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President: Mr. Rüdiger von WECHMAR
(Federal Republic of Germany).

AGENDA ITEM 61

Development and international economic cooperation:
(f) Natural resources: reports of the Secretary-General

Special meeting to launch the International
Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade

REPORT OF THE SECOND COMMITTEE (PART I)
(A/35/592)

1. The PRESIDENT: In accordance with resolution 34/191 of 18 December 1979, the General Assembly is today holding a special meeting to launch the decade 1981-1990 as the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.
2. Of all the many life-sustaining elements that we take for granted in our environment, water is perhaps the most vital for all human beings and for earthly life in general as we know it.
3. The human body is 60 per cent water and cannot survive for more than eight to 10 days if deprived of water in a temperate climate—even less in a hot, dry climate.
4. Interplanetary exploits of recent times have ascertained that the absence of water in other celestial bodies precludes the presence of any form of life similar to that on our planet.
5. Yet rational usage and preservation of this life-giving natural resource on earth have been somewhat neglected in many areas of the world through a series of social and economic factors that have contributed to pollution, contamination and general misuse of this precious liquid.
6. It is therefore with deep respect for the subject matter of our meeting today and with great and sincere admiration for the work of the United Nations system towards a more systematic and productive usage of water in the world, that I feel doubly honoured in inaugurating the International Drinking Water

Supply and Sanitation Decade at this special meeting of the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly, first, as the President of the General Assembly, upon whom the privilege of opening this meeting was bestowed, and, secondly, as the representative of a country that has contributed through the supply of funds and experts to the work of the United Nations system in its endeavours to provide safe drinking water and healthier sanitation systems in developing countries. My country has been striving at the same time to clean and purify its own waterways.

7. I am familiar with some of the impressive community-level projects undertaken by UNICEF, UNDP and WHO in Asia and in Africa, and I cannot but praise those United Nations bodies for their invaluable contribution towards the provision and protection of sources of safe drinking water for millions of people and the integration of water and sanitation programmes with other development projects and with primary health care and educational programmes.

8. With a concerted effort involving the United Nations system and the developing countries themselves, on which the heaviest burden of monitoring and managing their water supplies must fall, I am confident that the special Decade we are launching today will be a success and that by 1990, when the Assembly meets again to discuss a progress evaluation report on the Decade, it will be able to note a drastic reduction or complete elimination of water-borne diseases and a great increase in the use of effective sanitation methods for the disposal of wastes, and consequently a sharp downward curve in the graphs of infant mortality and of gastrointestinal diseases caused by polluted waters.

9. I now call on the Secretary-General.

10. The SECRETARY-GENERAL: This special meeting of the General Assembly marks the launching of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, as has just been explained by the President of the General Assembly. It is both the start of a vital endeavour and the culmination of a long process in the United Nations system. Habitat, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held at Vancouver in June 1976¹, recommended that quantitative targets should be established by nations to ensure that all their people had access to safe water supply and hygienic waste disposal by 1990. Later, the United Nations Water Conference held at Mar del Plata in March 1977, recommended that the period 1981 to 1990 should be designated the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade and

¹ Report of Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, Vancouver, 31 May-11 June 1976 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.76.IV.7 and corrigendum), chap. II.

formulated an Action Plan.² Finally, last year, the General Assembly endorsed the Plan and formally decided to launch the Decade at its session this year [resolution 34/191.]

11. Each year, about 15 million children under 5 die in the world, most of them from water-borne diseases. Half of the world's hospital beds are filled with people stricken with diseases from the same source. If the Decade managed to achieve the goal of clean drinking water and sanitation for all by 1990, it could cut infant mortality by half and dramatically reduce sickness and suffering throughout the developing world.

12. The health consequences of this programme are clearly the most obvious. However, they are only one element. The need for water is a unifying element that runs through the whole enterprise of stimulating production and eradicating poverty. The provision of safe water and sanitation does not merely mean happier, healthier citizens; it also means increased economic productivity. In turn, improved agricultural production or increased earning power brought about by better health leads to higher nutrition, further reducing the susceptibility to disease. When millions of a country's citizens are undernourished and sick they cannot possibly make a meaningful contribution to their nation's economic and social growth. Investment in human potential is not only a moral imperative, it is also sound economics.

13. The results of the Decade should furthermore be of immediate significance to women in the developing countries. In these countries, every day millions of women spend hours walking to fetch the water necessary for the survival of their families. Hours are consumed that could otherwise be devoted to providing better care for their children, to cultivation of crops or to other useful productive activities. Recognizing the effect of the provision of accessible water in revolutionizing the role of women in rural areas in developing countries, the recent World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, held at Copenhagen, unanimously endorsed the goals of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.³

14. The cost of achieving the Decade's goals will undoubtedly be considerable. Inevitably, it will have to be borne in large part by developing countries themselves. However, there are many obvious reasons for the full and effective participation of developed countries in the efforts in this Decade. The humanitarian arguments are overwhelming. In addition, it is a field in which the technology is relatively simple and readily available, the cost effectiveness is very high and the results will be quickly and clearly visible. I would therefore take this opportunity to call upon developed countries to make available the additional resources necessary for achieving the objectives of the Decade.

15. At the same time, I want to stress that, no matter how great the support from the donor community, the

programme will not be a success unless there is a sufficient degree of commitment from the Governments of developing countries themselves. There must be the necessary political will to give the Decade the priority it deserves. It must be recognized that the goal of clean water and sanitation for all by 1990 is eminently achievable. I am gratified that several heads of State have already expressed their enthusiastic support for the Decade programme as a priority for their countries. This, I am sure, will greatly help in enlisting the strong support of the entire international community for this programme.

16. The United Nations system will provide the over-all framework, the technical support, the momentum and the promotional activities necessary for the programme's success. To maximize the effectiveness of the role of the United Nations system, a Steering Committee for Co-operative Action has been created, chaired by UNDP and including the World Bank, WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, the ILO, FAO and the United Nations itself.

17. At the country level, the UNDP Resident Representative has been designated as the focal point for co-ordinating the activities of the various agencies of the United Nations system and also external technical support for the Decade. It will be his responsibility to work with Governments and assist them in all matters relating to the implementation of national programmes.

18. In response to a request I made to Governments last year in connexion with this launching day [see A/35/367, para. 8], national reports have been submitted by both developing and donor countries on the preparations they are making for the Decade. Based on these reports, a global summary of the situation of existing supplies of drinking water and sanitation facilities has been prepared, which is being submitted to this Assembly today, together with a catalogue of reports from donor countries and organizations [see A/35/367]. In addition, the regional economic commissions have prepared similar reports for their own regions [see A/35/341 and Add.1].

19. Some might express doubts about the feasibility of achieving the Decade's goals. Thirteen years ago similar scepticism was voiced concerning the proposal to eradicate smallpox. For the last three years, however, there has not been a single case of smallpox anywhere in the world. This ranks as one of humanity's most beneficial achievements, for which the United Nations, and especially WHO, deserves special credit. The International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade offers a similar opportunity to change the quality of life in a fundamental, lasting and far-reaching way for hundreds of millions of human beings upon this earth.

20. The PRESIDENT: in accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly on 19 September this year [3rd meeting, para. 117], I shall now call upon the heads of the United Nations agencies directly concerned. The first speaker is the Director-General of WHO, Mr Halfdan T. Mahler.

21. Mr. MAHLER (World Health Organization): Three years ago, the States members of the international health co-operative, WHO, a United Nations organization, decided that their main target would

² Report of the United Nations Water Conference, Mar del Plata, 14-25 March 1977 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.77.II.A.12), chap. I.

³ Report of the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Copenhagen, 14-30 July 1980 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.80.IV.3 and corrigendum), chap. I, sect. B.

be the attainment by all the peoples of the world by the year 2000 of a level of health that would permit all of them to lead a socially and economically productive life.

22. The States members of WHO decided as they did, realizing that the existing gross inequality in health status between the privileged developed and the underprivileged developing countries, as well as within countries, is morally, politically, socially and economically unacceptable and is clearly, therefore, of common concern to all countries. We speak a lot about a divided world, and I of course need not once more remind the Assembly that in reality the highest barbed-wire fences are those that exist between the haves and the have-nots, those more than 1.5 billion of the earth's population who still continue to be trapped in an endless cycle of poverty and disease.

23. Over half of the peoples of the third world do not today have any access to anything like safe drinking water. More than two thirds of them have nothing like decent sanitation facilities. And as a consequence of this, even by the end of my address in some 12 minutes' time, many many thousands of these people will have acquired a water-related disease, and more than a thousand children will have died in those 12 minutes because of this intolerable situation.

24. Indeed, more than 80 per cent of the total disease load in developing countries can be directly related to the absence of safe water and adequate sanitation. Apart from the sheer human misery involved in this, it also represents an enormous waste of human energy, and may I assure members that the god of self-reliance does not speak to a sick, energy-depleted body. Indeed, the General Assembly emphasized this mutually reinforcing relationship between health and socio-economic development when it adopted resolution 34/58, in which it solemnly declared that health should be an integral part of development.

25. What is more, history has clearly given us ample proof of this relationship. It was on the twin pillars of safe water and sanitation that the great social revolution of the nineteenth century was based, and it is on them that the prosperity, affluence and well-being of the industrialized countries have been generated. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that finally the international community has realized that this is indeed an area of great, acute need.

26. I know we are talking in big monetary terms when it comes to the cost of the Decade—around some \$30 billion of investment on an average per year; but if, as the Secretary-General emphasized, one looks at the socio-economic benefits that will come from our ability to give each and every citizen an acceptable level of health, then I think representatives will realize that these investments are very puny, as compared to the benefits. So we have not only a screaming need for better health, but we also have a great socio-economic opportunity.

27. What is more, I also believe that we have all the elements for success, because we have the appropriate technology, if member States have the courage to choose wisely. We can command the necessary resources because our new approach depends not only on impersonal pipes and pumps, no matter how

essential they are, but above all on people, on how they ensure and use safe water and sanitation as part of their fundamental right to primary health care. And it is by that very criterion—what it achieves for people and by people—that this Decade eventually will be judged.

28. Because of this people-intensive approach, the Decade clearly has to begin within the countries themselves. Each national Government must launch it, and each Government must take its responsibility. This is the first vital step in demonstrating what is always so glibly called political commitment.

29. Clearly, each country also has to translate the Mar del Plata philosophy into concrete national strategies and plans of action. But these strategies and plans of action will both contribute to and become the beneficiaries of our whole aggressive thrust for health for all by the year 2000, because these strategies will include the basic elements of primary health care, which are: that the rural and urban poor, the social periphery, will be the main beneficiaries; that these programmes will include not only drinking water, but also sanitation and the education of the people; that these programmes will begin with the community, involve the community and belong to the community; that these communities will be encouraged not to choose high, but right technology, so that they can make use of their own skills and resources; and finally—and this is difficult—that these programmes be intersectoral, mobilizing in joint participation agriculture, public housing, public works, education and health.

30. All this will mean very big and very uncomfortable changes: alterations in priorities and in the allocation of resources; multisectoral co-ordination; new community structures; new managerial approaches; and the establishment of country-wide monitoring and evaluation systems. Because of what it will imply in end results to people, I am utterly convinced that the number of water taps per 1,000 population will be an infinitely more meaningful health indicator than the number of hospital beds per 1,000 population. But all this will certainly pose very grave challenges to vested interests, wherever they are found, in the industrialized or in the developing countries. And here again we shall have to see whether there is anything but lip-service to political commitment by Governments, whether these are only pious slogans expressed in international conferences or during international years.

31. I repeat: most important of all, this Decade is for people and, when the chips are down, it will be executed by people. So it is vital that we open and continue a dialogue with people at large, in the North as well as in the South. Only in that way will we have a small chance of avoiding more frustration and inertia and only in that way can individuals and communities achieve that positive feeling that this is not our bureaucratic decade but their own living development decade.

32. That will take more than words, however, because the dialogue must have content. It must show clearly what can be done, how it can be done and, above all, why it must be done. Only in that way can

we be sure that we shall get socially relevant and self-sustaining programmes.

33. However, let us not have any doubts that the colossal efforts that everybody is expecting from Governments in the developing countries will have to be matched by considerably increased support from the rich developed countries. We are therefore, without any bad conscience, calling for an aggressive reappraisal by all the countries involved in bilateral collaboration and, not least, also by the international agencies.

34. The global strategy has some major strategic objectives that apply to all the international agencies involved. These are: first, we shall support Governments not only in developing but also in executing their strategies; secondly, we shall support a sense of responsibility and self-reliance at the community level; thirdly, we shall ensure the adequate infrastructure development; fourthly, we shall support the training of the manpower required at all levels; fifthly, we shall help develop practical, low cost technologies; and sixthly, we shall mobilize additional resources and rationalize their transfer to the developing countries.

35. That is the strategic core of the global approach. When it comes to the international framework to support that core, above all we must learn to co-operate much better together in the system. We shall have to make sure that we not only are providing the pipes and the pumps but can also help to develop the necessary planning and management skills. We shall have to learn how to synchronize our external inputs with national plans of action, and we shall have to resist firmly the temptation to back attractive-looking short-lived projects to the detriment of cumulative programme growth.

36. WHO, a United Nations organization, comes to this Decade with some 30 years of experience concerning water and sanitation. In this spirit of WHO being the international health co-operative, I pledge that we shall place all our technical skills and all our managerial competence at the entire disposal of the developing countries.

37. Finally, I want to underline a small lesson that we in WHO are slowly learning from very painful experience: that is, to set markers by which progress can be evaluated within a specific time-frame; because that is how we can really test our commitment, by action and not by rhetoric. Those markers may have to be set at all levels and by all those involved in the Decade. Clearly, that applies to national Governments but it applies just as much to the international Organization and to all those providing external support.

38. For instance, the World Health Assembly, when it comes to the mid-term review in 1985, will have to ask member States some searching questions: "Did you formulate a country-wide water and sanitation programme and do you implement it?" "Can you demonstrate significant reorientation of national budget allocations for safe water supply and sanitation?" "Have you instituted mechanisms to ensure genuine community participation?" The Assembly will have to ask itself: "Have we truly harmonized our policies and activities in order to maximize the immense potential that lies in our collective will?"

The World Health Assembly will have to ask the donors: "Have you drastically increased your investments in the Decade?" "Have you reoriented your approach to support self-sustaining programmes?"

39. Once more our collective credibility is at stake. We must move forward together. The 1985 review will be the opportunity to demonstrate the true nature of our commitment or simply to call the moral bluff represented by such words as "solidarity", "generosity" and "compassion".

Mr. Ortiz Sanz (Bolivia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

40. The PRESIDENT (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Grant.

41. Mr. GRANT (United Nations Children's Fund): We begin today a decade of action which offers to the United Nations and to the Governments of the world a most meaningful opportunity to start fulfilling the commitment represented by the consensus [A/35/464] which the eleventh special session of the General Assembly achieved in this hall on the new international development strategy just two months ago. As the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the New International Development Strategy, Ambassador Niaz Naik of Pakistan, said in introducing the draft,

"... the present strategy... conceives of development as an integral process and the objectives of social and human development have been accorded a new emphasis... The strategy... contains specific goals and objectives relating to the elimination of hunger, universal primary education, primary health care for all, and a sharp reduction in infant mortality by the end of the century."⁴

42. These are most worth-while, but also, we must recognize, most ambitious objectives. The new international development strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade, for example, calls for the reduction of infant mortality in all countries to 50 infant deaths or fewer per 1,000 births in the first year. Its achievement would require most low-income countries, which now have an average infant mortality rate of more than 130 deaths per 1,000 births, to reduce infant mortality at a rate two to three times as rapid in the next two decades as that which they achieved in the past two decades. This will not be easy, but it can be done if approached with both the requisite determination—some would say political will—and skill in implementing necessary programmes, one of which is the provision—as is repeatedly emphasized in the new international development strategy—of safe water, our topic here today. Success in achieving the new international development strategy's goals would mean several million fewer children dying annually by the year 2000 than the United Nations now projects—the approximate equivalent of one Kampuchea each year. Given the favourable impact of these improvements in well-being on attitudes towards family size, achievement of these goals would also mean an even larger decrease in births than the United Nations now projects. The stakes are high, very high indeed.

⁴ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Eleventh Special Session, Plenary Meetings*, 2nd meeting, para. 44.

43. We meet here today to proclaim the goal of clean water and adequate sanitation for all by the year 1990. That is the goal, as the President has reminded us, of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. Governments, institutions and communities are called upon to invest hundreds of billions of dollars to achieve the physical manifestations of this goal: the wells, the pipes, the pumps and connexions, the latrines and the sewage disposal systems.

44. As Mr. Mahler has just said, this is a reasonable and dischargeable commitment. It is an affordable and practical commitment. It is an imperative humanitarian and developmental commitment. But its achievement will not only require increased national and international financial resources, it will also require, first, the redesign of many water programmes to reduce their *per capita* cost while expanding their coverage and, secondly, the much closer linkage of most water programmes with progress in other sectors, notably health education, to achieve the health goal. Increased participation by people and more appropriate technologies are required to lower *per capita* cost to a point where mass coverage is possible. Far more effective linkage of water programmes with health education is required in most countries if the health objectives are to be achieved in the Decade and not delayed until far, far later.

45. Safe clean water is essential to life; it is a prerequisite for health; it is a critically necessary instrument for well-being. Ready access to water, as the Secretary-General has already noted, is a saving of time and a conserver of energy and thus allows the fetchers of water, almost always women and children, to apply themselves to other, more productive pursuits. No sectors of the world's population are more directly and destructively affected by deficiencies in water supply and sanitation than are women and children. Children, being always more vulnerable than adults, more desperately require clean safe water as a part of their diet and to protect them from water-borne diseases. The yearly incidence of water-related and excreta-related diseases among children is estimated at 3 billion to 5 billion. Mr. Mahler has given us a graphic indication of their impact upon the mortality of small children. And, contrary to the assumption prevalent in many societies, the child's faeces are in fact the most dangerous of all human wastes, the most prone to carry infectious diseases to others.

46. For the mother, the strength and health which may be derived from clean water and sanitation has a direct impact on the strength and health of the child. Moreover, the accessibility of clean safe water has an impact on the ability of the woman and mother to address the full range of the children's needs, the family's needs, the community's needs and her needs. In many cases, as all too many of us have seen, a woman, with children either at her side or on her back, must walk many miles from home to carry water, often from contaminated sources. This daily, or twice or thrice daily chore may consume six or ten hours. The installation of pumps in a village may not only lower the diarrhoea rate and provide micro-irrigation for lowest-income farmers but also increase the time for women to participate more efficiently

in the production of food, improve the home economy, take better care of the children, have an opportunity for their own education and, not least, enjoy personal rest and a reduction of physical strain.

47. For the older child, a water well situated near home not only reduces the time and energy consumed in the water-fetching chore but frees the child's time for education, recreation and other contributions to the family's well-being. I can particularly cite the case of certain areas in South America where schools are often officially closed for the morning during the dry season so that children can search for and haul water for their families.

48. It is worth stressing that safe water alone, at the well-mouth, at the tap or at the pump, is neither a guarantor of health nor an enhancer of life. It is a starting point, a means to an end. And this, too, is a goal of this Decade: to ensure that the installation of water facilities is accompanied by education and training, and the understanding of many interrelated factors which can allow people, the beneficiaries of the facilities, effectively to apply their new water supply in sanitation, food hygiene, irrigation and income generation.

49. Perhaps the most important point for us to remember, as we launch this Decade, is that benefits of health and well-being flow from water only when its availability is accompanied by the understanding of how to use the water and how to maintain it, and the reasons for this.

50. It is also important to remember that basic sanitation is even less frequently available than safe water in developing countries and that its benefits are even more dependent upon the understanding of the community and individuals of the factors involved. Ignorance and social stigma often prevent the introduction of simple sanitary latrines, safe disposal methods for household wastes and adequate personal and food hygiene measures.

51. We are encouraged that Governments have agreed, through their designation of the 1980s as the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, that they are prepared to invest vast sums of money in support of the Decade's goals. But, in all due respect, I must caution members of the Assembly that too often the Governments of donor countries and developing countries alike are mightily impressed by the purchasing power of the hard currency at their disposal for equipment and material and construction and are terribly tight-fisted when it comes to developing the educational and social context within which alone their physical investment can produce long-term and continuing health benefits.

52. There are, of course, situations in the world where the availability of clean, safe water at convenient access may be the only missing-link element in that combination of factors which join together to produce a better life for people and we should move as rapidly as possible to provide that missing link in those circumstances.

53. More often, however, the absence of convenient, safe water is only one of many missing elements. And in those more common situations the failure to accompany the introduction of water fa-

cilities with appropriate training and education and cultural enlightenment represents an investment of limited or negligible effect in terms of the health and well-being of the beneficiary community. All too often, particularly in low-income countries with low educational levels, the availability of safe water at a pump or tap does not mean that safe water is drunk.

54. In the past three years, for example, UNICEF has assisted in the sinking of 400,000 tube-wells some 30 metres deep in Bangladesh. A large part of that investment has been borne by the communities and the Government, with UNICEF providing the hand pumps, the pipes and the well screens, which cost a total of approximately \$100 per tube-well. That has greatly eased the daily burden for literally millions of people, again especially women and children. However, evaluations of that programme indicate that there has not yet been a significant, measurable beneficial impact on morbidity and mortality from the introduction of those 400,000 tube-wells. As a consequence, the Government of Bangladesh, with continued UNICEF support, is now strengthening its work to promote and support environmental sanitation along with intensified health education efforts. The successful achievement of Bangladesh's goal of universal primary school enrolment with improved curricula by the mid-1980s can be expected to contribute greatly to the impact that the vast well-drilling programme will make on health as well as on convenience. In other words, clean water alone, out of the ground, is not enough.

55. UNICEF is starting this Decade by supporting the Governments of 90 countries in providing the means of drinking water supply and sanitation. World-wide UNICEF expenditures for water and environmental sanitation have been growing steadily since the late 1960s, reaching \$53 million in 1979, which represents over one quarter of UNICEF's general resource expenditures.

56. Supplies and equipment constitute over 90 per cent of UNICEF's total input. Additionally, UNICEF now deploys approximately 120 supply and sanitation project officers in 40 countries.

57. In several countries, such as India, Indonesia, Burma, Bangladesh and Pakistan, the involvement of UNICEF is a significant element in the support of large-scale national rural efforts, in spite of its relatively modest level. In other countries it has often led to, or been supplementary to, large-scale inputs from bilateral and other major sources of external funding.

58. We plan to increase substantially the input of UNICEF in water and sanitation over the next several years. Our medium-term work plan foresees an increase in annual expenditure in that sector to approximately \$100 million in 1984, roughly double our current level. The largest part is still directed to supplies but there is an increasing emphasis on training, health education, project support communication and technical support in specialized techniques and logistics.

59. UNICEF will also continue to concentrate its attention on those areas which are least likely to attract other external funding assistance—rural and urban slum areas where external aid may not be bankable in the same way as, for example, large-

scale urban water systems—and on funding innovative programmes, which later, after a successful pilot period, are acceptable to larger funding sources.

60. Most important in the UNICEF programme is our reliance upon community participation as the essential vehicle and context for water supply and sanitation improvements. Dr. Mahler has already spoken to the imperative of community involvement if we are to have programmes which can reach the whole population. Also, since water is often a community priority, its supply is often the starting point, we have found, for other self-reliant efforts. Safe water has thus become the potential leading edge, following which other services can be gradually organized. Moreover, direct community participation in the development of water supply and sanitation facilities is most likely to ensure their full use, the maximization of their benefits and their continued functioning.

61. Water covers three quarters of the earth's surface but only less than 1 per cent of the world's water supply occurs in a natural condition usable for sustaining human and animal life. Of that small amount, even less is readily accessible and still less of that has not been contaminated by natural or human forces. The International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade affords us all an incentive to protect those supplies that we have, to clean those supplies we have abused, to develop access to new supplies and, most importantly, to ensure that all who share this planet share also in water, the fluid of life. We must co-operate to ensure its success.

62. The PRESIDENT (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is the Administrator of UNDP, Mr. Bradford Morse, on whom I now call.

63. Mr. MORSE (United Nations Development Programme): I am highly honoured to have this opportunity to join with the Secretary-General, the Director-General of WHO, Dr. Halfdan Mahler, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. James Grant, in inaugurating this critically important Decade dedicated to the life-saving provision of clean water and adequate sanitation for all people by the year 1990. At a time when development practitioners are focusing increased attention on the pivotal role played by human resources in the development effort, nothing could be more appropriate than the stark, the shocking reminder that 2 billion potentially productive men, women and children are denied the clean water and adequate sanitation necessary to begin to fulfil their aspirations for a fuller, more productive life.

64. Eight hundred million people live in absolute poverty, caught in an endless cycle of malnutrition, high infant mortality, illiteracy and disease that reduces their life expectancy shamefully below that of the rest of mankind. And worst of all, they are denied hope—hope that they or their children can ever break out of that prison of destitution. Our commitment to development and to social and economic advancement means nothing if we cannot change the deplorable conditions of nearly one quarter of the world's population who are now condemned to live lives of misery and despair by absolute poverty.

65. The world continues its search for the keys which will liberate it from the enslavement of poverty,

yet nothing touches the lives of poor people so closely, so constantly and so pervasively as does the lack of pure water. It is a cruel adversary, which takes an appalling toll in death and disease every year. The goals of this Decade lie at the heart of our strategy to overcome the misery and suffering of poverty, for investment in water is investment in the human potential of the poor, not only one which is economically sound, but one which we can achieve, and achieve now.

66. I am struck, in particular, by the reference of the Secretary-General to the enormous gains to be made from the work of this Decade for innocent and helpless children, whose futures can be shattered by contaminated water or the lack of adequate community sanitation facilities—conditions which are totally beyond their control. And it would be nothing less than shameful if, solely because the international community lacks the determination to correct those conditions, the potential human resources embodied in those children should be cast aside for yet another generation of poverty, disease and despair.

67. What angers me is the simple fact that if water were oil we should have many, many, many times the financial commitment expressed to date for this Decade which has already been placed on the table. We should have many, many, many times the number of journalists in the press gallery attending this session. Indeed, what arouses my particular indignation on this solemn occasion is the tragic, indefensible "fact" that by our current standards we are willing to invest vastly more in ensuring enough gasoline for our automobiles than we have been in assuring the minimum, basic standards of good health and productivity for the world's poor. We are eager to pay for petrol but not for the pure water which is essential to life itself. And let us pledge that in the coming decade the fundamental human right to pure water will be achieved for the millions of men, women and children who are at present without it and are suffering indescribable misery as a result.

68. Certainly, our work is cut out for us, and let me say at the start that UNDP intends to use its entire field network and its co-ordinating role within the United Nations system to the fullest and most effective way possible to achieve the Decade's goals. I do not wish to minimize the enormity of the task before us. If we are indeed to supply clean water and proper sanitation for all by 1990, we face the problem of providing the new facilities required at a rate such as to serve half a million more people each and every day of the Decade. This will require a virtually unprecedented joint international effort in technical co-operation to strengthen national capacities, to generate self-sustaining programmes, to promote technical co-operation among developing countries and to encourage and expedite the flow of massive external funds into national Decade activities.

69. UNDP chairs the Steering Committee for Co-operative Action for the Decade through the person of the Deputy Administrator, Mr. Arthur Brown, and UNDP is fully aware of the extensive nature of the follow-up actions that must now begin. The effective co-ordination of the United Nations system involvement with the work of Governments in planning and implementing water supply and sanitation activities

is a critical process which the Steering Committee has already begun.

70. At the same time, the Resident Representatives of UNDP in developing countries have already been assigned critical responsibilities as focal points for both interagency co-operation at the operational level and for the support of the national action committees and national action plan. In many cases those Resident Representatives have already been provided with technical support teams drawn from different United Nations organizations working in their countries of assignment. They are ready to lend every assistance possible to national action plans, and as Administrator of the Programme I shall personally see to it that every Resident Representative discharges his or her focal point functions vigorously and lends every measure of assistance within his or her command to this gigantic international effort.

71. But I must at the same time underline the fact that, as is the case in any development endeavour, the source of real action and implementation lies with the participating Governments and, more importantly, with the people most directly affected. Local communities and the human and material resources available in the local communities will have the central and critical responsibilities in the achievement of the objectives of the Decade. This is as it should be, for it is the local community which best knows its needs and can best determine the most appropriate and effective way of meeting them. But this also means major co-operative efforts by all Governments and by all organizations involved in the promotion and mobilization of full-scale community participation, including local, national and international non-governmental groups.

72. At the national level, a number of developing countries have already devised action plans and have already appointed action committees to carry the Decade's objectives forward, and I urge all Governments which have not yet undertaken those initial activities to do so as soon as practicable, calling upon the United Nations system for support as they deem appropriate in the process. Equally critical is the need for due emphasis on water and sanitation in national development plans and targets and for developing countries themselves to commit the increased resources required to meet target goals, to strengthen infrastructure arrangements for the design, management and servicing of the new systems and to exchange experiences among each other on the problems encountered and the successes achieved.

73. Now, in addition to the task of attending to their own unmet water supply and sanitation requirements, developed countries have a particularly vital role and high responsibility to participate in the mobilization of the massive external resources which will be needed to fulfil the Decade's objectives. This Decade provides a genuine and practical measure of the commitment of the international community to development efforts of the kind that all nations and their citizens understand and appreciate—the direct alleviation of disease and the destitution stemming from it and the broad-based enhancement of the human resources required to accelerate the achievement of all of their economic and social development goals.

74. The Governments of developed countries can therefore signal to the world their own commitment to these practical ideas by strengthening their bilateral programmes of assistance towards the Decade's goals, by harmonizing their efforts in that respect with those of the entire international community, and by increasing their contributions to the multilateral Decade-related programmes. All of this can provide what will be a test of the world's determination truly to advance the conditions of life of those who have suffered so much so long.

75. Today we are launching a carefully constructed, thoroughly prepared people-oriented, fully integrated programme with prospects for success that are, as a practical matter, within reach, provided every participant does its part. It is at this operational stage that UNDP can give its own participation full effect. We are ready, we are eager, to assist in making the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade the success that I know it can be. And let us this day together solemnly pledge that it shall be.

76. The PRESIDENT (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call upon Mr. Luis Urbano Jáuregui of Argentina, President of the United Nations Water Conference, held at Mar del Plata in 1977.

77. Mr. JÁUREGUI (Argentina), President of the United Nations Water Conference, (*interpretation from Spanish*): Please allow me at the outset to bring the Assembly the greetings of the Argentine Government and to assure it that our presence at this meeting is a demonstration of Argentina's desire to bring every effort to bear in order to guarantee the implementation of the objectives set for the Decade that we are beginning today.

78. We wish to extend our congratulations and thanks to the Secretary-General for the excellent work he has presented to us in documents A/35/367 and A/35/341 and Add.1, which are an important starting point for the task we have before us in the Decade.

79. It was my privilege to preside over the United Nations Water Conference at Mar del Plata and to participate in its preparatory meetings as well as in subsequent national, regional and international gatherings called upon to implement the Plan of Action.

80. Today I am extremely gratified to attend this meeting, which I would describe as historic. As a result of Economic and Social Council resolution 1979/31, adopted at its 14th plenary meeting, on 9 May 1979,⁵ the General Assembly agreed to set aside a special day of its thirty-fifth session for the official launching of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, one of the most important actions contained in the Mar del Plata Action Plan.

81. How could I fail to be pleased at seeing that the same international community that emphasized the urgent need for a change of attitude and behaviour in connexion with water and a more orderly and responsible management of water resources as a factor of economic development and a decisive factor in improving the standard of living of the international

community is developing that level of commitment by supporting this official launching of the Decade in the General Assembly.

82. When I closed the Mar del Plata Conference I stated that it was intriguing to see how needs can unite those separated by circumstance and that I was confident that the needs arising from the water shortage might be no exception to that rule.

83. Today, in the light of the attitude of the Member States that participated in the Conference, whose delegations were always inspired by the sincerest spirit of participation and collaboration, and given the responses at the State level and at the level of the entire United Nations system at the intergovernmental level—in the Committee on Natural Resources, the Economic and Social Council, and in the regional economic commissions themselves at their different gatherings—as well as in the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, which have been preparing and defining ways to participate in the course of action requested at Mar del Plata, I think that the words I spoke in closing the Conference have been confirmed.

Mr. Kasemsri (Thailand), Vice-President, took the Chair.

84. The Water Conference was special in that it brought the consideration of the water problem to a very high level, locally and internationally.

85. The momentum that resulted from Mar del Plata has been maintained; this meeting reaffirms that. Let us continue to maintain the momentum, and even to increase it further, through intelligent and resolute implementation of the Action Plan locally and internationally.

86. That will, no doubt, require efforts to which we must all be committed and in which there can be no excuse for the wasting of energy and resources.

87. In this connexion, and without being critical, I should like merely to mention that in this joint action that unites us, just as in all human endeavours, it is always possible to provide more and to provide it better.

88. Here I would appeal, as a passionate specialist in this field, for greater commitment and, where possible, greater operational efficiency on the part of Governments and governmental machinery, and greater participation by the agencies of the United Nations system and the co-ordinating machinery established at the international and local levels, in order thus to contribute to the attainment of the objectives of the Conference.

89. In connexion with the specific problems of providing water and sanitation services, I believe that the vast sectors of our world's population that have no access to safe drinking water and that lack adequate sanitation facilities demonstrate the seriousness of the problem globally and locally.

90. The Conference concluded its analysis of this issue in its highly important resolution II, and in recommendations 15 to 17 of its Action Plan.⁶

⁵ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1979, Supplement No. 1.*

⁶ See *Report of the United Nations Water Conference, Mar del Plata, 14-25 March 1977* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.77.II.A.12, chap. I).

91. The recommendation of the Water Conference that the decade of the 1980s be designated the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade doubtless provides a unique opportunity for dynamic action, at the national as well as at the international levels, in a vital activity related to the daily lives of men, women and children of all countries, regardless of their positions or political, economic, social and cultural differences.

92. The concentration of those efforts in one Decade will no doubt require imagination, creativity and foresight in order to work out the details of the course of action to be developed, so that the impact of that decision can be felt in every corner of our world.

93. Of course, if there is an area of activity that can have a simple, direct and universal impact and transcend all the artificial barriers created by the individual, it is included among the objectives of the Decade, since it will not only make it possible to improve the living conditions of the world's population but will also serve to give cohesion to the international community, including the United Nations system, in the quest for genuine economic and social development.

94. Resolution II of the Mar del Plata Action Plan can be defined in that connexion as an intelligent elaboration which is derived from past experience and which includes courses of action at the local, regional and international levels and calls for the preparation of global plans to programme action to be undertaken. It calls for appropriate co-ordinating machinery among the competent agencies. It talks about the intensification of co-operation and technical assistance. It involves the need to provide greater financial resources, be they local or international. It is aimed at banishing the concept of a free drinking water supply but it also maintains and reaffirms the social character of that provision and its characteristics of vital service to the individual, especially in the poorest economic sectors of the population.

95. If the past is a prologue to the future, I believe that as a result of our joint actions, decisions and firm implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan, we shall have transformed a general consensus into concrete action, and even though the objectives set have been ambitious, they can be achieved in the near future. I believe that this political decision, which involves the harmonious use and increase of resources of all types, will make it possible for the entire world community to look towards its future with greater optimism.

96. I shall now, if I may, describe how Argentina plans to fulfil its own commitment to the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.

97. On the occasion of the first regional meeting on the Mar del Plata Action Plan, co-ordinated by ECLA, my Government expressed its views on the goals established for the Decade, which state that by 1990 the water supply should be made available to 80 per cent of the urban population and to the same percentage of the rural population where it is concentrated in groups of more than 100 inhabitants, and that waste disposal services should meet the requirements of a minimum of 70 per cent of the urban population with the above-mentioned concentrations. This means that out of a total population of 30 million

inhabitants expected by 1990, there will be almost 7 million new beneficiaries of drinking water and 12 million beneficiaries of sewage services.

98. From the physical and infrastructural standpoints, those goals require a vast programme of works and investment to improve and widen existing public services as well as to construct new systems in areas which now lack them.

99. The degree of obsolescence of many existing installations also requires parallel efforts and a vast renovation programme, including installations utilized by 7.5 million inhabitants for drinking water and by 3.5 million inhabitants as regards sewage services.

100. In addition to that, we must consider the adaptation or construction of sewage processing plants within the present system. The level of investment to be applied has been estimated to be of the order of \$5.2 billion. In order to make those considerable efforts possible, the Argentine Government has made important changes in the institutional structures of water supply and sanitation services in our country.

101. Just a few months ago, the national Government was responsible for providing drinking water supplies and sanitation services in almost all the cities in our country. But today, that situation has been changed. There has been a transfer to the provinces—22 in all—of the responsibility for installation, equipment and available human and economic resources in operation in each province. It has been understood that the decentralization of those services—services which are in general eminently local—is an important measure for good administration and greater efficiency in resolving problems at the local level.

102. The national Government has in turn promoted the establishment and development at the provincial level of entities which are responsible for those activities and have competent, flexible administrative structures and a proper level of operative decentralization.

103. We have also considered making those services municipal or private in the future. The national Government will only participate in the construction, operation and administration of interjurisdictional works and services and will also rely on the human and operative resources available to provide technical aid to the provinces engaged in this process of decentralization.

104. This very important institutional change is being supplemented by the design of a national programme which includes a global policy of the country for the sector under its jurisdiction. Towards that end a special unit has been established; that unit is also acting as a steering committee in order to propose, co-ordinate and supervise national efforts during the Decade.

105. Financing machinery is being prepared to make it possible for this sector to have genuine national resources which can be supplemented by loans at the local and international level. In the matter of priority of investment in the administration of this financial machinery, the national Government will be assisted by the provinces.

106. I should also like to comment on some other decisions already reached in connexion with drinking water.

107. We have decided to set up a broad system for measuring the consumption of drinking water and to define a tariff system which would penalize abuses in the use of water and thus make it possible for all sectors of our population to have access to proper drinking water supplies and have the benefit of an adequate level of hygiene, even those that have scarce economic resources.

108. There will be greater consumer and private sector participation, not only in the traditional areas of design, construction and provision of equipment and materials, but also in the maintenance and financing operations. To illustrate this, we should like to point out that international tenders are requested under the system of public works contracts for the building of aqueducts in the central area of our country. This involves 2000 kilometres of tubing and investments of over \$500 million.

109. Active work is also being done in meeting basic needs related to water supply and sewage in four vast regions in our country. Master plans have been drawn up for the next 30 years.

110. In respect of water pollution control, the Government has defined its objectives aimed at maintaining the process of pollution over the short term at its present level and of implementing during the Decade a programme of recovery of polluted water courses at optimal quality levels compatible with differences in water use. In that connexion, a national committee has already been created—for pollution control and co-ordination of the efforts made by the various competent bodies—as well as a national programme for quality control of water and the promotion of the establishment of control bodies at the provincial level. Polluted water recovery projects and programmes are being developed for some rivers in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area.

111. This has been a very brief review of some of the actions and decisions reached by the Argentine Government to fulfil its commitment to its population and to the international community, of which it forms a part, in this effort to be accomplished during the Decade.

112. That is why the Argentine Republic fully endorses the text of the draft resolution on the proclamation of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade adopted unanimously on 4 November last by the Second Committee and by the General Assembly as resolution 35/18.

113. We feel that if in the future we are able to implement this resolution, the international community will have acted in a very positive way to meet a requirement basic to the well-being of peoples.

114. The PRESIDENT: I now invite the Rapporteur of the Second Committee, Mrs. Stephenson-Vernon of Jamaica, to present Part I of the Committee's report on agenda item 61, containing the draft resolution on the Proclamation of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.

115. Mrs. STEPHENSON-VERNON (Jamaica), Rapporteur of the Second Committee: I have the

honour to present to the General Assembly Part I of the report of the Second Committee on agenda item 61, "Development and international economic co-operation" [A/35/592].

116. In paragraphs 17 and 18 of the report, the Second Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft resolution entitled "Proclamation of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, 1980-1990" and the adoption of a draft decision relating to the documents submitted under subitem (f), "Natural resources", which was adopted by the Committee without a vote. I commend these recommendations to the Assembly.

117. The PRESIDENT: I call on the representative of Senegal, who will speak on behalf of the group of African States.

118. Mr. SARRE (Senegal) (*interpretation from French*): The official proclamation of the "International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade" is undoubtedly a major event of the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly, particularly for the third world countries.

119. As religions emphasize, water is the source of life. It is necessary for drinking, for cooking and for hygiene. It is also indispensable to enable animals and plants to live. Hence the need for adequate water supplies of sufficient quality and quantity.

120. Shortage of drinking water can hamper the economic and social development of the third world countries. On this matter I would refer the Assembly to the report of the Secretary-General [A/35/367].

121. Is there any need to emphasize that certain endemic diseases found in the third world are transmitted water-borne? Dysentery, cholera and bilharzia, to cite only a few, are transmitted by organic wastes, borne in the majority of cases by water. The eradication of these infectious diseases will depend, on the one hand, on the quality of the water at the disposal of the population concerned and, on the other hand, on the quality of the sanitation services provided to ensure a healthy environment.

122. The goal of the Decade that we are proclaiming today is to guarantee the water supplies of urban and rural areas by the year 1990, by the adoption and early implementation of health service programmes and programmes for the elimination of waste water. Of course this is an ambitious goal but it is within our capabilities.

123. Millions of women and children walk miles every day to obtain a few pints of water. For millions of human beings the fetching of water is the main activity, and what water it is!

124. The report of the Secretary-General provides ample illustrations of the effects of the shortage of safe water and adequate sanitation services. According to this report, "every year over 13 million children die in the developing countries [partly because of] the absence of reliable water supply and sanitation services" [*ibid.*, para. 13]. The heavy price they pay deprives these countries of millions of potential workers. However, those who survive are not spared, for they suffer the after-effects of those parasites.

125. If one takes the example of Africa, more than 75 per cent of the rural population there does not have drinking water. To this must be added the precarious health infrastructures. It must be our policy to reverse that trend.

126. There is no point in reaching the objectives of the Decade if the populations for which these infrastructures are destined are not in a position to ensure the maintenance and smooth functioning of the equipment installed.

127. WHO and the World Bank have estimated the cost of building the necessary facilities for attainment in 1990 of the goal of 100 per cent coverage with regard to the provision of water supply and sanitation at \$132 billion. Such amounts of money far exceed the possibilities of the developing countries, which have to rely on external assistance to a large extent.

128. As stated in the report of the Secretary-General, "the major share of investment during the Decade will have to come from the developing countries themselves" [*ibid.*, para. 36].

129. As far as Africa in particular is concerned, very few countries are in a position to finance investments themselves. The report of the Secretary-General which, in the section dealing with ECA, has supplied this information [A/35/341, para. 18], points out in particular that certain African countries depend very heavily on foreign loans for their water supply programmes and their sanitation programmes.

130. Thus it is absolutely imperative that the developed countries in particular make additional efforts by providing technical and financial assistance for the implementation of the goals of the Decade.

131. We are aware of the efforts that have been made by the developed countries and by the World Bank and WHO in this field and we congratulate them on those efforts. While we do so, we agree with the Secretary-General "that the traditional involvement of the Bank will need to be supplemented by increasing commitments from other donors" [A/35/367, para. 38].

132. The success of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade will depend on the will and the commitment of all to co-operate and to work to bring about the early attainment of the targets.

133. We hope that the efforts made so far in this field will be stepped up throughout the Decade and thus guarantee safe and ample water supplies and adequate sanitation facilities for all urban and rural populations.

134. The PRESIDENT: I now call on the representative of Burma, who will speak on behalf of the Asian group of States.

135. Mr. GYEE (Burma): It is my privilege and pleasure, first of all, to speak on behalf of the Asian group of States, of which Burma is the current regional Chairman. I need not say how happy we all were to hear our President open this unique one-day special meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the launching of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. We are confident that his valued guidance will be a major contribution to the success of our deliberations.

136. At the same time, we should like to extend our friendly greetings to all the delegations and members of the Secretariat at this meeting and to the executive heads of WHO, UNICEF and UNDP, who have addressed us this morning.

137. We in the Asian group of States listened with keen attention to the views and comments of the Secretary-General in his opening address. May we also mention that the Secretary-General's two reports, one on the present global situation and prospects regarding drinking water supply [A/35/367] and the other on regional reviews of activities in the same field [A/35/341 and Add.1], are highly commendable documents which give a detailed analysis of the major issues confronting Member States in the fulfilment of the objectives towards which they are embarked. Valuable recommendations and general guidelines have also been given, and our appreciation is due to all those officials who have been associated with the preparation of the reports.

138. Under resolution 34/191, adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 1979, we are gathered here for the purpose of designating the years 1981-1990 the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, with the goal and the hope of providing safe drinking water and adequate sanitation to all by the year 1990. We all know that this is the culmination of a process which began with the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held at Vancouver in 1976 and was recommended by the United Nations Water Conference, held at Mar del Plata in 1977. The task before us is to generate the momentum for a special programme, encompassing both national and international efforts, to bring safe water and adequate sanitation to all within a specific time-frame. This is welcome, in view of the alarming fact that half the world's population is without reasonable access to a vital necessity of life and an even greater number of human beings lack proper sanitation. Undoubtedly, the magnitude of the task being undertaken presents a daunting challenge, but today the course of human history is a rapid one, and this cannot wait. The peoples of the world have a right to expect enlightened decisions and that the first steps will be taken at this session.

139. The countries of the Asian region are glad that the United Nations system has seen fit to highlight the importance of drinking water and sanitation, and we strongly endorse this trend. Generally, water-related projects form an integral part of national plans and programmes. This perhaps partly explains why not all countries of the region are able at present to adopt the target of providing water for all at the end of the Decade. But for those few that have attempted to do so, the targets set may be seen as representing the basic minimum and be regarded as achievable. No doubt more success could be achieved given adequate internal and external financial resources, technical staff, education, effective organization and supervision.

140. I should now like to turn to the situation in my own country, since in a sense it reflects the problems faced by countries of the Asian region. Burma, my own country, attaches much importance to working actively to promote safe water supply and adequate sanitation for its people. We are happy to note that the aims

and objectives being discussed at this special meeting correspond in large measure with the programmes currently being implemented in Burma. Since the commitment of the Burmese Government in both sectors comes within the context of Burma's overall national development strategies, I should like to say a few words about the national economy of Burma as a prelude to an understanding of the emphasis we place on water supply projects and management.

141. By virtue of its natural and geographical conditions, Burma is predominantly an agricultural country. It is a country endowed with a natural river system of four large rivers, all flowing in the same direction from north to south. These are the rivers Irrawaddy, Chindwin, Sittang and the Salween, with their tributaries. Apart from this riverine environment, Burma is blessed by the monsoon rains for over six months of the year. Hence, it can be seen that Burma has enormous water potential, both surface run-off and ground water, for the multiple purposes of irrigation, hydroelectricity and potable water supply. We in Burma are highly conscious of the socio-economic aspects of water resources and we have accorded appropriate attention to those aspects endeavours concerning national development.

142. Of a population of approximately 35 million, about 87 per cent is in the rural sector, consisting of peasant families engaged in crop production. The fact that Burma has an agriculture-based economy and that peasant farmers have a direct or indirect bearing on the national development process needs no special emphasis.

143. Against such a background, it is only natural that our external trade should be highly dependent on agricultural production. Foreign exchange derived from agriculture constitutes 70 per cent of our total economy and this fact of itself warrants unremitting efforts on our part to boost agricultural production through rural improvements.

144. Accordingly, in the current implementation of Burma's 20-year long-term economic plan, which has been under way since 1971-1972 with five component short-term plans of four years each, agriculture has been accorded the highest priority. The human element is an integral part of any national development process and we have not lost sight of the urgent need to raise the living and working conditions of our peasant farmers. We have not lost sight of the fact that water plays an important role in serving the interest of our people, regarding it as vital that a safe and adequate water supply be made available to rural areas for drinking and domestic use, as well as for cultivation. An assured safe water supply can provide peace of mind to our peasant farmers and thereby enable them to devote themselves whole-heartedly to their productive activity.

145. There is no denying that water is indispensable to many types of economic activity as well as to human, plant and animal life, and no systematic economic progress can be made without careful study and application of the water factor. Providing safe water and sanitation would contribute in no small measure towards cutting down water-related diseases—diarrhoea and other gastroenteric diseases and

malaria, among others—thereby contributing to the better health of working people, both rural and urban.

146. The availability of adequate water in the rural areas would also cut down labour spent in fetching water from long distances and enable those who have to spend a greater part of their time fetching water to concentrate on production work.

147. With these thoughts in mind, we in Burma have been giving due attention to solving the problems of safe water supply and proper sanitation. I should now like to turn to the policies and performances of my country in both areas.

148. The declared Government policy is to give priority to the rural poor, with economic priority for the agricultural sector, since that is the sector providing the major contribution to the foreign exchange earnings of the country and, also, it is the major employer of the country's manpower. Currently, a number of rural supply water projects are being carried out in Burma on tapping, pumping, storing, purifying and delivering clean water and effectively disposing of waste, particularly in rural areas.

149. In our ongoing endeavours, UNICEF, UNDP, the Asian Development Bank and the Australian Development Assistance Agency have all contributed towards the advancement of Burma's programme. The delegation of Burma wishes to take this opportunity to express its appreciation and grateful thanks to those organizations.

150. At present in course of implementation is the dry zone safe drinking water supply project with the assistance of UNICEF and the Australian Development Assistance Agency. That is a ground water utilization project for providing drinking water to thousands of villages in the dry zone of Burma. Under that project, the work of sinking tube-wells in water-scarce areas for supplying potable water has met with considerable success.

151. Assistance is also being given by UNICEF in implementing a water supply and environment sanitation project. The construction of water systems for small hospitals, village schools and rural health centres is included in that programme.

152. Further UNICEF aid is being sought for drilling drinking water tube-wells outside the dry zone. In accordance with Government policy, those tube-wells, including the pumps and engines, are provided free to poor villages. However, the village, through the formation of a village water committee under the village people's council, has to pay for the operation and maintenance of the pumps and engines. In that way village people are being assisted to help themselves by raising their living standards, improving health and active participation in development efforts.

153. Although emphasis is on the rural sector, the welfare of the urban population is not neglected. Since the urban people have a relatively higher income than the rural peasants, they are expected to pay for the cost of their drinking water supplies through appropriate municipal taxes. The urban water supply projects are for the cities of Rangoon and Mandalay. Similar projects are under way for other cities with Asian Development Bank assistance and for the towns with UNDP assistance.

154. At present, the Pugyi reservoir and water supply projects for Rangoon City are being assisted by funding from the Asian Development Bank and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. That project, to be completed in the early stages of the forthcoming decade, will supplement present water supplies from two existing reservoirs and tube-wells.

155. The aforementioned projects being carried out in Burma tie in with the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade activities. Burma intends to pursue those projects with greater momentum during the Decade on which we are embarked. But any attempt to reach the targets set for the Decade would initially require an increased flow of external inputs in the form of a reasonable amount of soft loans or grant aid. We need not stress how important it is to create the right conditions for achieving planned targets. Based on our past experience, timely inputs, both internal and external, play a very important part in ensuring the success of any plan and it is important that they be made available in sufficient quantity at the appropriate time.

156. Burma has already made much headway as regards water supply projects. It is vital that we sustain our efforts, not only to maintain the tempo of achievement but to claim bigger successes, during the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. International assistance, expertise and technology will obviously be necessary. As we see it, the task of providing new water supply within a country must go beyond any planned decade and necessarily with only minimal foreign assistance. For Burma, that means a strategy for mobilizing internal resources in order to reduce the foreign exchange assistance required for both urban and rural water systems.

157. Our present pattern of foreign assistance is based completely on the import of needed equipment, such as pipes, pumps and engines. We wish to change that pattern by the setting up of plants within the country to produce those very items with locally available materials, but such plants require capital funding. The advantage of that pattern is that it would be self-generating in the production of needed items and encourage self-help and self-reliance.

158. The chief constraint on foreign technical and financial assistance to the country has been that there is not enough money available for projects such as those concerning drinking water and sanitation. Such projects are unable to compete with economic and industrial projects which can show definite economic returns or foreign exchange earnings. Thus, in the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade a separate allocation will need to be made for funding such projects related to drinking water as those we have proposed. Such projects cannot hope to get adequate funding either from UNDP or from the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

159. The delegation of Burma, therefore, would like to urge the relevant international organizations and developed countries to increase their support and the flow of grant assistance to developing countries in

their efforts to fulfil the worthy goals of the Decade being launched today.

160. The PRESIDENT: I call on the representative of Czechoslovakia, who will speak on behalf of the group of Eastern European States.

161. Mr. HULINSKÝ (Czechoslovakia) (*interpretation from Russian*): Since we share and support the goals of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, the delegations of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, the German Democratic Republic, the Hungarian People's Republic, the Mongolian People's Republic, the Polish People's Republic, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic welcome its official proclamation. The Decade is the first step towards the practical implementation of concrete plans and programmes to help in the carrying out of the important social and economic development tasks of all countries and the strengthening of mutually advantageous bilateral and multilateral co-operation to supplement the efforts of States at the national level.

162. The attainment of the ultimate goal of the Decade—to provide all people with an ample supply of water of an acceptable quality—could be an important and worthy contribution towards the attainment of the goals and targets of the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade. Successful achievement of the targets of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade will require significant material resources, of which there is an acute shortage at the present time.

163. The socialist countries will, in this respect as well, strive, both within the United Nations and outside the Organization, to implement the proposals they have put forward on disarmament issues, which would enable States to harness resources now spent on the arms build-up to the attainment of social and economic progress. On that basis, the socialist countries advocate that the permanent members of the Security Council and other States with major economic and military potential cut back their military budgets and use the resources released by such cuts for the social and economic development of peoples and, in particular, for providing assistance to the developing countries, as set forth in resolution 3093 (XXVIII) of the General Assembly and in the proposals put forward by the socialist countries at the tenth special session of the General Assembly, devoted to disarmament, in May 1978.

164. The socialist countries are further convinced that the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade can only be truly successful on condition that the projects and programmes of the Decade are implemented in accordance with the national plans for social and economic development of the developing countries and that they are underpinned with an implementation of progressive social and economic reforms to be brought about in those countries by mobilization by the latter of their own resources, the intensification of their own efforts to create and develop their independent national economies, *inter alia*, by strengthening the sovereignty of

countries over their own natural resources and all spheres of economic activity. This includes the implementation of General Assembly resolution 3171 (XXVIII) of 17 December 1973, entitled "Permanent sovereignty over natural resources", of resolution 3175 (XXVIII), of the same date, entitled "Permanent sovereignty over natural resources in the occupied Arab territories and of resolution X, adopted at the United Nations Water Conference held in 1977 at Mar del Plata on water policies in the occupied territories.⁷

165. In the interest of present and future generations, the socialist countries are taking necessary steps for the protection and rational, scientifically sound use, of natural resources: the protection of clean air and water supplies; the preservation and regeneration of natural resources; and the improvement of the living conditions of the peoples of our countries. The water legislation in force in our countries is geared to meeting the water needs of our populations and of our economy and to the protection of water from pollution, contamination and depletion. The activities of countries members of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance in the matter of water resources are not confined merely to measures directly related to internal problems. We co-operate extensively in this field with other countries, both on a bilateral and on a multilateral basis.

166. Our countries play a particularly active part in work dealing with water problems within the context of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, and those collective activities are proceeding in a harmonious, planned way and are producing fruitful results for all countries participating in the Council's activities.

167. The socialist countries co-operate actively in the field of water management within the framework of the activities of the regional economic commissions of the United Nations. The committees on water problems of the regional commissions of the United Nations are the appropriate forums for examining questions of regional water management and for exchanging experiences. Results of these activities in one region are often beneficial to the others. For example, the report, conclusions and recommendations of the Seminar of ECE on Rational Utilization of Water Resources, which was held from 17 to 22 September 1979 at Leipzig, were made available to other United Nations economic commissions as well.

168. Together with this, the socialist countries are co-operating in the field of water resources on a bilateral basis with many developing countries. In accordance with bilateral intergovernmental agreements, they are providing technical assistance for the development of the water resources of many such countries. A highly important feature of our assistance is the comprehensive, multifaceted approach we adopt to resolve the water management problems of the developing countries. Our organizations are carrying out planning and prospecting projects, providing materials and equipment for them, and are training national professionals. In particular, technical assistance is being provided to develop the water supplies of the People's Democratic Republic of

Algeria, the Revolutionary People's Republic of Guinea, the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, the People's Republic of Mozambique, the People's Republic of Angola, the Republic of Tunisia and other countries as well.

169. With the participation of specialists from our countries, plans for the comprehensive use of water resources are being drawn up in which questions of water supply are also dealt with as, for example, in the Republic of Iraq, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the Syrian Arab Republic.

170. Prospecting and planning work on these problems is under way in other countries as well.

171. In expressing our willingness to promote as far as we can the goals and targets of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, which we share and support, and in particular our willingness to take part in implementing the multilateral United Nations projects and the projects of the specialized agencies in the field of drinking water supply by means of their contributions to UNDP, the delegations of the countries that I mentioned at the beginning of my statement, which are members of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, state that the efforts of our countries to attain the progressive goals and targets of the Decade will be made in ways which will be consistent with the social and economic structures of our countries and the fundamental principles of our foreign economic relations, that is to say: full equality, non-discrimination, mutual advantage, co-operation among all States, irrespective of their economic and social systems, non-interference in the internal affairs of others and respect for sovereignty.

172. The socialist countries voice their staunch conviction that the States and peoples of the world, acting in a spirit of high-minded responsibility, will be able to bring about in the 1980s the maintenance and strengthening of universal peace and will thus be able to create the conditions for resolving the vital global problems which confront mankind, including the problem of providing the peoples of the world with pure water.

173. The PRESIDENT: I now call upon the representative of Colombia, who will speak on behalf of the group of Latin American States.

174. Mr. LIEVANO (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Latin America is very pleased to join in the launching of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.

175. At a time when, in spite of the vast progress achieved in the fields of technology and public health, millions of children still die each year from illnesses related to the lack of drinking water and sanitary facilities and large sectors of the population see their capacity to work and their life expectancy reduced for the same reasons, the need to mobilize the international community is becoming increasingly pressing.

176. Since the time when the United Nations Water Conference, held at Mar del Plata in 1977 following the guidelines set by the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held at Vancouver in 1976, recommended that the period between 1981 and 1990 be designated the International Drinking Water Supply

⁷ Ibid.

and Sanitation Decade, many countries, including those of Latin America, have intensified their efforts to provide their populations, in rural and urban areas alike, with better sanitary conditions and adequate supplies of drinking water. Some countries have continued the task of transferring significant financial and human resources to programmes aimed at the improvement and broadening of services in those fields.

177. Nevertheless, the complete attainment of the objectives of the Decade, namely drinking water and sanitation facilities for all by 1990, is by no means an easy task. As we have stated in different international forums, Latin America, in spite of the degree of its development as compared with other regions of the world, also requires a measure of external assistance commensurate with its growing needs. Although most development plans in the region include as goals and objectives the provision of adequate drinking water and sanitation facilities to the urban and rural population, the needs are growing in both areas. On the one hand, the rapid growth of urban centres increases the number of areas that lack the most essential services; on the other, the difficulty in gaining access to many rural areas has an impact on the quantity of financial and human resources devoted to the achievement of the objectives included in the development plans.

178. Our region has already made great efforts with its own resources but we realize that this is an undertaking of universal scope, which should be dealt with as such.

179. Latin America has as one of its priorities the achievement of the goals of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. In spite of the difficulties inherent in any programme of magnitude such as this, we have not spared, nor shall we spare, any effort to convert our intention into reality.

180. We offer our support and our encouragement to the international bodies which are committed, with great devotion and effectiveness, to this task of decisive importance for the well-being and the health of the population of the world.

181. The PRESIDENT: I now call on the representative of the Netherlands, who will speak on behalf of the group of Western European and other States.

182. Mr. SCHELTEMA (Netherlands): On behalf of the group of Western European and other States, I welcome the initiative that has been taken to devote a special meeting of the General Assembly to the water and sanitation problems we are faced with in this world. The Secretary-General and his close collaborators, who have addressed this meeting today, has given us insight into the magnitude of the problems and at the same time have pointed to options for the solutions we are all seeking.

183. Since the United Nations Water Conference, held at Mar del Plata in 1977, the United Nations system has stimulated countries to take up the challenge to reach the goals set out in the Action Plan we all agreed upon.

184. It was not so long ago that the Western industrialized countries themselves were engaged in the process of delivering water and sanitary facilities

to the people. This could be achieved successfully only by attaching high priority to that effort in the national development plans, and through planning and by informing the people of the convenience and the health benefit to be derived from potable water and sanitation. The report [A/35/367] presented to this session underlines the importance of those factors. It furthermore emphasizes the integrated national approach needed to arrive at self-reliance in that respect. Self-reliance in water and sanitation is not measured by the number of taps and pumps alone but rather by the ability to install, use and maintain them. It requires measures on such items as the development of institutional facilities, manpower development and the mobilization of community resources.

185. We realize that the developing world, in co-operation with the nations I am representing here today, has still a long way to go in reaching the target set for 1990. In rural areas as well as in the urban fringes, so much remains to be done in so many sectors that we wonder whether we shall ever be able to succeed. But let us not be paralysed by the magnitude of the work ahead of us and by the resources needed to reach the goal we have set ourselves: water and sanitation for all. They are measured by financial resources, but not by them alone. We are ready to assist wherever possible.

186. A pre-condition for bringing about the provision of an adequate amount of safe water and an improvement in the sanitation situation is the raising of the technical capacity at the national level. And although it is the responsibility of national Governments to allocate the highest priority to that area, inputs from outside may be of help.

187. We have listened with great care to what has been said by the Secretary-General and his collaborators today. On behalf of the Group which I represent, I want to underline the great importance we attach to the assistance rendered by the United Nations system at the national level. A co-ordinated approach is needed, and I also welcome the arrangements that have been made in establishing a steering committee under the chairmanship of the Deputy Administrator of UNDP, Mr. Brown, which will bring about this co-ordinated approach.

188. The Decade we are about to launch is not confined to water and sanitation. In the course of the Decade, it will become apparent that through the actions taken in this Decade we shall also make a contribution to the satisfaction of the basic human needs, such as health, education, housing and employment.

189. The PRESIDENT: I now call on the representative of Qatar, who will speak on behalf of the group of Arab States.

190. Mr. JAMAL (Qatar) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It is an honour for me, as Chairman of the group of Arab States for the month of November, to speak on behalf of those States on the occasion of this important meeting at which the General Assembly is launching the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.

191. It is also a pleasure for me to express on behalf of the Arab group our thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General for the valuable statement he made at the beginning of this meeting and for the two important reports he has submitted to the General Assembly on the international situation with regard to the supply of drinking water and sanitation [A/35/367], and on regional activities in this field [A/35/341 and Add.1]. We should also like to thank the Directors of the United Nations specialized agencies taking part in the work of this Decade, in particular, Mr. Halfdan T. Mahler, the Director General of WHO, Mr. James Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF and Mr. Bradford Morse, Administrator of UNDP.

192. The Arab States, which are developing countries, welcome most sincerely the launching of this Decade and express their commitment to co-operate fully in its goals.

193. The problem of water supply and sanitation is one of the most important problems faced by the world today, and the developing countries are the first victims of it. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General [A/35/367], the developing countries each year lose 13 million children below the age of 5, half of them falling victim to factors directly connected with water supply and sanitation. This is a catastrophic loss for the developing countries, which has to be added to the social and economic disasters which beset the societies of those countries because of the poor conditions of water supply and sanitation.

194. The world today has the scientific and technological capacity to ensure drinking water and sanitation for every society in the world—hence the close link between drinking water supply and sanitation, on the one hand, and international economic co-operation and the establishment of the new interna-

tional economic order, on the other. That is why we must stress the major role to be played in this problem by the developed countries within the framework of the new international economic order.

195. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to draw attention to the fact that while the problem of drinking water supply and sanitation is most often the result of scientific and technological under-development, it has been aggravated by another phenomenon in our Arab region, that is, the occupation of the Arab territories by Israel. The exploitation by the occupying authorities of the water resources in the Arab region, to the benefit of the settlements instead of the Palestinian people, has a negative effect on the drinking-water supplies and the sanitation situation, as well as on the agricultural situation. The Israeli occupying forces have cut off the water supply from homes—in both towns and villages—which are subjected to a curfew for long periods, and they have exposed children as well as grown-ups to thirst by way of collective punishment. The General Assembly must energetically condemn these inhuman practices.

196. Science and technology help human society to improve living and health conditions and help mankind to free itself from poverty and disease, but the misuse of technology is a danger for the environment because it can cause water pollution—hence the importance of planning.

197. Finally, we hope that the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade will be an example of success in the field of international co-operation in the service of man, wherever it may be, with the aim of providing a proper environment for a better life.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.