

Poverty, Misery, Affluence and Obligations: 2004 World Water Week Seeks Solutions

Photo: Stephanie Blumhauer

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Dr. Abdul Latif Jamal Rashid, Iraq's Minister of Water Resources

“Poverty and human misery still prevails side by side with affluence, conspicuous consumption and mismanagement of vital resources in spite of significant technical and entrepreneurial abilities,” said SIWI Executive Director Anders Berntell in his address during the opening of the 2004 World Water Week in Stockholm, August 15–21. “It is highly relevant, and an ethical obligation, to discuss how a fair and stable social development can be accommodated within an integrated drainage basin management.”

With that as a backdrop, a record 1,300 participants from more than 100 countries set about the serious business of the week. Featuring plenary sessions, workshops, panel debates, side events, award ceremonies and a record number of independently organised seminars, the 2004 edition was the most comprehensive to date. Some 50+ leading international organisations were involved.

As has become the trademark of this annual forum, the experts didn't just talk about water. They discussed water in relation to vicious cycles of corruption, global poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and gender inequality.

Two major themes were over-riding, however, and were reflected in the Stockholm Water Symposium theme of Drainage Basin Management – Regional Approaches

for Food and Urban Security, and the related plenary and workshop sessions.

With about 840 million people malnourished or lacking a secure food supply today and another 2 billion or more people expected to be seated at the table by 2025, finding water to feed the world's growing population is a major priority for world attention. Many areas of the world have either run out of water to grow more food or have difficulty exploiting or accessing available water resources.

And with the world's urban population expected to reach 5 billion by 2030, increasing water needs for urban uses will put increasing pressure to reallocate water from agricultural uses to city uses. Demand management practices in cities, together with more efficient and water saving technologies, e.g. low-flush toilets, low-flow showers and more efficient and cleaner technologies in industry, can relieve the pressures on scarce water resources.

The importance of the water issue was underscored by numerous key speakers during the week. “The water we are using is only borrowed from future generations,” said Ms. Anna Kajumolo Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-Habitat and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, in her Keynote Address.

“Business as usual approaches are not valid any longer,” said Ms. Carin Jämtin,



Ms. Anna Kajumolo Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-Habitat and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations

Swedish Minister for International Development Co-operation.

One of the hotter topics of discussion during the week was the current water situation in Iraq. Dr. Abdul Latif Jamal Rashid, Iraq's Minister of Water Resources, spoke of the challenges his ministry and the country is facing, as well as some of the future priorities. These include environmental restoration, dialogue with bordering nations regarding water issues, water conservation, modernisation of water control, supply and sanitation systems and reorganisation and capacity building. Successes he noted were the establishment of a Commission for Integrated Water Resources Management and the ongoing restoration of the Mesopotamian Marshlands. He also emphasised that, while partners and investment are welcome, the work in Iraq “will be carried out by Iraqis for Iraqis.”

The power of one was emphasised by Ms. Ethne Davey, Gender and Water Alliance Executive Director, who showed how one single woman in South Africa was able to locally generate enthusiasm enough to stimulate development of livelihood security with small-scale food production for 35,000 households.

The following pages feature an overview of the 2004 World Water Week in Stockholm. Full Workshop Conclusions will be presented in the December 2004 issue. ■



Ms. Carin Jämtin, Swedish Minister for International Development Co-operation