



STATEMENT

BY

Alhaji Mukhtari Shehu Shagari
Honourable Minister of Water Resources, Nigeria
(Chairman, African Ministers Council on Water)

AT

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE 12TH SESSION
OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

NEW YORK, APRIL 29 2004

Mr. Chairman,

Water problems in Africa are acute and complex. Water bodies and courses are diminishing across the continent. Lake Chad basin for instance, has shrunk from 26,000 sq. kms to less than 3,000 sq. kms affecting over 20 million people, livestock and the environment.

Over three hundred million people are without access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. Yet, water holds the key to achieving the goals of reducing poverty and hunger by 50 percent by 2015. The provision of water as a basic need is a social responsibility no government can ignore, but it has its economic costs. How do we ensure access, quantity, quality and efficiency?

In recognition of these challenges, African Heads of State and Governments, decided at the first extra-ordinary Summit of the African Union held two months ago in Libya, agreed that Members Countries should prioritize water supply and sanitation and Integrated Water Resources Management issues in their national development strategies. The Summit further considered favorably, the issue of trans-boundary water transfer to mitigate uneven water distribution and shortages in Africa.

In addition, the African Ministerial Council on Water (AMCON) has taken concrete steps to urgently strengthen water governance with focus on implementation, institutional reforms and mobilization of resources at local and national levels. We have also endorsed a portfolio of key water action plans from each of our five sub-regions to support the objectives of the New Partnership for African Development.

Acting with our development partners, we have launched a number of strategic initiatives, which include:

- Africa-European Union Strategic Partnership on Water and Sanitation;
- The African Water Facility for medium term projects on water and sanitation;
- The Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative for Africa supported by the ADB;
- The Water for African Cities (Phase 11) in partnership with UN-HABITAT
- The G-8 Action Plan on Water for Africa; and
- Launching of an African Journal to disseminate information and sharing of experiences.

Mr. Chairman,

Our goal is to provide water for consumption, agriculture and other uses. African governments cannot afford to treat water in the strict category of either an economic or social good given the central role water plays in sustaining life. We agree with the maxim that says, "Water is life". However, it is obvious that African countries cannot go it alone in achieving their goals and targets on water, sanitation and human settlements.

In view of this, I would like to renew the call for the international community, especially our development partners, to continue to support our sustainable development efforts.

On our part we will re-double our efforts and take every step necessary, in partnership with all stakeholders to ensure the achievement of our development goals and targets. However, it is pertinent to stress that Africa's problems should be addressed in tandem with the continent's external debt crisis.

Finally, I would like to remind us all, that the CSD remains the only high-level commission on sustainable development within the United Nations system and our discussions must respect both the inter-governmental nature and the programme of work of the CSD. Its integrity and relevance should be preserved.

I thank you.