Press Release

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Global water campaign launched

The ‘Ripples on Water’ campaign aims to bring more attention to water issues through a creative combination of art, science and development.

(Colombo, 22 March) A spectacular laser show and water dance taking place on Friday and Saturday this week in Sri Lanka will mark the launch of a major global campaign to improve water management.

Backed by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the campaign, RipplesOnWater.org, will raise awareness about water issues, initially in Sri Lanka and will then be spread globally throughout 2012.

“I am very excited by this creative new approach to getting the message out about the importance of managing our water better,” said Dr Colin Chartres, Director General of IWMI. “The talk of a ‘global water crisis’ is growing louder and louder. It has got business people, politicians and scientists worried. However, the good news is that it really doesn’t have to be this way. Research is clearly showing that with more investment and new thinking on resource management, we can not only have all the water we need, but also create jobs, grow more food and maintain our natural heritage.”

As the world’s population continues to grow, urbanize and become wealthier, the pressures on global water supplies are going to intensify. More water will be needed for industry, and more for food production. The natural systems that underpin the water cycle may be eyed up for the commercial development opportunities they offer, instead of the environmental services they provide. On top of this, climate change will bring new challenges. More extreme weather events are forecast, and that means more floods and droughts.
This is what *Ripples on Water* is all about. By bringing together art, science and development in a unique global movement, say the organizers of the campaign, the aim is to revitalize water management so that we can create jobs, grow more food, keep ourselves healthy and protect our natural heritage.

To launch the campaign a spectacular laser show and water dance will be performed in Colombo.


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The **International Water Management Institute** (IWMI) is a nonprofit, scientific research organization focusing on the sustainable use of land and water resources in agriculture, to benefit poor people in developing countries. IWMI's mission is "to improve the management of land and water resources for food, livelihoods and the environment.” IWMI has its headquarters in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and regional offices across Asia and Africa. The Institute works in partnership with developing countries, international and national research institutes, universities and other organizations to develop tools and technologies that contribute to poverty reduction as well as food and livelihood security.

IWMI website [www.iwmi.org](http://www.iwmi.org)


The **CGIAR** is a global research partnership that unites organizations engaged in research for sustainable development. CGIAR research is dedicated to reducing rural poverty, increasing food security, improving human health and nutrition, and ensuring more sustainable management of natural resources. The research activities are carried out by the 15 centers who are members of the CGIAR Consortium in close collaboration with hundreds of partner organizations, including national and regional research institutes, civil society organizations, academia and the private sector.

CGIAR website [www.cgiar.org](http://www.cgiar.org)
Background on Global Water Issues

There are serious and extremely worrying factors that indicate that water supplies are close to full exploitation in some countries. Population growth over the next 40 years will result in an extra 2 billion people on the planet. Essentially, every calorie of food requires a liter of water to produce it. Therefore, on average, we require 2,000-3,000 liters of water per person to sustain our daily food requirements. So, we will need to find at least 2,000 cubic kilometers more water annually to grow our food. This is no easy task given that the required amount is over double of what is currently used in irrigation. We will not be able to produce all the food, feed and fiber required in 2050 unless we improve the way we manage water.

A few years ago, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) undertook a far-reaching study of global agricultural water use. This clearly demonstrated that many countries are facing severe water scarcity either as a result of a lack of available freshwater, or due to a lack of investment in water infrastructure such as dams and reservoirs. What makes matters worse is that this scarcity predominantly affects developing countries where the majority of the world’s undernourished people live.

However, there are potential solutions. Better water storage, particularly, has to be placed center stage. Ethiopia, which is typical of many sub-Saharan African countries, has a water storage capacity of 43 cubic meters per person. In contrast, Australia has almost 5,000 cubic meters per person. Whilst there will be a need for new large- and medium-sized dams to deal with this critical lack of storage in Africa, other simpler solutions are also part of the equation. These include the construction of small community reservoirs and the sustainable use of groundwater. Improved year-round access to water will help farmers maintain their own food security using simple supplementary irrigation techniques. The redesign of both the physical and institutional arrangements of some large and often dysfunctional irrigation schemes will also improve productivity. Safe, risk-free reuse of wastewater from growing cities is a further option. These actions need to be paralleled by the development of drought-tolerant crops, and the provision of infrastructure and facilities to get fresh food to markets.

We cannot afford to develop these new approaches to water management without looking at the wider environmental consequences. Technically, it is possible to ‘fix’ agriculture, while ensuring long-term sustainability and environmental health. However, in devising solutions, we must assign value to ecosystems, recognize environmental and livelihood trade-offs, and balance the rights of a variety of users and interests. A new CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems will attempt to directly address these issues.