

Speech by the Prince of Orange, First African Water Week, Tunis, March 26 2008

Mr Chairman, Mr. Gantsho

Mr President of the African Development Bank, Mr. Kaberuka,
Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources of Tunisia, His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Habib Haddad,

Ministers of state responsible for water and senior government officials from African member countries”

Excellencies, Distinguished representatives, Ladies and gentlemen, Friends

In September 2006 I accepted Mr Kofi Annan’s request to chair his Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation. Soon after, in December 2006, I chaired my first meeting, here in this hotel in Tunis, where we also held our first regional dialogue with African stakeholders led by the African Ministers’ Council on Water.

That frank and sobering dialogue underscored the many serious roadblocks impeding progress on water and sanitation in Africa. Yet, ultimately, it was also a hopeful and encouraging discussion. It reaffirmed my belief that by working hand-in-hand with our African partners, UNSGAB can make a difference. Since that first meeting in Tunis, I have seen what we can achieve. And I have not once regretted saying yes to the Secretary-General 18 months ago.

At that meeting in Tunis, you, our African partners, emphasized the urgent need to galvanize a stronger, more operational political commitment at the highest levels. And so we all agreed to campaign for an African water and sanitation summit specifically in the International Year of Sanitation, a high-profile event to push water and sanitation to the fore of African politics. On behalf of UNSGAB, I promised our support in making it happen.

And we did it! The African Union’s General Assembly recently agreed to organise a dedicated African Union Summit of Heads of State on Water and Sanitation, to be held on 30 June in Sharm el Sheik, Egypt. But a Summit alone... well, we’ve seen enough of them to know how effective they are without the right input. Input is content and content is king.

A very important step towards formulating that content was made at the Africa Sanitation Conference in Durban last February.

35 African Ministers and Heads of Delegation pledged their full support and commitment to making an ultimate effort to achieve the millennium goals on sanitation. This was put down on paper in concrete agreements in the éThekwini Commitments on Sanitation and the AfricaSan Action Plan 2008-2010. The next step will be to have these agreements endorsed by the Heads of State at the AU Summit in Sharm el Sheikh.

My sincere congratulations and thanks to everyone who helped to achieve these impressive results!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Progress has been made, but more needs to be done. We have no time to waste. By any measure, Africa is lagging far behind in achieving the MDGs. If we do not act now, more than a million people will die every year because they lack adequate access to clean drinking water and safe sanitation. We must not let this happen. We must devote ourselves this year, the International Year of Sanitation, to making a real difference, to offering Africa's poorest new opportunities for a healthy, dignified existence and for development. We must redouble our efforts to achieve the MDGs in Africa.

The coming months may be crucial for the future of the water and sanitation sector in Africa. Let us keep up the momentum and use this African Water Week to prepare for the following steps forward!

Not only do we have to prepare for the dedicated AU Summit in June, but also for some other important meetings where Africa is on the Agenda, such as the G8 summit and TICAD IV in Japan later this year, a special UN MDG summit in September, a high level OECD meeting in autumn and the World Water Forum in March next year, to name but a few.

How do we get Africa on track to meet its water supply and sanitation targets?

For me, that is the fundamental question for this First African Water Week. Allow me to share some ideas with you.

It is clear to me that many countries lack the capacity they need to reach the MDG targets. Yet there are some countries that will not only meet but exceed their targets. What can we learn from them? What are the success factors that make the difference?

In the countries that are going to meet the targets, politicians have recognised the urgency of the problem and acted accordingly. They have decided on a realistic and robust schedule, they have established accountable institutional leadership and they have made sufficient investment in the Water and Sanitation sector.

We can also learn that to achieve tangible and sustainable results we need to go beyond policymaking and ensure implementation in the field through workable strategies and realistic budget allocations, with strong links to other development plans such as the PRSPs. And of course the full and timely involvement of all stakeholders is an absolute prerequisite. A bottom-up approach will prove to be a fundamental factor in demonstrating concrete results on the ground. We can, for example, learn some wise lessons from the Indian rural Total Sanitation Campaign!

At the same time, efforts will have to be stepped up towards developing human resources capacity and establishing adequate monitoring and evaluation systems.

Ladies and gentlemen, it can be done!

Some positive examples show that the necessary steps forward can really be made:

Uganda has established separate strategies for rural, urban and small town water supply and sanitation, and prepared an integrated sector-wide investment plan and investment model. This includes making grants available to local government under the fiscal decentralisation strategy, and allowing local government to mobilise local resources.

Likewise in Tanzania, the reform process has involved the transfer of roles and responsibilities, decision-making authority and control of resources for the delivery of basic services to District Councils, NGOs and the private sector.

In Ethiopia, water and sanitation are recognised as an important step in poverty eradication, and the sector was given high priority in the Poverty Reduction Plan, with substantially increased funding allocations.

Ethiopia has also devised integrated programmes to tackle water supply, sanitation and hygiene education – known as WASH programmes. The Ministries of Water Resources, Health and Education have signed an MoU setting out the roles and responsibilities of partners regarding their implementation, while underscoring the need for cross-sectoral approaches to achieve the MDGs.

Under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister, these three ministries have formed two national coordinating structures: one for policy and strategy and the other for technical and operational issues. Civil society, the private sector and international development partners are also actively involved. A National Sanitation Forum has been set up to promote and support sanitation and hygiene. Institutional arrangements, sub-national roles and responsibilities have also been clearly defined.

And some stunning results have already been achieved. In Ethiopia's Southern Nations State, 1.3 million latrines were built in only 18 months.

These examples show that there are lessons here for all of us to learn from other countries in terms of key actions. This week you will have the opportunity to look around, to exchange experiences and to learn from your fellow Africans. All these successes - and there are many more, but I had to make a selection - were achieved by Africans, for Africans. I know you are all set to continue with African pride. Show the world what you can do, show the world you take your own development and well-being seriously. The world will gladly help you achieve it!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Accelerating the Water Security or the Socio-Economic Development of Africa is the theme of this first African Water Week. I am very happy that AMCOW and the African Development Bank recognise the crucial role of Water for Development.

Water is the key factor in food production. Water and Sanitation are the main contributors to improving health and comprehensively reducing poverty.

Sound management of water resources may reduce the effects of climate change. Further development of hydropower will yield enormous benefits on Africa's energy balance,

where water is already proving to be a limiting factor in biofuel production. Water and development really go hand in hand.

Many of these issues will also be discussed next week in Addis Ababa, during 1st Joint Annual Meetings of the AU Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

I hope the outcomes of this First African Water Week will be brought forward to this meeting, because meeting Africa's new challenges in the 21st century will only be possible if the water issues are adequately addressed and obvious synergies are obtained to the maximum.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude.

Actions for sanitation were agreed in Durban. Actions for water security should be agreed here this week in Tunis. I sincerely hope that the First African Water Week will come up with strong and practical recommendations, recognising the pivotal role of water. In doing so, this week will provide an excellent foundation for the AU Summit and other upcoming global water events.

I am confident that AMCOW and the African Development Bank will provide the political leadership, policy direction and advocacy in the provision, use and management of water resources for the sustainable socioeconomic development of Africa and the health and well-being of its people. And I am happy to say that each member of UNSGAB, including myself, is poised to support and work with you. We sincerely believe that by working together we can make important gains towards meeting our Millennium Development Goals on Water and Sanitation.

Thank you.