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Global forces unite in Water Footprint Network

Today, 16 October 2008, the Water Footprint Network was founded. The water footprint of a nation is the volume of water needed for the production of the goods and services consumed by its inhabitants. The idea of the water footprint is quite similar to the ecological footprint, but focusing on the use of water.

The Water Footprint Network originates from research started by Prof. Arjen Hoekstra at UNESCO-IHE in 2000, which resulted in an international team of researchers led by Hoekstra estimating the size of the 'water footprints' of nations. The network will aim to find broadly shared standards on water footprint accounting. Transparent standards are necessary to enable communication about water footprints of consumers and producers, to make sure that all stakeholders speak 'the same language'. These shared standards will also be key in finding measures to reduce the negative impacts of water footprints.

"The interest in the water footprint is rooted in the recognition that human impacts on freshwater systems can ultimately be linked to human consumption," says Professor Arjen Hoekstra, now scientific director of the network. "Issues such as water shortages and pollution can be better understood and addressed by considering production and supply chains as a whole. Local water depletion and pollution are often closely tied to the structure of the global economy. Many countries have significantly externalized their water footprint, importing water-intensive goods from elsewhere. This puts pressure on the water resources in the exporting regions, where too often mechanisms for wise water governance and conservation are lacking."

The seven founding partners of the Water Footprint Network are major global players in the field of water: UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education, the University of Twente, WWF-the global conservation organization, the Water Neutral Foundation, the World Business Council on Sustainable Development, the International Finance Corporation (part of the World Bank Group) and the Netherlands Water Partnership.

"The concept of water footprint has gained huge credibility from the business, governmental and civil society communities," says Derk Kuiper, executive director of the network. "The Water Footprint Network is a multi-stakeholder platform and gateway to further the water footprint methodology and tools."

The network is open to partners from all relevant stakeholders in water resources management: academic institutions, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, businesses, public utilities and UN-organizations. Partner registration will start in a few weeks and will be announced on the website. The public launch of the network will be in December 2008.

More information about the Water Footprint Network on: www.waterfootprint.org

Contact the Water Footprint Network: info@waterfootprint.org