

# WORDS OF CAUTION, AND OF HOPE

## Open letter to the CSD 11 Ministerial Delegation

By Shiney Varghese, IATP

**M**inisters and delegates gathered here have proposed Water to be the theme for the first cycle, particularly in the context of meeting the millennium development goal on water. Throughout the preparatory committee meetings towards WSSD, the NGO major group has stated that water is a crosscutting issue: ensuring water security can help us meet several of the millennium development goals (MDGs) and help address many of the themes of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI): poverty eradication, sustainable production and consumption, and the protection of the natural resource base.

However, a word of caution: Achieving MDG on water is not the same as putting in place a sustainable water use and management policy.

In fact, the provision of water and sanitation, even at the cost of environmental sustainability, is in evidence in most parts of the world, for example the US state of California, but especially in several urban centres in arid regions. In these situations water security and water availability for luxury use are ensured at the cost of environmental sustainability. Yet that is not an option available to most governments for ensuring universal water security, nor is it advisable.

We would argue that MDGs directly linked to safe water security (i.e health, food security, and water and sanitation in particular) can be achieved successfully only by ensuring that the criteria related to crosscutting themes, such as sustainable production and consumption and gender, is used in addition to biodiversity impact assessments in evaluating each proposal that involves the use and management of water resources.

### **Inter-linkages among the crosscutting themes**

We also congratulate the delegates for suggesting energy as the next theme, since sustainable production and use of energy is key to sustainable use and management of natural resources (including water), the third crosscutting theme.

The complex inter-linkages between poverty alleviation and the other two crosscutting themes makes JPOI and the implementation of Agenda 21 a real challenge for all of us directly involved in it, be it governmental agencies or civil society major groups, but even more so for the national government delegates who have to compete for resources, especially in the context of increasing unilateralism, military spending and economic globalisation, all of which undermine sustainable development.

But we need to have hope! .....

It is often said that while water can be a cause of conflict, it also offers tremendous opportunity to work for peace. All over the world, there are excellent examples of sustainable water use, where communities come together and manage their resources in micro-watersheds. However, the enabling environment is lacking in most areas to help local people and communities to participate in decisions regarding water management or protection of the ecosystem. When decisions are taken at the lowest appropriate level, through democratic processes, the responsibility to manage it also rests at that level. To reiterate, the key to sustainable development lies in ensuring that the responsibility for managing the resource and the right to use the resources is at the same (lowest possible) level, and national governments can help this happen to a great extent.

SDIN and thousands of other civil society networks working towards sustainability outside the UN system are with you on this!

