

Address to the Second Asia-Pacific Water Summit
By Mr Gábor Baranyai, Special Envoy of the President of Hungary

Mr President, Mr Deputy Prime Minister, ministers, ambassadors, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen!

It is a great honour and a great pleasure for me to address the Second Asia-Pacific Water Summit on behalf Mr János Áder, the President of Hungary.

First, I would like to thank the Royal Thai Government and the Asia-Pacific Water Forum for giving us the possibility to address the Summit. I also have to congratulate Thailand for this splendid new conference centre, already a token of sustainable development, a piece Thai architecture harmoniously fitted into nature.

I am sure many of you are asking yourself why Hungary, a country that is neither Asian, nor Pacific holds such a great interest in this Summit.

Well, first of all, from the economic point of view Asia-Pacific is the most dynamic and powerful region of the World. Naturally, anything that happens here is of interest for us. The fast development that takes place in many countries of the region, and most particularly in South East Asia, resembles the neck-braking economic development that happened in Europe in the late 19th century. Those days cities grew out of nothing, factories were built on empty fields, rivers got regulated.

But those days politics and people paid very little attention to the impacts of development on the environment in general and on water resources in particular. A result of that development is that almost everywhere in Europe people have access to clean drinking water at an affordable price.

But there is another price. Decades of overuse, pollution and physical alternation have resulted in an ecological degradation of our waters beyond the point of no return. So as one American scientist said: it is very good to be a human in Europe, but quite bad to be a fish.

We truly hope that the countries of the Asia-Pacific Water Forum will be able to avoid our mistakes and achieve a good quality of life both for the people and for the fish. In Europe with have plenty of experience to share with you.

The second reason why we wanted to come to Chiang Mai is that the international water community is boiling after the Rio+ 20 Conference. The world finds itself at difficult crossroads. The noble legacy of the first Rio Conference, an environmental dream that is still alive but that has proved so difficult to implement, must be married with the pressing unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals.

So the world needs a new development vision. A vision that is fair, equitable, sustainable and engaging.

And nobody questions that the issue of water will have to play a key role in that vision. But water in the broadest sense. In addition to the satisfaction of immediate human needs, we need a specific sustainable development goal that takes account of all other aspects of water. The

physical water cycle, the natural environment, the governance issues and the related economic questions. This is why the Government of Hungary welcomes so warmly the broad agenda of the Second Asia Pacific Water Summit and the crosscutting messages of the draft Chang Mai Declaration.

The work has already taken a promising start in the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, that is actually co-chaired by Hungary's UN ambassador actually present in this room.

My country, Hungary holds a special interest in water. It is a land-locked country, sitting on the bottom of what scientist call: the most perfect geological basin. We receive 95% of our surface waters from our neighbours. So what happens to the waters in the neighbouring countries is an eminent and immediate environmental, economic and national security issue for us.

But we cannot blame our neighbours for everything. More than 90% of our drinking waters come from the groundwater, a precious resource that we have to take care of ourselves. On this note we were very happy to recognise the attention given to groundwater in the Chiang Mai declaration.

It is not surprising that international water cooperation has been a must, an absolute imperative for my country. We have been active in three levels.

First, at the level of our immediate environment. The entire territory of Hungary lies in the Danube basin. The river Danube has the most international catchment area in the world with 19 countries sharing the wider river basin. It was a long and painful experience to establish proper cooperation mechanisms and institutions to jointly manage the river. But we believe we have made it.

Secondly, in the broader European region Hungary has been an active promoter of the 1992 Helsinki Convention on Transboundary Water Courses. May I call your attention to the fact that as a result of a recent amendment, the Convention has become a global legal instrument. There is 20 years of vast practical experience. I invite all countries to study the possibility to join that useful instrument. Hungary also initiated the Water and Health Protocol to the Helsinki Convention, the only international instrument specifically designed to address the nexus between water and public health.

Thirdly, my country has been active at the global plane as well. Together with Thailand, Tajikistan and Finland – whom I would like to thank for their fruitful cooperation – we have been steering the Friends of Water Group in New York. This group was instrumental in shaping the water-related agenda of the Rio+ 20 Conference.

And most importantly, Hungary is organising a major international water conference, the Budapest Water Summit this October with the sole objective of defining the major elements of a Sustainable Development Goal on Water.

Finally, let me say a few words on the importance of this conference. We believe that the Second Asia Pacific Water Summit is not only important for the region, but for the entire world. Its policy conclusions will be followed up in all important water meetings to come, in Dushanbe, Stockholm, New York. And at last, but not least, they will be taken into account at

Budapest Water Summit in Hungary, October this year. It is important that the Asia Pacific region has expressed itself on water and that its voice will be heard globally.

With that I thank again the organisers and wish a very successful Summit for you all. Thank you very much for your attention!