

**Address of Mr. Timothy Rothermel,
Special Representative of the United Nations
Development Programme / Programme of
Assistance to the Palestinian People
(UNDP/PAPP)**

Eng. Kawash, Dr. Khatib, distinguished participants and friends.

My colleagues and I are very pleased to be with you this morning and I welcome the privilege to make a few remarks at the outset of this important international conference which is the first of its kind in Palestine.

As you know, last month marked the beginning of a new United Nations International Water Decade, this one Decade for Action, Water for Life. During the first UN Water Decade - the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade from 1981 to 1990 - UNDP sponsored a number of activities at the national and international level, including the closing conference of that decade, the Global Consultation on Safe Water and Sanitation which took place in New Delhi in 1990. And in spite of the efforts of many, significant investments in infrastructure and human resource development, and considerable advances in technology, the end of the decade assessment was only that “the current rate of progress remains slow and would leave a very significant number of poor people in urban and rural areas without suitable and sustainable services in water and sanitation by the year 2000”

Today, fifteen years after that assessment, the picture has not substantially changed: over a billion people worldwide lack access to improved water resources, over twice that many do not have access to basic sanitation and 1.8 billion still die annually from diarrhoeal diseases. In this region, where water is scarce, the record of success is somewhat better than in other parts of the world, but the management of these scarce resources, the need for better technology and wastewater management issues remain priorities, and all of these matters are inevitably affected by issues involving water rights and the political situation.

In yours, the first conference of its scope in Palestine, there will be a welcome opportunity to focus on the Palestinian water sector and to better facilitate Palestinian institutions, in both the governmental and civil society, to meet the objectives of the new Water for Life Decade, not to mention the important Millennium Development Goal of halving by the year 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation. I sincerely hope that the opportunity for interaction among Palestinian water sector professionals and institutions and international experts will give direction to future cooperation.

With the support of the international community, over the past twenty-five years UNDP has invested well over \$100 million in seeking to meet urgent water supply and sanitation needs for communities throughout the West Bank and Gaza. During this period, it has been a pleasure to have as our partners, many of the institutions and individuals who are with us today including numerous municipalities and village councils, the Jerusalem Water Undertaking, and the Palestinian Water Authority which, in fact, was the outgrowth of the Water Resources Action Programme, or WRAP, which was a pre-Oslo UNDP initiative. And here, I sincerely thank the organizers of this meeting for their fitting recognition to three great Palestinian leaders, all of them personal friends, and especially the late Nabil Sharif who so skillfully led the PWA for many years.

With the support of the Governments of Germany and Japan as well as the Islamic Development Bank and the Saudi Fund for Palestinian Relief, UNDP currently has over \$12 million in water and wastewater projects currently under implementation and that figure will nearly triple in the days ahead with the expected generous contribution of the Government of Japan to support the implementation of a major wastewater undertaking in Khan Yunis.

But despite these efforts and those of many others in Palestine, there are still long lists of needs and problems to be addressed. And in addressing these needs, even further commitments, cooperation and coordination will be required among stakeholders at all levels. The participation of all - government, civil society organizations, the academic community, politicians and scientists - will be a must. I congratulate you on taking important steps in this direction at this Conference in Ramallah and I wish you great success in all of the sessions that will take place during the next three days.

Thank you very much.