



# Media Update

20 March 2015

## United Nations

### SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE

## INTERNATIONAL DAY OF NOWRUZ 21 March 2015

The annual observance of Nowruz is a wonderful opportunity for people to join together to celebrate cultural diversity, dialogue and mutual respect. It is a moment of unity and solidarity, within and among societies, that is all the more important at times of strife and division.

This year's Nowruz also takes on special meaning as the United Nations works to shape a new vision for sustainable future and adopt a meaningful universal climate agreement. These priorities for 2015 are in line with the spirit of Nowruz, which promotes harmony with nature and all peoples to foster cooperation for lasting peace.

This ancient New Year tradition coincides with the arrival of spring, giving rise to a rich array of customs, rituals and festivities, from communities in Western, Central and Southern Asia, to the Caucasus, Balkans and other regions. Nowruz is inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, under UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

I wish joyous and peaceful celebrations to all. May the spirit of Nowruz live on throughout the year.

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## WORLD WATER DAY 22 March 2015

This year, as the UN prepares to adopt a new post-2015 sustainable development agenda in September, World Water Day highlights the essential and interconnected role of water. We rely on water for public health and equitable progress, it is essential for food and energy security, and it underpins the functioning of industries.



The onset of climate change, growing demand on finite water resources from agriculture, industry and cities, and increasing pollution in many areas are hastening a water crisis that can only be addressed by cross-sectoral, holistic planning and policies – internationally, regionally and globally.

Among the most urgent issues are access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Despite progress under the Millennium Development Goals, adopted in 2000, some 750 million people -- more than one in ten of the world's population -- remain without access to an improved water supply. Women and children, in particular, are affected by this lack, as not only is their health compromised, but considerable hours are wasted in the unproductive – and sometimes dangerous – business of collecting water.

The statistics on sanitation are even less encouraging. Some 2.5 billion people still live without improved sanitation, and a billion people practice open defecation, making sanitation the least successful area of the MDGs. We cannot achieve a world of dignity, health and prosperity for all until we address this urgent need.

Our sustainable future is also jeopardized by climate change, which is why United Nations Member States are working hard towards a meaningful, universal climate agreement this December in Paris. Over the coming years, greenhouse gas emissions will have to significantly decline in order to avert the worst impacts of climate change, which include changed weather patterns and the threat of water scarcity in large parts of the world.

To address the many challenges related to water, we must work in a spirit of urgent cooperation, open to new ideas and innovation, and prepared to share the solutions that we all need for a sustainable future. If we do so, we can end poverty, promote global prosperity and well-being, protect the environment and withstand the threat of climate change.

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