

United Nations Under-Secretary-General Anwarul K. Chowdhury's essay on the importance of freshwater for human survival, for inclusion in the book, **Waters Letters from Around the Globe**. The book will be released at the launch of *The International Decade for Action: "Water for Life, 2005-2015"* on 22 March 2005.

To the People of the World:

Water is precious. Although water covers three quarters of the earth, only a small fraction is accessible to human beings as fresh water. Water is critical to nourishing and fostering life. Water is vital to our existence and to our social and economic development. While water is taken for granted in many parts of the world and often wasted, 1.4 million children die each year from lack of access to safe drinking water.

Water plays an essential role in helping to eradicate poverty, especially in the 50 Least Developed Countries, 34 of which are in Africa. To build a world without hunger, we must and we can harness water to feed the world by developing policies and ensuring programmes that will encourage sustainable use of water.

At the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, the international community agreed to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water in both urban and rural areas. But we should remember that in sub-Saharan Africa only 58 per cent of the population has access to improved water resources. In the most vulnerable Least Developed Countries, improvement in the proportion of people with access to water has remained marginal.

In order to reach the Millennium Development Goals, the world must move from commitments to concrete projects – from promises to tangible action. We must improve water productivity, particularly in agriculture by assisting with improved agricultural techniques and better water efficiency. In order to stop the unsustainable exploitation of water as a resource, water management strategies at the regional and sub-regional levels should be developed and promoted.

Providing safe water services and sanitation to all, especially the most vulnerable countries, should be the goal not just of governments but also of people who use water. To eradicate hunger and poverty and reach the Millennium Development Goals, governments and people will need to work together to ensure access and make best use of the water resources of our planet. If the goal of “ensuring environmental sustainability” is to be achieved and the suffering of the world’s poor alleviated, the world community must focus on water, our most precious resource.