

SETW's speech at International Symposium on Sustainable and Safe Water Supply (English Only)

Following is the opening speech (English only) by the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works, Dr Sarah Liao, at the International Symposium on Sustainable and Safe Water Supply today (January 15) :

Pro-Vice-Chancellor Tam, Prof Fang, distinguished speakers, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning, I am most honoured to have the opportunity to speak at the opening of this two-day International Symposium on Sustainable and Safe Water Supply organised by the University of Hong Kong.

Throughout the years, in addition to its numerous academic achievements, the University of Hong Kong has provided an academic coliseum for outstanding scholars and experts from all parts of the world. I am glad to see so many acclaimed water experts from around the globe gathering here today to share with us the latest technologies, knowledge and ideas on a wide range of important water-related issues such as water conservation, water resources management, environmental policies and water science.

Water is the basis of all forms of life. Not only is it vital to our daily life and health, it is also fundamental to the development of human societies. Since ancient times, civilisations have nurtured and developed in regions with major river networks such as the River Nile in Egypt, the River Ganges in India, and, of course, the Huanghe and Changjiang in China. These great rivers provide abundant supply of water to satisfy the human needs for drinking, cooking, sanitation, irrigation, transportation and even entertainment. On the other hand, water can also be unfriendly and even destructive. When floods occur, people, livestock, homes, and even the entire empire could perish. Indeed, the struggle to tame and harness the "troubled" water for the good use of mankind forms a colourful facet of our history.

Despite our remarkable achievements in economic development and the incredible advancement in technology, it is hard to believe that nowadays, according to the United Nation's recent report, more than a billion people in this planet are still living in lack of adequate

supply of clean water. The very lives of these unfortunate people are directly threatened everyday by a number of water-borne diseases let alone their physical and mental sufferings as a result of deprivation of this basic necessity. Continuous growth in population, un-controlled industrialisation and rapid urbanisation in certain countries are all causing detrimental impacts to the ecological balance of many water systems, resulting in serious water pollution. We look forward to water experts to lead us in alleviating these problems - whether through innovation in technologies or collaboration with regulatory authorities and the community as a whole.

Hong Kong is fortunate in this respect. After experiencing the severe droughts and water restrictions in the 1950's and early 1960's, we have started to import raw water from our neighbouring Guangdong Province. The imported water from our Motherland is now a major source of our water supply, meeting some 70-80% of the fresh water demand in Hong Kong. With the support of the Guangdong authorities, an adequate and continuous supply of water to Hong Kong is secured. The successful renewal of our water supply agreement with the Guangdong Province in allowing us to acquire an appropriate amount of water based on local supply situation is a shining example of our mutual understanding and co-operative efforts made.

However, we should never be complacent. Our Government always keeps an eye on the long term needs for a sustainable and safe water supply. We are also aware that the remarkable economic growth in the Pearl River Delta region in the past 25 years which has exerted tremendous pressure on the water supply there, which covers an area of about 40,000 sq km with a population of over 30 million. We have therefore embarked upon a comprehensive review on Total Water Management which includes, inter alia, conducting a series of research on using the latest technologies to desalinate sea water with a view to increasing local water resource on a long term basis. For example, we have successfully carried out the first test with positive results on a pilot desalination plant at Tuen Mun using reversed osmosis technologies. The pilot plant has been relocated to Ap Lei Chau to run the second test under a different environment of coastal water. We are also focusing on the use of advanced technologies to reclaim usable water for non-potable uses. The Ngong Ping Sewage Treatment Works on Lantau which is the first tertiary sewage treatment and reclaimed water facilities built in Hong Kong, has been in operation since March, 2006, producing reclaimed water for flushing

the nearby public toilets, controlled irrigation and rearing ornamental fish. We have already commenced another pilot scheme in Shek Wu Hui in North District for more extensive use of reclaimed water. In addition, we have also commissioned a consultancy study for completion at the end of 2007 to map out the long-term strategies and to formulate implementation plans for our Total Water Management programme.

As an on-going effort, we will continue to promote water conservation within our community through a wide range of effective and intensive publicity campaigns. Our tariff structure is specially designed to discourage heavy water consumption, through higher charges. We have implemented a major water mains replacement and rehabilitation programme. This, together with other leakage detection and reduction measures, will help to reduce significantly the leakage of fresh water. We also enforce vigorously environmental protection laws to control activities and developments within our water gathering grounds. We hope that with all these measures, we are able to secure a sustainable and safe water supply for our citizens and the generations to come.

Last but not least, I would like to once again welcome all participants in this symposium. I am sure you all agree that sharing is the key to problem solving and improvement. May I wish this symposium a great success.

Thank you.

Ends/Monday, January 15, 2007