

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Global Water Initiative created in response to world water crisis

Madrid (23 Oct. 2007) - A new partnership has been launched to address the declining state of the world's fresh water supply and the lack of access to clean water services by the world's poorest people. The Global Water Initiative (GWI) brings together a group of seven leading international NGOs, including Action Against Hunger – USA, CARE, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), The World Conservation Union (IUCN), International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), Oxfam America and SOS Sahel – UK.

The announcement of the GWI comes at a time when more than one billion people lack access to improved water sources, and more than 2.6 billion people lack adequate sanitation. Water resources are under increasing pressure from human use while communities are frequently affected by floods and droughts

The GWI will work in 13 countries in Central America, West Africa and East Africa to address the challenges of providing long-term access to clean water and sanitation, access to water for rural production, as well as the protection and sustainable management of ecosystem services and watersheds. The partner organizations will focus on the needs of some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities including refugees and internally displaced persons.

Projects will deliver water and sanitation in rural communities. In addition, investments will be made to strengthen institutions, build capacity to enable organizations to initiate and sustain long-term projects, increase community participation, improve local governance, facilitate inter-governmental coordination and cooperation, raise awareness, emphasize innovation and support the development of responsible water policies. The projects at local and national levels will help catalyze change toward better integrated management of water resources.

Examples of early projects include training micro-watershed committees on risk management issues; constructing and improving the water and sanitation infrastructure in community schools; rehabilitating water harvesting ponds; raising awareness of the opportunities for multiple water use; and offering leadership training to women.

The coalition of seven international organizations is a unique partnership which will combine capacities to support services in water supply, sanitation, agriculture and environmental management. What makes the GWI distinctive from other development efforts is that all organizations have been involved from the outset of the initiative in collectively building the common vision and sharing the responsibility and accountability for implementing the GWI. The GWI will provide strategic environmental and water resource analysis in addition to policy development and raising awareness.

A specific highlight of this initiative is the opportunity to address trans-boundary issues and regional watersheds in a broad approach. Combining these strengths provides an unusual opportunity to support transformation of water management in selected countries in close cooperation with other local partners and agencies. Within the first two years, the GWI will demonstrate practical approaches to achieving integrated water resource management, supporting responsible water policy, addressing water conflict

resolution and reducing water related risks. In its inaugural year, over US\$15 million has been made available for implementing these activities in 2007. Similar levels of resources are anticipated for the following nine years.

Funding for the GWI is provided by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation. "This initiative is designed to recognize and meet the needs of both domestic and productive water uses, while combining integrated watershed management with environmental accountability," stated Howard Buffett, President of the Foundation. "It is our objective to utilize and leverage the experience of our partners to create a flexible and spontaneous approach to providing poor communities access to safe drinking water. By building new constituencies, creating stronger alliances and engaging all stakeholders, it is our hope to create a new vision and an effective platform for change." The Howard G. Buffett Foundation funds water projects in 19 countries, but does not accept any unsolicited proposals.

*The Global Water Initiative works in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.

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