

## **ADB Water Week 26-30 January 2004**

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

**By ADB Vice-President Liqun Jin**

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to join you at the closing of ADB Water Week. I appreciate your hard work over the past few days to move the water agenda forward in the interests of the poor who do not have access to water, the most essential constituent of all living matter. I understand that you have focused especially on addressing the challenge of improving water governance and of financing. Water Week has reminded us all that this remains a fundamental development challenge in our region. All of us are stakeholders in the regional cooperation in this area.

ADB feels honored and privileged to have the presence of all the stakeholders under our roof, government officials, water providers, civil society, research, and the media. Thank you for sharing with us, in a constructive and candid manner, your views and proposed solutions from your special perspective for our common goal, that of Water for All.

Talking about water, we would be reminded of a saying that the rising tide lifts all boats. This is indeed the general experience with economic growth as an essential engine for poverty reduction. Without economic growth, people cannot lift themselves out of poverty.

However, for a rising tide to lift all the boats, we have to make sure that these boats are not leaking. For economic growth to bring benefits to all the poor people, we have to make sure that they have access to the basic services and the means to take advantage of the potential opportunities. .

In fact, in terms of improving water security, the poor are often caught in a vicious circle of lack of water and lack of economic opportunity. To break this circle, we need to focus more attention on meeting the basic needs of the poor people. Water security is one of the top priorities. Water is not only the basic need of human life; it is also an essential input in production. We need to target and tailor investments and capacity building to the needs of the poor. This requires specific interventions to make sure that the poor can benefit from economic growth and the overall development process.

Ladies and Gentlemen, poverty reduction is our overarching objective at ADB. We promote and support pro-poor economic growth projects, as well as projects with specifically designed poverty interventions, supported by specific water

governance and financing arrangements to ensure that the needs of the poor are met.

Fixing the leaking boats has many dimensions that have been discussed this week. To mention just a few, they included issues of empowering poor communities to solve their water problems by involving them more in project preparation, issues of better project selection and preparation, to work with capable organizations under inspired leadership, issues of combining structural with non-structural interventions, issues of appropriate and cost-effective technology, and issues of working better in partnerships for action.

The Water Week theme this year was Water for the Poor – Setting the Rules and Finding the Money. On Tuesday, Keynote speaker Erna Witoelar advocated that Water Week should result in a commitment to “Simplify the Rules and Decentralize the Money”. The validity of this statement has been confirmed through your discussions, and I am pleased to support it. ADB and its partners should work together to streamline and simplify project procedures, wherever possible, without compromising quality to facilitate more rapid and sustained benefits to the poor.

Decentralizing water financing through autonomous and accountable service providers is a key part of ADB’s Water Policy, and one that we are keenly advocating to our clients and partners. It is fully consistent with the recommendations of the World Panel on Financing Water Infrastructure, chaired by Mr. Camdessus. Capacity building in local government and water user organizations will help to further decentralize financing to the poor in a demand-led manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen, two important recommendations have come out of Water Week, they are about the need for better leadership and partnerships. Both are critical in improving water governance and financing in our region, and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals relating to water. Better leadership is needed in adopting effective policies, in the autonomous and accountable provision of water services, in strengthening water regulation, and in mobilizing civil society to catalyze water reforms through better information and awareness.

Water Week recommended that partnerships in the water sector should build on the complementary strengths of the stakeholders, to ensure better development impact from projects. At ADB, we commit ourselves to further strengthen our partnerships for action to catalyze effective pro-poor water projects throughout the region. This will involve working more closely with local governments, with bilateral funding agencies, the private sector, nongovernment organizations, research institutions, and the media. We have already started this in Viet Nam and will build similar partnerships in other countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen, ADB remains fully committed to provide high-quality technical assistance and loans to pro-poor water projects, and to support the enabling framework of policies and institutions. The results of Water Week are a source of inspiration and knowledge to us to help sharpen our focus on reducing poverty through water projects. We will report and distribute the results of this Water Week widely through our website and our knowledge and awareness activities, and put them to good use in our country and regional operations.

We in ADB would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Governments of the Netherlands and Norway for their generous contributions to our Cooperation Fund for the Water Sector and their support to ADB Water Week and its follow-up actions.

I thank you all for your active participation in ADB Water Week 2004. I am sure that the productive interactions among all the participants have facilitated exchange of ideas and networking, and enhanced your understanding towards each other. I believe that your stay in Manila and in ADB has been pleasant and productive. I wish you all a safe journey home.

Thank you.