

Draft

Pakistan Launches the 'International Year of Sanitation 2008'

ISLAMABAD, March 4: The Federal Minister for Environment, Govt. of Pakistan, Syed Wajid Hussain Bukhari formally launched the International Year of Sanitation 2008 here on Tuesday, March 4, 2008.

The International Year of Sanitation (IYS) is being observed by the Ministry of Environment in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Bank's Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP), Department of International Development (DFID) UK, Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) and Water Aid.



Federal Minister for Environment, Syed Wajid Hussain Bokhari speaking at the inauguration of the IYS 2008

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Bukhari said that the Environment Ministry, in line with the country plan for IYS and in collaboration with the provincial governments, national and international partners, is undertaking various interventions to accelerate progress on implementation of the National Sanitation Policy. He also mentioned that the National Drinking Water Policy has been finalised and shared with the provincial governments for their endorsement.

The Federal Minister for Environment said that Pakistan is committed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) including halving the proportion of people without access to environmentally safe sanitation by the year 2015 and 100 per cent coverage by the year 2025. He said that our policies must be proactive and have financially and technically innovative incentives.

Explaining the IYS country plan, Mr. Bukhari said that about 20 per cent of the country's population will be reached with hygiene messages and 6 per cent of the population lacking access to improved sanitation will be provided access to the same by the end of 2008.

Participants of the launch were informed that IYS will be launched in all four provinces, AJK and the Northern Areas simultaneously in conjunction with the World Water Day on March 20, 2008. A 'Child Health and Sanitation Week' will also be observed throughout the country during April in collaboration with UNICEF and the Ministry of Health.

In his address, Secretary Ministry of Environment, Mr. Ejaz Qureshi revealed that Pakistan suffers a loss of Rs. 112 billion (US\$ 1 = PK Rs. 61) which is equivalent to 1.8 per cent of the GDP in terms of damage to environment and natural resources on account of improper water supply, sanitation and hygiene conditions in the country.

He said: "For every dollar spent towards improving sanitation and hygiene, between \$3 and \$34 is saved in health, education and social and economic development. Hence, investment in sanitation is an investment for the betterment of communities and the children," he observed.

The Acting UN Resident Coordinator and Country Director WHO, Dr. Khalife Bille, while addressing the gathering, reiterated that UN will continue to work with the government towards achieving the MDGs in Pakistan and continue supporting the implementation of the action plans developed for the IYS.

Earlier, a presentation was made by the Chief, Water, Environment and Sanitation UNICEF, Andrew Parker to explain the objectives of the IYS. He mentioned that the UN General Assembly has declared 2008 as the IYS in order to raise awareness amongst the masses and to mobilize resources and increase commitments for tackling the lack of sanitation.



Chief, Water, Environment and Sanitation UNICEF, Andrew Parker made a presentation on the objectives of IYS.

In his presentation, Andrew Parker said that sanitation would help eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, help achieve universal primary education and promote gender equality and empower women.

"It will also help reduce child mortality. Pakistan is still one of the few countries left with polio and poor sanitation does not help. Sanitation will have better impact on maternal health," Mr Parker added.

The Director General of the Ministry of Environment, Mr. Jawed Ali Khan; Team Leader WSP, Farhan Sami and a representative of the RSPN, Ms. Shandana also addressed the gathering which included a large number of INGO and NGO representatives, academia, media and the private sector.