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Governments urged to embark on a decade of implementation to meet sustainable development targets, as UN Commission concludes

(New York, 30 April 2004) – Talks among over 80 government ministers have stressed the need to speed up efforts in delivering safe drinking water, basic sanitation and shelter for the poor according to a summary of the meeting by Chairman Børge Brende, Norwegian Minister of the Environment.

The talks took place in the Commission on Sustainable Development's Twelfth Session (CSD-12) which was held in New York from 14 to 30 April. This was the first substantive review of progress on targets set by world leaders at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg which include many of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Minister Brende, current Chairman of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, called for a "decade of implementation" in order to meet the agreed goals.

In the closing summary of the meeting, the Chairman presented a clear message: "The international community is not on track and efforts must be scaled up. Achieving the targets is doable. The time-bound targets are specific, practical and realistic. They are technically feasible and financially affordable," said Chairman Brende.

"For too many years we have had too little action. Now we must make a difference. Let us all embark on a decade of implementation," the Chairman continued.

If the agreed goals are to be met, 1.6 billion people must be provided with safe drinking water and 2 billion people will have to get access to basic sanitation by 2015. By 2020, the living conditions of 100 million slum dwellers are to be substantially improved.

The non-negotiating nature of the talks allowed for frank exchanges and interactive dialogue among UN Agencies, government ministers and the participating representatives of civil society on the three themes of water, sanitation and human settlements.

The large number of ministers representing a broad range of portfolios indicates that the energy and momentum of Johannesburg has been sustained, and is a clear sign of the heightened interest and expectations related to the work of the Commission.

"I believe the Commission has changed. CSD is now more interactive and action-oriented," Chairman Brende stated.

In his opening address to the Commission, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan encouraged the Commission to keep a close eye on progress: "This Commission must be a watchdog, alert to threats and fearless in sounding alarms. We look to you for coherent, effective policy-making," the Secretary-General stated.

At the opening of the High-Level Segment, Qatar's Minister of Finance, Yusef Hussein Kamal, speaking on behalf of the G-77 and China, stated the need for a more enabling international environment as well as increased Official Development Aid. The Irish Minister for the

Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Martin Cullen, speaking on behalf of the EU and the acceding countries, stressed the importance of integrating water and sanitation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). US Under Secretary for Global Affairs, Paula Dobriansky, underlined the need to release the energy of Public-Private Partnerships. The Minister of the Environment of Japan, Koike Yuriko, focused on the issue of safe water provision and emphasized the importance of fostering partnerships, and accepting ownership and responsibility as a global community for our water resources.

The particular goals and targets being reviewed at CSD-12 include halving by 2015 the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, and significantly improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.

Continuing challenges were identified in the area of improving access to safe drinking water: ensuring effective water sector management and investment in infrastructure, improving regulatory frameworks and strengthening local governance. The role of women in water policy-making, planning and decision making was also seen as essential.

In the area of sanitation, many delegations underscored the need for governments to raise the profile of the issue through including sanitation in Poverty Reduction Strategies and national development plans. Improved regulatory standards, increased development assistance for sanitation infrastructure and transfer of technology to developing countries were seen as key challenges going forward.

In the area of human settlements, ensuring security of property tenure for the poor was recognised as a prerequisite for people to be able to access credit to improve their homes. In particular, improving legal recognition of women's rights to property and inheritance was identified. The importance of cooperation between slum communities and local authorities in upgrading existing slums was underlined.

For more information on CSD-12 including official documents visit:

<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd12/csd12.htm>

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