

**Speech by HE Mrs Bea Ten Tusscher,**

Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Bangladesh

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**South Asia Regional Workshop on  
Transparency and Integrity in the Water Sector**

5 November 2007

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to say some words on the topic which you debated in the past days: Transparency and Integrity in the Water Sector. The fact that this is a multiple-day, regional workshop, held in Bangladesh, already tells you something:

- The issue is important enough to bring together top-level experts and policy makers for 3 straight days;
- the issue has a clear, regional context;
- and Bangladesh is ready to play its part as a responsible nation in the region.

The fact that The Netherlands Embassy has provided financial support for this workshop, tells you yet another thing:

- The Netherlands is firmly committed to support all actors who strive to improve governance in the water sector, and other sectors.

As many of you know, The Netherlands has a lot in common with Bangladesh, as both countries are low-lying river deltas. The famous French general Napoleon Bonaparte once said that the Netherlands were not much more than sediment from the main river system. Well, he was right. We did work a bit on the sediment, I must add. The Netherlands is a man-made country, which requires water management 24 hours a day. Our active engagement with water goes back centuries. The country has learnt not only to battle against floods, but also to optimize agricultural activities by adapting its water systems.

My main message to you today is this: the key to our success in harnessing water resources has been good governance. Your deliberations over the past three days are directly related to the two main dimensions of governance: legitimacy and effectiveness. Legitimacy is about support from the people for its administration; and about accountability from the administration to its people. Effectiveness is about the administration's ability and capacity to carry out its mandate successfully. Let us apply this to water management.

First, legitimacy. The Dutch approach to water management is based on local water boards that have existed for some six hundred years. The local community and landowners were dependent on each other for maintaining the system of waterworks. The fact that when a single individual did not cooperate, all other individuals suffered, led to the creation of a society in which working

together became essential. This laid the foundation for early democratic systems in the Netherlands.

Legitimacy however, can be washed out (if you'll pardon me to use a watery analogy...) if the trust of the people in their administration is absent. And people's trust comes from transparency, from integrity, and from inclusion. So, besides transparency and integrity, I make the proposition that inclusion, of all people in a society (including women), but for instance also of all nations in a region, is the basis for good governance in the water sector in South Asia.

The old small-scale water boards of past centuries have given way to a more modern system in the Netherlands. Bangladesh too, is strengthening and modernising its water governance institutions. The reform process which is taking place within the Bangladesh Water Development Board today, and the establishment of functioning local level Water Management Organisations throughout the country will ensure *legitimacy of water governance*. Innovative mechanisms have to be worked out to better manage the human and financial resources of these organisations and encourage them to set new standards in view of the challenges climate change poses to us.

Secondly, effectiveness. Bangladesh has realised the importance of decentralisation of water management. It adopted the Guidelines for Participatory Water Management in 2003, enhancing transparency and integrity in the water sector. Various programs, financed jointly by the government of Bangladesh, the Embassy of The Netherlands and other development partners, are actively operationalising these guidelines, by setting up and empowering water management organisations at the lowest possible level. Through our 'Twinning Mission' arrangement experts from the Waterboard in The Netherlands are in direct contact with their counterparts in Bangladesh. We will continue this support, helping to strengthen BWDB's corporate skills, enhancing its management capacity, and building its ability to liaise with the people. These are all preconditions, among others, for *effective water governance*. We intend to intensify our dialogue with the Government of Bangladesh, and the development partners, on water governance in the coming years.

As I come to the end of my presentation, I would like to highlight a final important consideration regarding transparency and integrity in water management in South Asia, reiterating what Dr. Labelle said in her address to you on Saturday. I refer to the need for regional cooperation on water issues in South Asia. We believe that the water problems of South Asia call for closer cooperation among the countries in the region that are facing similar challenges. Only through confidence building and closer cooperation with our neighbours in Europe we managed to solve the problem of water management and pollution in our river Rhine. Transparency and integrity are essential to build trust. Regional leaders will be seen as visionary leaders if they assume their regional responsibilities, take the lead in building trust between neighbours, and guide cooperation between riparian countries.

I call upon the governments of the countries in South Asia to strengthen this process and involve regional organisations such as SAARC and ESCAP to assist them in this. A recent security report mentioned water as the main potential source of world conflicts in the future. Let us set a different example in this region and focus on building trust and transparency in regional water management. So that all countries and their populations prosper and thrive economically and socially.

Thank you.