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Thirsty Planet: Teens Address Water Scarcity in Africa

SAN JOSE, Calif., – March 22, 2007 – Water. Most Americans don't give it a second thought. It's always available, in a bottle or from the tap. But for more than one billion people without access to safe water, getting a drink is not an easy task. In fact, according to Water Partners International, women and girls around the world walk 200 million hours every day on the quest for water.

The United Nations (UN) has designated March 22 as World Water Day and this year's theme is 'Coping With Water Scarcity' (www.worldwaterday07.org). World Water Day promotes awareness of the global water crisis. According to the United Nations, one person in six in the world lives without regular access to safe drinking water and over 2.6 billion lack access to adequate sanitation.

Knowledge of these harsh facts motivated X-Force Student Ministries – a youth group based in San Jose, California – to hold a special meeting this week to discuss the challenge of water scarcity. “Several students were moved to tears as they learned that more than half of Africa's people lack access to safe drinking water, leaving them vulnerable to water-borne diseases like cholera, typhoid and infectious hepatitis,” said April Hunt, staff intern at X-Force. “Health care is often inaccessible, too. So water-borne diseases often go untreated and millions, especially young children, die as a result each year.”

Aside from diseases caused directly by ingesting water from unsafe sources, students also learned that there are many indirect negative effects, as well. Women who spend hours each day obtaining water do not have time to care for their families or participate in any income-generating activities. Girls who must retrieve water often do not have time to attend school. And yet, according to Blood:Water Mission, one dollar can provide clean water for one African for one year! As little as ten dollars can provide a lifetime supply of clean water. As the meeting concluded, students committed themselves to action.

On Thursday morning, March 22, students officially launched the **African Water Project** – a student-led campaign to help build wells and clean water projects in Africa. The young people plan to inspire others to learn more about the need for accessible clean water in Africa and to raise funds to help drill clean water wells. A rapidly growing network of local businesses, churches, schools, and individuals are collecting funds to sponsor the construction of wells. These projects will bring access to clean water and improved sanitation to thousands of people in Africa. All donations to the African Water Project will go directly to carefully-screened partner organizations that are conducting the well-drilling. The African Water Project exists to focus on one achievable goal: providing access to clean water to everyone in Africa. For more information, please visit www.africanwaterproject.org.

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