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Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean**

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**Integrated Water Resources Management
(Agenda Item 3.1 of the Ministerial Segment)**

**General considerations that can be
used by the Ministers and Heads of
Delegation for the Exchange on
Integrated Water Resources Management**

I. Introduction

1. This theme will be addressed by a panel discussion where recognized experts will make introductory presentations, providing a basis for the contributions expected from the Ministers and Heads of Delegation, which could result in proposals revolving around the activities needed to strengthen national policies and laws in the field of water.

II. Proposal of Elements for the Exchange of Information and Points of View

2. Current problems of climate change, desertification and drought, deforestation, loss of biological diversity and other global and regional problems that have been dealt with through multilateral consensus and efforts of different international legal instruments have a decisive impact on the economy, society and environmental protection, particularly on the quality and quantity of water, in all countries. The adverse impacts that these problems involve have been documented through specific analyses conducted by organizations of the United Nations system, as well as academic, private and other organizations.

3. Regional and international forums and action programmes, such as the Johannesburg Summit, the Millennium Development Goals, the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development (ILAC) and the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) have repeatedly indicated that water is a basic environmental resource and a key element in the viability and sustainability of global ecosystems.

4. The balance of these ecosystems is being threatened as a consequence of the adverse impacts resulting from human activities and natural disasters. International discussions have produced policies, commitments and specific targets that should, with the backing of international cooperation, translate into the strengthening of national policies and laws.

5. Water supply has warranted the attention of the international community. Among the targets of the Millennium Development Goals is reducing by half the proportion of people who do not have access to safe drinking water and sanitation by the year 2015. Latin American and Caribbean leaders have recognized the seriousness of this challenge, and water management has therefore become a focal point in national policies and a matter of national security in several countries. Consequently, the protection and sound management of water have been included as one of the areas of greatest urgency and priority in the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development (ILAC).

6. In Latin America and the Caribbean, water is of vital importance to development. Even though the region has 30% of the world's total water resources, water distribution is irregular and access is inequitable.

7. In the region, the proportion of people with access to improved sanitation services in urban and rural areas has increased. It rose from 69% in the region as a whole, 82% in urban areas and 35% in rural areas, in 1990 to 75% in the region as

a whole, 84% in urban areas and 44% in rural areas in 2002. This represents an increase of 6%, 2% and 9%, respectively, instead of the 15.5%, 9% and 32.5% needed to fulfill the target of the Millennium Development Goals. There was a decrease in only a couple of countries, while the high rate of coverage in the Caribbean subregion is outstanding. In view of the progress made in the coverage of drinking water services in the 1990-2002 period, it is highly feasible that a large part of the countries of the region will be able to reach the target of the Millennium Development Goal. For most of the countries it would be sufficient for them to expand coverage between 2000 and 2015 at an annual percentage similar to or even lower than that for the 1990s. In contrast, in the field of sanitation, the situation is less promising and more heterogeneous. It should be noted that a large part of the investment requirements in both services is needed to expand the access of the poorest segments of the population.

8. Various ecosystems, from tropical forests to estuaries and coral reefs, are associated with water problems in Latin America and the Caribbean.

9. The water problems in the region are linked to other social, economic and environmental challenges. Most of the inhabitants who do not have access to drinking water are poor. Most of the poor population (70%) lives in urban areas. In the cities of the region, 13% of the population does not have access to drinking water, while the main problem for 25% of the rural population is the shortage of water.

10. Agriculture and industry are the principal water consumers in the region. The technological inefficiency of these sectors produces considerable losses in water use, which also involves problems of erosion and loss of fertile lands.

11. The countries of the region of Latin America and the Caribbean have been making coordinated efforts at international forums on water resources, which has enabled them to put forward initiatives that have been incorporated into agreements at these forums, such as, for example, the Governing Council of UNEP. In particular, the Latin American and Caribbean countries have agreed on common objectives in relation to integrated water resources management, the decentralization of decision-making procedures, ecosystem protection, pollution prevention, user participation in management and international cooperation for development, among other matters.

12. The countries of our region have been part of the international consensus implicit in various political declarations, commitments and quantitative targets adopted at some international forums; however, fulfilling these international agreements continues to be a challenge for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

13. Recently, at the Meeting of the Inter-Agency Technical Committee (Panama, July 2005), the Government of Brazil circulated a proposal suggesting that the agenda of the Fifteenth Meeting of the Forum of Ministers should include the development of a common strategy for water management in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, recognizing that this meeting could formulate concrete decisions for consensus on such a strategy and guidelines, so that the theme would be developed in a coordinated manner by UNEP, the World Bank and the OAS.

14. The World Water Forum is another forum which for some years now has concerned itself with the world water agenda and will hold its fourth forum in Mexico City in March 2006. Thus, the Ministers may wish to consider this forum in their deliberations on this theme and, at the forum itself, promote the implementation of policies and actions consistent with the needs of the region. Several countries of the region considered that the region should assume an active role at the forthcoming Fourth World Water Forum, and present a common strategy on water resources. In that regard, the Government of Brazil has circulated a detailed proposal analysing the challenges and opportunities that Latin America and the Caribbean should take into account for advancing towards the adoption of such a strategy.

15. In addition, decision 23/2 of the twenty-third session of the Governing Council of UNEP, called "Updated water policy and strategy of the United Nations Environment Programme", may be considered in this context for purposes of general and specific exchange on this important theme. The Water Policy and Strategy should once again be discussed at the ninth special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum and should promote activities of significance related to:

- a) Analysis, transfer and dissemination of environmentally sound technologies for water resources management.
- b) Integrated management of river basins, groundwater and coastal areas.
- c) National water policies and recommendations for the reforms needed to achieve sound water management.
- d) Regional and global assessments of water resources.
- e) International cooperation on environmental aspects of water.
- f) Support for the review and expansion of national legislation important to water themes.
- g) Support for governments in developing agreements on shared waters and agreements related to pertinent United Nations conventions.
- h) Assessment of vulnerability in groundwater and promotion of its sustainable management.
- i) Collaboration in specific water projects and activities with UN-HABITAT and other agencies, including urban programmes on water management and industrial and domestic wastewater management.

16. Both the Regional Action Plan for the biennium 2004-2005 and the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development include integrated water resources management among their priorities. The following activities could also be considered for the biennium 2006-2007, in view of their importance to the region:

16.1. Water supply

- a) Improve technology to increase efficiency in the use of water in agriculture, industry and domestic consumption.
- b) Introduce modern technologies for the desalinization of sea water.
- c) Set up coastal aquifer management to prevent salt-water intrusion.
- d) Promote rainwater catchments systems.

16.2. Water Pollution

- a) Expand the coverage of drinking water and sanitation services.

16.3. Watershed Management

- a) Improve and strengthen the institutionality for integrated watershed and aquifer management through, among other measures, the establishment of watershed committees with the participation of all subnational government levels, civil society, the private sector and all stakeholders.
- b) Promote the use of the Ecosystem Approach to Watershed Management.

16.4. Management of coastal and marine areas and their resources

- a) Implement action plans for the integrated management of coastal resources and coastal ecosystems, with particular attention to the small island developing States. Special attention should be given to the assessment of the sources and impact of land-based activities, including pollutants, physical alteration of the coastal area, all forming part of the preparation and implementation of the national action plans. Activities of key importance in these tasks are those carried out by the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities. (GPA).
- b) Adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach to the management of the Caribbean Sea through the development of a comprehensive strategy for its protection and management.

17. In relation to problems posed by integrated water resources management, the authorities of the countries of the region could also consider focusing their efforts on the following areas:

- a) Systematic assessment of water resources.
- b) Institutional capacity building for water management.
- c) Water and poverty links.
- d) Water and sanitation links.
- e) Changes in water-related production and consumption patterns.
- f) Water and human settlements.

18. When considering the different action alternatives, the Ministers may wish to consider the pertinence of applying some criteria such as, for example, establishing medium and long-term activity horizons to be in a position to respond to the dynamics of the water agenda; distinguishing between the activities that should be undertaken by the countries individually and those that would be carried out collectively; and identifying the means of implementation and the partners and agencies that could join the implementation of tasks to be carried out in the next few years.

