

UNITED NATIONS



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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON WORLD WATER DAY**

**22 March 2009**

Water is our most precious natural resource. More than ever we need to work together to use it wisely. While the world's growing population is consuming more freshwater, climate change is making less water available in many regions as glaciers recede, rainfall becomes less predictable, and floods and droughts become more extreme. Managing water carefully and balancing the varied needs for it is vital.

Much of the planet's water, above or below ground, is shared. Forty per cent of the world's people live in one of 263 basins that are shared by two or more countries. Concern over the possibility of violent disputes features regularly in discussions about sharing limited water resources. But while the potential exists for water to act as a catalyst for conflict between States and communities, precedent suggests that the opposite is actually what happens. Cooperation, not conflict, is the most common response by people facing competing demands.

Under the theme "Shared Waters, Shared Opportunities", World Water Day this year highlights how transboundary water resources can act as a unifying force. Worldwide, there are at least 300 international water agreements, often among parties that are otherwise at odds. These agreements demonstrate the potential of shared water resources to foster trust and promote peace. Political will, a flexible policy framework, strong institutions and an inclusive approach will help us build on this foundation for the benefit of all.

On this World Water Day, I urge governments, civil society, the private sector and all stakeholders to recognize that our collective future depends on how we manage our precious and finite water resources.