



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of the *World Water Day*
“Water and Food security”**

22 March 2012

Water is vital for agriculture, rural development and food industry. Food security is unthinkable without it. On this *World Water Day*, we must all recognize this inextricable link between water and food security and make it a central component of our work for sustainable development.

Today, one billion people are undernourished. Every year, six million children die of hunger. Lack of access to clean drinking water exacerbates the burdens carried by the poor and the undernourished, and it increases mortality rates. Global food production and supply do not today match up with demand. And the world will need to feed two billion more people over the coming decades.

Food security depends highly on water -- in terms of quality and quantity. Water of acceptable quality and in adequate quantity is needed to meet food production demands. At the same time, food production and supply have a negative impact on the sustainability and quality of water resources.

Agriculture is the biggest water user, with 70 percent of the global water withdrawal coming in irrigation. Agriculture is also the biggest water polluter, with millions of tons of agro-chemicals from fertilizers and pesticides discharged into rivers and seeping into soil and groundwater. In the face of climate change, food production is also becoming uncertain, because of increasingly variable rainfall patterns and more frequent and prolonged droughts. At the same time, with increasing demand for food, competition for water is rising.

We must come together now to face up to water and food challenges. UNESCO is working to enhance national capacities to use and manage water sustainably. Our

vision of green growth in agriculture is clear. We must increase water productivity and wastewater reuse in agriculture to produce 'more food per drop'. We must put in place more efficient irrigation and rainwater harvesting systems and we must integrate our management of water and land, including also women's voices.

UNESCO's *International Hydrological Programme* leads global efforts to promote sustainable rural and urban water management. It works to protect water quality for sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction and it builds capacity in order to enhance water management. It is supported by a network of over 20 UNESCO water Centres and University Chairs that train water professionals across the world.

This *World Water Day* is a call to action. We must join together today to secure clean water and food for every citizen of the world, now and in the future.

Irina Bokova