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# Director of United Nations' Global Water Program Meets With UNH Scientists

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DURHAM, N.H.— Next year will mark the beginning of the United Nations' "International Decade for Action - Water for Life," and scientists from the University of New Hampshire's Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space (EOS) already are laying the groundwork with the program's director in an effort to play an active role in solving problems related to Earth's most precious resource.



*Gordon Young,  
coordinator of the  
UN's World Water  
Assessment  
Programme*  
stress."

Spearheaded by the UN and its 24-agency World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP), the project will focus on monitoring and assessing human stewardship of global water resources. On a recent visit to EOS, Gordon Young, the coordinator of WWAP, gave a seminar on the program's work and met with EOS researchers. "I'm here to discuss what sort of contributions the institute and particularly the Water Systems Analysis Group (WSAG) can make to our overall UN effort. The group provides extremely powerful tools for answering critical questions that many governments have about their own water resources and how they can be used," Young said.

According to Charles Vörösmarty, director of the water analysis group at EOS, the specific tools Young referred to are the global hydrological archive and analysis system, and geospatial data and analysis tools developed by WSAG. "In particular," Vörösmarty said, "the UN program is interested in our capabilities to map indicators of water scarcity and

While the United States does not, in general, suffer from water scarcity and stress issues compared to many parts of the world, Young asserted that the UN's decade-long effort to focus attention on global freshwater issues should concern Americans very much.

"A large portion of the world's people are really suffering from lack of water, which influences the lack of food or poor health conditions," Young said. He pointed to statistics from WWAP's publication on global water resource issues, "World Water Development Report," which states that 6,000 children die per day from diarrhea-related illnesses, and more than 2.2 million people die each year from diseases related to contaminated drinking water and poor sanitation. "We should all be concerned in two senses: from the humanitarian point of view, and also for our own

self-interest,” Young said.

On the humanitarian side of things, Young said it's simply the right thing to do for the haves to help the have-nots, particularly with something as essential as freshwater. “If our brothers and sisters in Africa are suffering, then we rich people should be feeling a little bit guilty and be willing to do something about it,” he said. Moreover, Young added, efforts to upgrade the quality of life for people in an ever-shrinking world help to stem social unrest, which in turn can make the world a safer place.

“Water flows through everything. The world is dependant on freshwater for food, energy, health, environment, industry, etc.,” Young said. This dependence is sure to become more critical as the “triple whammy” of population growth, increasing standards of living, and climate change further complicate the situation and put further stress on the world's freshwater supply. “Global warming is very much linked into water availability because it's climate that drives water resources,” Young said.

For more information on the World Water Assessment Programme, visit <http://www.unesco.org/water/wwap/index.shtml>. Visit the EOS Water Systems Analysis Group at <http://www.watsys.unh.edu>.