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MEDIA ADVISORY

News – National/International
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

World Water Day (Mar. 22): Celebrating progress made, but only a drop in the bucket

OTTAWA, ON –**World Water Day**, a critical day to draw attention to the world water crisis, takes on added significance this year as new statistics released by UNICEF and the World Health Organization reveal that the numbers of people without access to clean water worldwide has, for the first time, dropped below 1 billion.

More than 1.5 billion have gained access to this essential need since 1990 and most regions in the world appear to be on track to meeting the water target of the Millennium Development Goals, to halve by 2015 the number of people living without access to clean drinking water.

But news is not all good. Sub-Saharan Africa, where current water coverage hovers at 58 percent continues to lag dangerously behind in progress, and will at present rates certainly fall far short of the MDG target. Celebration on this internationally recognized day of action is thus tempered by a keen awareness that efforts in the poorest region of the world must be redoubled.

The world water crisis is one of the most lethal public health emergencies of our time, and condemns hundreds of millions to struggle for survival at the subsistence level.

- Around the world, 890 million people—about a seventh of the world’s population don’t have access to clean drinking water
- Each year, some 1.5 million people die from water and sanitation-related diseases; 90 per cent of these deaths occur in children under the age of five
- As a result, healthcare costs soar, countless school and working days are lost, and communities around the world sink deeper into poverty and despair

Should you wish to feature a story related to World Water Day and/or the global water crisis, WaterCan would be pleased to provide further resources, photos, quotes, interviews, etc. As a leading Canadian non-governmental organization that has been providing clean water and basic sanitation to the world's poorest people since 1987 and presently concentrates its efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa, WaterCan has made available the following staff for interviews:

George Yap, Program Director, WaterCan – Mr. Yap is an international development and natural resource specialist with more than 17 years experience in the NGO sector. He has spent considerable time in both Africa and Asia – ground zero for the global sanitation crisis – and regularly travels to Africa to oversee WaterCan's clean water and sanitation initiatives.

Gary H.J. Pluim, Executive Director, WaterCan – Mr. Pluim draws on more than a decade of experience in the field of international development after 25 years in the Canadian banking industry. Mr. Pluim leads WaterCan's annual study tour to Africa, which last year included WaterCan's honorary president, Margaret Trudeau, and her daughter-in-law, Sophie Grégoire.

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WaterCan is a registered Canadian charity dedicated to providing clean water, basic sanitation, and hygiene education to the world's poorest people. Since its creation in 1987, WaterCan has assisted more than one million to live healthier, happier and more productive lives. WaterCan currently supports projects in Sub-Saharan Africa and works with local partners to implement water and sanitation solutions that are low-cost, long-term, and meet the unique needs of each community. For more information, please visit www.watercan.com.

Additional Resources:

- UN World Water Day 2009: <http://www.unwater.org/worldwaterday/flashindex.html>
 - WaterCan's Case for Support: http://www.watercan.com/PDF/Case%20for%20Support_Final_english_2009.pdf
 - International Decade for Action—Water for Life (2005-2015): <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/>
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