

Statement
by
H.E. Mr. Chung Hong-won
Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea
on the occasion of
the 2nd Asia-Pacific Water Summit
20 May 2013, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Her Excellency, Ms. Yingluck Shinawatra, Prime Minister of Thailand,
Your excellencies, heads of state and heads of government
And distinguished guests,

Let me congratulate the opening of the 2nd Asia-Pacific Water Summit.

And first, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Prime Minister Yingluck for the invitation.

I also would like to express my respect for the leading role that the Thai government has been playing in regional water cooperation after overcoming the scars left by the severe flooding in 2011.

As you must be aware, since the beginning of the 21st century, the world has been facing a number of challenges such as food and energy shortages, environmental pollution and increased outbreaks of contagious diseases. And these challenges are growing in their intensity as well.

They are making it difficult to ensure sustainable water supply and management, which is essential for the humankind's survival.

Environmental pollution is reducing clean and safe water resources while water-related disasters that are increasing in frequency due to climate change are making water management more difficult.

Moreover, growth of the global population that is projected to reach 8.3 bn. by 2030 and rapid urbanization that is in progress across the world are likely to aggravate serious water shortage.

Although the Asia-Pacific is posting most dynamic growth in the world, it is also the region more vulnerable to water issues than others.

While rapid social and economic development in the Asia-Pacific is fast increasing demand for water, frequent water-related disasters such as flood and drought occur every year, inflicting great pains.

A simple look at the latest a few years will reveal that the floods and typhoons that hit more than several nations in Southeast Asia resulted in a number of casualties and property damages.

Safe drinking water and basic sanitation facilities are in severe shortages.

Given these circumstances, it is only natural that this summit today is drawing a level of interest and expectations that are higher than ever before.

Distinguished guests,

Water issues cannot be resolved by any one nation or region. Under the clear recognition that there can be no future without addressing water problems, we have to bring all of our capabilities together.

First of all, we have to ensure that water is given top priority in the ongoing discussions about the post-MDG agenda beyond 2015 or the Sustainable Development Goals promoted after the Rio+20 (UN Conference on Sustainable Development).

Second, the focus of water-related disaster measures should now shift from ex-post responses such as emergency relief and reconstruction to prevention.

Early warning systems should be made more advanced while disaster response exercises should become more systematic.

In particular, efforts are needed to prepare for water-related disasters from the beginning stage of urban construction plan development.

A collaborative system for water-related disaster response among nations should be further strengthened.

Thirdly, we should realize water welfare so that all people including venerable groups in the society can enjoy benefits of water as water is one of the most fundamental conditions for people to enjoy happy life.

Most urgently, more financial resources and investment should be made available for making improvement in water and sanitation sectors.

In fact, although improvement of sanitation facilities is one of the most basic MDGs, we are hearing the projection that this goal appears unlikely to be attained by 2015.

Overall access to water in the Asia Pacific is improving. However, more efforts are in order to tackle sanitation issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Korea is also not free from water issues.

Korea is one of the water-stressed countries defined by the United Nations and we have been making steady efforts to fundamentally address this issue.

Particularly after the launch of the Park Geun-Hye government in February this year, 'sustainable water management' and 'creation of healthy water environment' are being pursued as major national agenda.

More than anything else, establishing a preventive and integrated anti-flood system is given top policy priority in Korea.

We are strengthening a system of flood forecast and warning by expanding rain radar deployment and digital flood risk map production.

Through aligned management of flood control facilities in areas prone to flooding, we will develop comprehensive flood control plans specific to each region.

Furthermore, access to tap water in rural and fishing villages will be drastically increased.

Currently, while tap water penetration in urban areas is reaching almost 100%, the comparable figure for rural and fishing areas is just about 60%. This is why the Korean government is planning to push up this number to 80% by 2017.

We will also revise relevant laws and regulations to build a sustainable water circulation system and increase supply of water circulation facilities such as those for rainwater utilization and wastewater reuse.

Going beyond such domestic efforts, as a responsible middle power in the international society, Korea will work proactively to contribute to resolving water problems in the world.

Most of all, we are making our utmost efforts to prepare for the 7th World Water Forum scheduled for 2015.

As the hosting nation, Korea will play whatever role it can to bring together each nation's commitment to addressing water issues and make water one of the key future goals for the international community.

In particular, by placing a focus on discussing various water-related commitments that have been made so far and effective ways to implement them, we hope to be able to make practical contributions to resolving water issues.

In the meantime, Korea is also actively participating in building an international response system for water-related disasters.

A case in point is the third DiREx (disaster relief exercise) of the ARF that was jointly held by Korea and Thailand earlier this month.

The exercise is viewed to have substantially increased joint coping capability against water-related disasters such as tsunami.

Lastly, the Korean government will also take an interest in developing nations' efforts for securing and managing water resources in this International Year of Water Cooperation and work towards stronger partnerships to support such efforts.

We will share extensive experiences and technologies we gained from supporting developing nations' water management efforts through the EACP (East Asia Climate Partnership) over the past 5 years.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ultimately, a change is in our hands.

This summit today will serve as an important opportunity for uniting political commitments of regional nations to addressing water issues and sharing one another's wisdom.

I hope this conference can remind us all once again of water's precious value and how appreciative we should be of water so that all can start to take proactive actions to resolve water problems in the region.

Thank you.