

**READY OR NOT?  
A CONFERENCE ON ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS FOR ADAPTING TO  
CLIMATE CHANGE**

**Panel discussion on “Climate Change and Water”  
Remarks of Mark Van Putten  
April 30, 2009**

**Introduction**

Thank you for inviting me to participate in this panel. Thanks, also, to Oxfam America, Church World Service, NRDC, Friends of the Earth and all of the organizations who collaborated in planning this important conference. It’s exciting and inspiring to see the combination of humanitarian, environmental, civic and public policy organizations involved.

I’m pleased to represent Water Advocates on this panel to discuss adaptation to climate change in the context of assuring access to affordable and sustainable supplies of safe drinking water and basic sanitation, especially for the world’s poor. Water Advocates was founded in 2003 and is the first U.S. nonprofit advocacy group dedicated entirely to raising awareness and support for addressing the global safe drinking water and sanitation crisis.

My comments today focus on two points:

1. Apart from climate change, there already is a global safe drinking water and sanitation crisis. There are noteworthy and hopeful steps toward addressing this crisis, from which much can be learned in crafting adaptation approaches.
2. Climate change will exacerbate this crisis, requiring additional resources and complementary adaptation strategies. Moreover, the commitment by the U.S. and other developing countries to adaptation assistance is likely a prerequisite to a new global agreement on reducing global warming pollution.

**The Current Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation Crisis**

Quickly, a few statistics about the consequences of the existing global safe drinking water and sanitation crisis:

- Nearly one billion people lack safe drinking water and two-and-a-half billion people lack access to basic sanitation.

- Waterborne diseases, mainly diarrhea, kill over two million children each year – six times as many than die from HIV/AIDS and four times as many killed by malaria.
- Girls drop out of school at puberty because of inadequate sanitation and women in many countries spend hours each day hauling water.
- Economic development is impeded, sensitive environments degraded and social stability threatened by unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation.

### **Current Actions & Strategies**

While the scale of the crisis is daunting, there are important features of the response to it that are relevant to adaptation:

- *It has been recognized as a global priority.* One of the Millennium Development Goals adopted at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development committed to reduce by one-half by 2015 the proportion of the world’s population lacking access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. Moreover, an analysis prepared for the Third World Water Forum concluded that safe drinking water and sanitation underpin 30% of all of the MDGs, making it one of the most cost-effective humanitarian or development investments.
- *There are an array of proven solutions appropriate to a variety of urban, peri-urban and rural situations.* Especially in rural settings, there are a rich variety of relatively simple solutions ranging from play pumps, bore holes, rainwater harvesting, gravity-fed spring systems, and point-of-use treatments. The trick is matching the right solution to the particular situation and assuring its ongoing effectiveness through community engagement and monitoring.
- *There is a robust network of civil society organizations with extensive experience working in public-private partnerships to deliver appropriate and sustainable solutions in virtually every country around the world.* Increasingly, these “implementing organizations” are working together to coordinate their efforts, learn from each others’ experiences, raise additional and more effectively spend available resources, engage with host governments, and communicate better to build more public and political support. For example:
  - The Millennium Water Alliance brings together implementing organizations like CARE, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision and Water For People in an

unprecedented consortium to extend safe drinking water and sanitation to the world's poor.

- The Global Water Challenge was launched to bring businesses and foundations together to fund safe drinking water and sanitation projects, including in schools – half of which worldwide do not have safe drinking water and adequate sanitation.
- *The U.S. Congress has passed important legislation and increased appropriations; hopefully, with more of both to come. For example:*
  - In 2005 with overwhelming bipartisan support, Congress passed the “Senator Paul Simon Water For The Poor Act,” which:
    - elevated the safe drinking water and sanitation crisis to a priority of U.S. foreign policy (the only MDG officially adopted as U.S. foreign policy) and focused the U.S. on a needs-based approach;
    - required the Department of State to develop a “safe water and sanitation strategy” with “specific and measurable goals, benchmarks, and timetables” ... “to provide affordable and equitable access to safe water and sanitation in developing countries;”
    - encourages public-private partnerships; and,
    - requires annual progress reports to Congress on implementation of the strategy.
  - Since passage of this Act, Congress has increased appropriations for safe drinking water and sanitation assistance, appropriating \$300 million in FY08 to implement the Act, with 40% targeted for use in countries of greatest need in sub-Saharan Africa.
  - Just last week, on Earth Day, the “Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act” was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives with bi-partisan co-sponsorship. Its goal is to provide 100 million of the world's poorest with first-time access to safe drinking water and sanitation on a sustainable basis by 2015. It would also build improved U.S. government capacity to address this crisis by:

- establishing an Office of Water within USAID to implement country-specific water strategies;
- creating a Special Coordinator for International Water within the State Department; and,
- establishing programs in countries of greatest need that invest in local capacity, education, and coordination.

### **Climate Change Adaptation and Safe Drinking Water**

Climate change will exacerbate the existing safe drinking water and sanitation crisis. Sir Nicholas Stern summarized the issue well in his 2006 *Review on the Economics of Climate Change*: “The most vulnerable – the poorest countries and populations – will suffer earliest and most, even though they have contributed least to the causes of climate change [p. ix].” The report urged developed countries to increase traditional development assistance, as well as to provide assistance to developing countries for adaptation to climate change.

The specific likely impacts of climate change on drinking water and sanitation are described by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s 2007 Working Group II Report, “Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability,” and in its June 2008 Technical Paper, “Climate Change and Water.” Among the exacerbating impacts cited in this paper are:

- reduction in water availability in basins fed by glaciers;
- changes in water availability due to precipitation changes and droughts;
- increased algal blooms;
- salinization of coastal aquifers;
- impacts on water quantity and quality from floods and low-water conditions; and,
- increased mortality and morbidity rates from waterborne diseases.

The IPCC report also emphasized the importance of ongoing measures as an essential part of future adaptation strategies: “the success of traditional public-health activities, including providing access to safe water and improved sanitation” is critical to enhance the “*adaptive capacity*” of vulnerable populations [p 415]. In short, to adapt to the likely impacts of climate

change on access to safe drinking water we must do much more of what we've already been doing.

Both in crafting U.S. climate change legislation and in the international negotiations, it is obviously important for the developed countries to provide significantly increased resources for adaptation assistance. But it is also important to assure that the adaptation strategies for distributing and using these resources complement the proven approaches to providing safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Important issues that must be resolved with respect to adaptation assistance include:

- determining the source of increased funds, such as from the auctioning of allowances for greenhouse gas emissions;
- determining the amount of money that will be made available for adaptation assistance generally and for safe drinking water and sanitation specifically;
- developing the criteria that must be satisfied by developing countries to access adaptation funds, such as whether or not they need to demonstrate the incremental impacts of climate change (i.e., an “additionality” requirement);
- coordinating distribution of adaptation assistance funds made available through climate change-related “facilities” with traditional, bilateral development assistance;
- learning from and building on the existing distribution systems and networks that provide access to safe drinking water and sanitation, especially with respect to community engagement, government buy-in, transparency and accountability and, most important, monitoring to assure the sustainability of the technologies or measures undertaken.

OxFam America, Friends of the Earth, NRDC and other groups worked well together in formulating common positions on these issues during the last Congress. Continued coordination among humanitarian, environmental and public policy groups will be just as important in this Congress and in the international negotiations leading up to December's meeting in Copenhagen.

### **Adaptation Assistance as the Key to Mitigation**

It may well be that coming up with an effective adaptation assistance package is the key to a new global deal to reduce global warming pollution. The talks last December in Poznan, Poland,

revealed what the Ghanaian delegate called a “vision gap” between rich and poor countries on the issue of adaptation assistance. Prodipto Ghosh of India called the disagreement over this assistance “one of the saddest moments” he’s witnessed in his 12 years of participating in international climate change negotiations. At the final plenary session, Ghosh castigated the developed countries, saying "In the face of the unbearable human tragedy that we in developing countries see unfolding every day, we see callousness, strategising and obfuscation."

Effective U.S. leadership in reducing the unbearable human tragedy of the global safe drinking water and sanitation crisis can help us build a global consensus to solve the global climate crisis. In short, adaptation may turn out to be the key to mitigation.

Thank you.