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**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of World Water Day 2009:
Transboundary Waters**

22 March 2009

Water affects all aspects of human life, from health and sanitation to the food that we eat, from our environment and ecosystems to the industry and energy that power our development. Yet this vital resource is under threat. The amount of water we have has remained constant for thousands of years while the number and types of users have increased massively. Global dynamics – such as population growth, urbanization, land use changes, and global warming – are creating competing pressures on this finite resource. As a result, the amount of water available for each person is increasingly unequal and diminishing dramatically.

Geopolitical realities compound these trends. Rivers, lakes and aquifers do not respect national boundaries. An estimated 276 transboundary surface water bodies and 273 transboundary aquifers have been identified so far and around 40 percent of the world's population live in transboundary water settings. Competition over water is even more acute in these zones, leading to serious tensions between different groups of users. Some have even raised the spectre of future “water wars”.

World Water Day 2009 is an occasion to raise awareness of these dangers. Yet it is also a time to remember that water does not have to be a source of conflict and competition. If we are wise and just in the way we use and share our water resources, water can also be a catalyst for international cooperation and peace.

Water should be seen as a multifaceted resource that provides opportunities for creating new benefits to be shared, for solving stakeholders' problems and for meeting their respective interests. When the management of shared water is handled with the right tools – that is, through cooperation, tolerance and mutual

respect – it can pave a safe way towards sustainable and peaceful development from every angle: social, economic, political, cultural and ecological. Thus, the benefits that accrue from cooperation over water can and should go far beyond the management of the resource itself.

Past experiences confirm that it is possible for parties with divergent interests to use a common resource harmoniously. What is important is learning how to manage shared resources equitably, in ways that guarantee good quality and adequate quantities of water for everyone.

It is toward this end, and to help different stakeholders deal constructively with sensitive water problems, that UNESCO created the From Potential Conflict to Co-Operation Potential initiative (PCCP). Launched in 2001, the programme focuses on developing the capacity of decision-makers, diplomats, water professionals and other key partners to anticipate, prevent and resolve water conflicts. Drawing on case-studies of successful cooperation, it seeks to change the culture of freshwater management from one of competition to one of collaboration and mutual assistance and understanding.

We have moved beyond the need for declarations and statements. The priority now is for action. We must mobilize the necessary political commitment, human capacities and goodwill to ensure that forecasts of looming water crises do not become true. Water has been, can be and must be a connector, not a divider



Koïchiro Matsuura