly around the globe to sustain cutting-edge research conducted at universities, laboratories and academies of sciences scattered around the world. Improved access to new information communication technology has brought scientists working in distant corners of the earth closer together.

Francis Bacon predicted accurately the rise of modern science as early as in the beginning of the seventeenth century, proclaiming that “If we begin with certainties, we will end in doubts, but if we begin with doubts and hear them patiently, we may end in certainty.” In the centuries since his prophesy, science has empowered us to be the masters of our own destiny, rather than mere players in the grand spectacle animated by divine forces. With the advent of science, destiny was no longer a predetermined fate, but a continuing experiment which taught us lessons from our mistakes. And with the immense power of science came an equally great ethical responsibility to “do no harm.”

For me, science diplomacy is the gravitational force that manifests itself through relations between people and communities. It is stronger than, and will eventually prevail over, the forces of division and conflict.

The power of scientific cooperation has for many decades brought together peoples from different countries and continents, has defined common values and aspirations across national boundaries, and has created conditions for durable peace to flourish. For me, the Budapest World Science Forum, which event Hungary has been organizing since 1999, always represented a small example of what the international relations will look like in the future, when we will reach a level of consciousness where the threat or use of military might or economic coercion will simply be unthinkable, and where culture of peace and mutual respect will guide the global pursuit of scientific progress. My country, Hungary, has long been committed, in words and in action, to promoting peace through scientific cooperation.

I would like to stress the importance of cooperation. We believe that we have to achieve that success in close cooperation with governments, the UN, business and civil society. Water Cooperation needs the contribution and collaboration of all. Science, among others, plays a major role.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the ‘Water for Life’ Decade, significant progress was achieved in promoting access to water and sanitation and fostering cooperation on water issues.

Nevertheless, and also in order to achieve a successful and sustainable international agenda, we shall emphasize that drinking water supply and sanitation should be fully integrated into water resources management policies with the recognition that water use and sanitation not only consume the resources, but also pollute water and, therefore, negatively influence the water cycle as a whole, if countermeasures are not applied.

Also, hygiene is often overlooked in the water and sanitation discourse. It is therefore important to identify realistic, monitorable and enforceable approaches that improve hygiene, especially for women and adolescent girls. As you all know, the Decade has strived to promote greater focus on the participation of women in water-related development efforts.

Significant steps have been made during the past ten years, and yet, significant obstacles remain to realize the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Today, 800 million people are without access to an improved water source and many more remain without safe and sustainable water supply. In addition, disparities continue to exist between and within countries. Also, access to sanitation is today the most lagging of the MDGs with 2.5 billion people without improved sanitation and 1.1 billion still practicing open defecation.

So, Distinguished participants,

In our morning session, with the assistance of our distinguished Keynote Speaker and Panellists, we shall identify some key responses to the following questions:

- What are the major achievements of the ‘Water for Life Decade? What are the remaining obstacles for achieving universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation services, and what do we still need to do in order to make further progress?
- What factors lie behind the increase in safe drinking water and sanitation access achieved during the Decade?
- How has the recognition of the human right to water and sanitation contributed to promotion of the MDG targets?
- Why involving women in decision making at all levels is crucial for ensuring access and sustainable management of water and sanitation?
- When the General Assembly declared the International Year of Water Cooperation, it recognized that “cooperation is essential in order to strike a balance between the different needs and priorities” related to water. In that regard, what conditions and measures can facilitate transboundary cooperation?