

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

**MESSAGE TO THE BANFF CENTRE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
“MOUNTAINS AS WATER TOWERS” SUMMIT**

The International Year of Freshwater (2003), proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly, comes at a crucial time. At the Millennium Summit in 2000, world leaders agreed to reduce by half, by the year 2015, the proportion of people who are unable to reach, or to afford, safe drinking water. And at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, a matching target was adopted -- a commitment to halve the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation services, also by 2015.

Grave consequences lie ahead if we fail to meet these goals: the persistence and spread of deadly diseases, further damage to the global environment and threats to food security and stability itself. And while water problems are most acute in the developing world, developed countries are also at risk.

The world needs to improve its stewardship of water resources. We need much more efficient irrigation, far less toxic agriculture and industry, and new investments in water infrastructure and services. And we need to free women and girls from the daily burden of walking great distances in search of water -- time and effort that could be better spent on education and building better lives for themselves, their families and their communities.

The International Year of Freshwater should mobilize the world behind these goals by raising awareness, by generating new ideas and strategies and by promoting participation, partnerships and peaceful dialogue. Let us pool our efforts; let us use the knowledge and technology at our disposal; and let us do our utmost to protect the world's precious freshwater resources -- our lifeline for survival and sustainable development in the twenty-first century.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Annan'.

Kofi A. Annan