



## PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

MESSAGE FROM Mr JACQUES CHIRAC  
PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

TO THE PARIS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION IN RURAL AFRICA

FRIDAY 1 APRIL 2005

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Africa, more than elsewhere, water is at the core of all development challenges.

Every year, due to the lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation, cholera, typhoid and different forms of dysentery take the lives of millions of children.

Owing to the lack of water points and adequate water distribution networks, tens of millions of little girls - particularly in rural areas - are forced to fetch water every day instead of going to school.

Inadequate irrigation in Africa is curbing the development of food agriculture which is crucial to combating hunger.

Rapid population increase, in towns especially, results in greater water abstraction from watercourses and ground waters leading to sometimes irreversible damage to the environment and to a multiplication of disputes over water use.

And yet, despite the scale of the challenges involved, resolving the issue of water in Africa is today within reach.

The international community has made water supply and sanitation a Millennium Development Goal. Africa has incorporated the issue of water into the NEPAD strategy and its G8 and European Union partners are committed to supporting it in this undertaking.

France is at the forefront of this commitment through its bilateral and multilateral assistance, notably within the framework of the EU Water Facility and the African Development Fund (ADF) to which it is the leading contributor. Moreover, France recently passed a law promoting the international cooperation actions conducted by its local authorities and Water Agencies.

Yet resources are still lacking. With the September United Nations Millennium +5 Summit a few months away, the international community must shoulder its responsibilities.



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This is why France, in keeping with its water commitment since the G8 Evian Summit, has decided to today host in Paris an international conference to support the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative (RWSSI) launched by the African Development Bank in March 2004.

The goal is an ambitious one, namely to raise from 40% to 80% the rate of access to those basic services in African rural areas, a rise representing an additional three hundred million women, men and children. How can anyone fail to assess the underlying implications of such a programme for the development of the whole of Africa? As well as its impact on the achievement of the other Millennium Development Goals, such as reducing child mortality, achieving universal primary education for boys and girls, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, and eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

This programme is going to cost 14 billion dollars over ten years. This amount may seem considerable. Yet, in the field of water policy, lack of action is more costly than action. Twenty-two billion dollars per year, 220 billion dollars over ten years, such is, according to the World Health Organization, the cost of failure to achieve water-related Millennium Development Goals.

Failure to act is thus not only a moral scandal, but also an economic absurdity. This is why I would like the Paris Conference to mark the first stage of renewed mobilization. A mobilization that should enable us to strengthen coordination among all players - donors and African countries - in order to enhance aid effectiveness. A mobilization that should enable us to finance in full the achievement in Africa of the Millennium Goal for water supply and sanitation. France will play its full part in this mobilization. Today, I solemnly call on the international community as a whole to take part in this effort.

Thank you.

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