

Hillary Clinton's Speech at World Water Day 2010

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Water issues are an urgent concern every day of every year for individuals, communities, and countries around the world. And as pressing as water issues are now, they will become even more important in the near future. Experts predict—and many of you are in this audience who are experts—that by 2025, just 15 years from now, nearly two-thirds of the world's countries will be water-stressed. Many sources of freshwater will be under additional strain from climate change and population growth. And 2.4 billion people will face absolute water scarcity—the point at which a lack of water threatens social and economic development.

Access to reliable supplies of clean water is a matter of human security. It's also a matter of national security. And that's why President Obama and I recognize that water issues are integral to the success of many of our major foreign policy initiatives. The United States is making major investments to combat preventable diseases and improve child survival through our Global Health Initiative. Increasing access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene will help save lives that are now being lost to preventable diseases.

Seventy percent of the world's water use is devoted to agriculture, and the outcome of our work to promote global food security depends in part on having a successful water policy and sound water management. A lack of water, sanitation, and irrigation we know leads to economic decline, and even can lead to unrest and instability.

Part of being serious about dealing with and adapting to climate change is about being serious about water. As the earth warms, rainfall patterns can shift, bringing new patterns of drought and flooding. And we need to get out in front of that problem.

Successful engagement on water can also affect how our country is perceived in the world. We spend a lot of time working on issues such as terrorism and arms control and nuclear proliferation. These are obviously important topics that deserve our attention. But the reality is that they are not problems most people deal with on a day-to-day basis. Water is different. When we demonstrate our concern for the issue, it speaks to individuals on a whole different level. Everyone knows sensation of thirst firsthand. We all have daily personal experience that we can think about and relate to, even if the nature and magnitude of that experience varies widely. Our ability to satisfy our need for water depends on our location and our circumstances. But as a matter of biological necessity, access to safe, sustainable supplies of water is a priority for everyone on the planet.

It is my hope that by making water a front-burner issue, a high priority in our national and international dialogues, we can give our children and our children's-children the future they deserve.

Many of you are experts. You have given your professional lives to working on behalf of water. I am here to thank you. Thank you for what you've done. I know how important it is. Perhaps you don't see it in the headlines, but often it's in the trend lines. Often, it's under the radar. Often, it is one of the root causes of what makes it into the top news broadcasts. So what you're doing is not only on behalf of water, not even just on behalf of development. It's on behalf of peace, prosperity, opportunity, security. And we want to be a good partner with each of you and all those who see water as a necessary part of the American foreign policy agenda.

I'm excited about what lies ahead, and I look forward to working with you, and I thank you for this opportunity to come and talk before you.