Former World Leaders
Call on UN Security Council
to Recognize Water as a Top Concern

World confronts serious water crisis,
former Heads of Government and experts warn in new report;
India and China may exceed supplies in less than 20 years

The world today confronts a water crisis with critical implications for peace, political stability and economic development, experts warn in a new report being launched Sept. 11 jointly by the InterAction Council (IAC), a group of 40 prominent former government leaders and heads of state, together with the United Nations University's Institute for Water, Environment and Health, and Canada's Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation.

"The future political impact of water scarcity may be devastating," says former Canadian Prime Minister and IAC co-chair Jean Chrétien. "Using water the way we have in the past simply will not sustain humanity in future. The IAC is calling on the United Nations Security Council to recognize water as one of the top security concerns facing the global community."
"Starting to manage water resources more effectively and efficiently now will enable humanity to better respond to today's problems and to the surprises and troubles we can expect in a warming world."

The new report on water and world security is released as Foreign Ministers of several countries prepare for a scheduled special discussion of the topic this month on the margins of the UN General Assembly. UN-Water, a coordinating body for water-related efforts by all UN organizations, will also convene a meeting of experts in New York Sept. 25 to identify key avenues through which such concerns should be addressed, including the Security Council.

In her foreword to the report, "The Global Water Crisis: Addressing an Urgent Security Issue," IAC member and former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland underlined the danger in many regions, particularly sub-Saharan Africa or West Asia and North Africa, where critical water shortages already exist.

"As some of these nations are already politically unstable, such crises may have regional repercussions that extend well beyond their political boundaries. But even in politically stable regions, the status quo may very well be disturbed first and most dramatically by the loss of stability in hydrological patterns."

In an exhaustive compilation of the many factors contributing to deteriorating water security worldwide, 23 eminent international water expert authors identify a host of serious security, development and social risks associated with the water crisis, including food, health, energy and equity issues.

Already, approximately 3,800 cubic kilometers of fresh water is extracted from aquatic ecosystems globally every year. With about 1 billion more mouths to feed worldwide by 2025, global agriculture alone will require another 1,000 cubic km (1 trillion cubic meters) of water per year - equal to the annual flow of 20 Niles or 100 Colorado Rivers.

It is expected that water demand in India and China -- the world's two most populous countries -- will exceed supplies in less than 20 years.

The report anticipates new conflicts caused by changes in fundamental hydrology, with both water scarcity and flooding expected to become major trans-boundary water issues.

Water security is key to peace between the Palestinians and Israelis, and between Israel and its regional neighbours, the report adds.

It also notes that in 1950, there were 500 large dams on the planet; today, there are over 45,000. This translates to a staggering average of two large dams added daily worldwide since the Korean War.

Meanwhile, greater competition between the energy sector and other water users for already limited freshwater resources in many world regions will impact future energy development, with significant potential impacts on energy reliability and security.
The report calls on Governments and international institutions to:

- Radically reform attitudes toward water and how it is managed globally, including programs to reduce demand through conservation, efficiency, re-use and the replenishment of natural systems;
- Increase annual investment in water supply and sanitation-related efforts by approximately US $11 billion;
- Create an international governance mechanism and relevant institutions to cope with the growing number of environmental migrants foreseen in years to come;
- Create new water governance alliances between public, private and civil society sectors, emphasizing the participation of women;
- Pursue a 'Blue Economy' economic paradigm in which water sustainability is rewarded;
- Underline the need among government and finance leaders to understand the relationship between clean, safe water and health, development and national economic well-being.

"Water is now playing a determining role in international, national and trans-boundary conflicts," said IAC Secretary-General Thomas Axworthy, President and CEO of the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation.

"At the same time, water security is also the foundation for food and energy security and for overall long-term social and economic development. It underpins health, nutrition, equity, gender equality, well-being and economic progress, especially in developing countries but increasingly in some of the world's most developed countries."

**Water and Development**

"Today, a child dies on average every 20 seconds from a water-related disease," says Zafar Adeel, Director of the United Nations University's Canadian-based Institute for Water, Environment and Health.

"That's a largely invisible average toll of 4,500 children dying every single day. How ironic that the world this year would commemorate the centenary of 1,502 deaths aboard RMS Titanic with movies and elaborate memorial services. Yet, every single day this year, three times as many kids die because of water problems and, for most people, its simply business as usual -- appallingly, the world takes little notice."

"Diseases due to a lack of water and sanitation claim more lives than guns in any war."

In his paper "A Human Development Approach to Water Security," Dr. Adeel says that providing safe drinking water and adequate sanitation can form the basis for reducing
poverty by improving livelihoods, creating jobs for local communities in developing
countries, removing the cycle of disease that reduces productivity, and redirecting the
resulting health savings to other needs.

He adds that the main challenge facing the agricultural sector "is not so much growing
70% more food in 40 years, but making 70% more food available on the plate. Reducing
losses in storage and along the value chain may go a long way towards offsetting the need
for more production."

Although projections vary considerably, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization
estimates an 11% increase in irrigation water consumption from 2008 to 2050, he notes.
This is expected to result in a roughly 5% increase of water withdrawals for irrigation.
"Although this seems a modest increase, much of it will occur in regions already
suffering from water scarcity," he says

"Water security requires long-term political ownership and commitment, recognition of
water's key role in development and human security, and budget allocations appropriate
to the fundamental importance of water to every living thing."

The IAC's senior water policy advisor, Bob Sandford, says a hydro-climatic time bomb is
already ticking.

In a paper entitled "Will the next Wars be Fought over Water?" Sandford says prolonged
droughts and serious flooding are likely to cause new kinds of conflict as the effects of
climate change join an already long list of water pressures, including overpopulation,
contamination, groundwater depletion and soil loss.

"Many still think the effects of climate change will be local, minor and cumulative," says
Mr. Sandford. "In fact, it will not be long before climate change affects everyone,
everywhere, simultaneously, compounding every regional economic, social and political
disparity. As this happens, it can be expected that the potential for general tensions and
conflict over water will rise."

"If current use trends continue through mid-century when Earth's human population is
expected to reach 9 billion -- and assuming climatic and precipitation patterns will remain
the same as today's -- our estimated agricultural, industrial and municipal uses would
require almost all of the current surface flows in all parts of the planet that we now
occupy."

However, a number of factors may alter this formula, Mr. Sandford says, either for better
or for worse: conservation and water re-use may have a huge positive impact on reducing
our needs; warmer global temperatures, on the other hand, will put more water into the
atmosphere (approximately 7% more water for every 1 degree Celsius increase) and may
lead to persistent flooding in some areas or severe drought in others.

"In other words," he says, "if past trends in terms of supply and human usage persist, we
may at some point be close to needing most of the water available to us, which will have
a huge impact on the natural systems we need to provide and purify that water. That said,
the global hydrological cycle is on the move and new patterns may emerge which may be difficult to predict."

According to Mr. Sandford, "managing our water resources more effectively and efficiently will allow us to respond to the many surprises we can expect with a warming world."

The economic opportunity resulting from the crisis is huge, with financial analysts predicting "tremendous growth potential for the water sector, particularly for those businesses focused on efficiency, re-use and source diversification," say David Henderson, managing director of Canada's XPV Capital Corporation, and Nick Parker, chair and co-founder of Cleantech Group, USA.

"In fact, revenues of the world's water-related businesses are forecasted to rise from US $522 billion in 2007 to nearly $1 trillion by 2020. The challenge to meet rising water demands presents myriad challenges in many key areas including: upgrading current water infrastructure and rethinking the infrastructure of the future; maximizing the water efficiency of industrial processes; treating wastewater as a resource; enhancing water productivity in agriculture; and using information technology for more effective water management."

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About the InterAction Council

Established in 1983, the InterAction Council of Former Heads of State and Government is an international organization whose objective is to address long-term, global issues facing humankind. Co-Chaired by the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister of Canada, 1993-2003) and Dr. Franz Vranitzky (Chancellor of Austria, 1986-1997), the Council's membership is comprised of 40 former heads of state and government who volunteer their time to develop proposals for action and submit them directly to national and international decision-makers.

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About the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation

Established in 1965 as a private charitable foundation with a mandate to improve public policy in Canada, one of its major programs supports the development of a comprehensive legal, regulatory and citizen action framework for protecting the quality and quantity of freshwater resources for future generations.
About the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health

UNU-INWEH is a member of the United Nations University family of organizations. It was created in 1996 to strengthen water management capacity, particularly in developing countries, and to provide on-the-ground project support. Its core funding is provided by the Government of Canada and it is hosted by McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada.