

ECWATECH 2008

Water Resources Conference

Opening Ceremony

Tuesday 4th, 2008

Moscow, Russia

Sppech by Loïc FAUCHON

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I would first like to tell you how happy I am to be with you today for the opening ceremony of the ECWATECH 2008 Conference.

It is an honour for the World Water Council and its President to be here and I would like to thank the Organizing Committee for giving me the opportunity to deliver this speech. I would also like to express best wishes on behalf of the whole international water community.

Today, the World Water Council has more than three hundred member organisations from close to seventy countries. Its role consists in advocating the water cause so that it becomes a priority for all decision makers in the coming decades.

You are all aware that without water there can be no life and no development. That is the message the great water Family you all belong to must communicate to decision makers and the public at large.

Why are we gathered here today?

Because guarantying to humankind the availability of fresh water, of drinking water and of the sanitation it needs today and will increasingly need in the ten or twenty years to come, is a very difficult challenge.

Because we want and must contribute to take up this challenge: convince people that the water cause is a priority with a view to all the issues we face to guaranty free access to water.

Let's quickly go over the main problems and consequences these issues have over the availability of water resources.

The first has to do with demography. The world's population is growing rapidly in the order of 1 billion people every ten years. This obviously calls for additional means that the most concerned countries are not prepared to come up with. Water and sanitation are first and foremost a question of survival and their absence is one of the reasons that throw thousands of women and men on the roads or at sea.

The over crowded cities and mega cities are the most visible consequence of this phenomenon. The world of the future is one where more than half of the population will live in cities and in coastal areas. And they are not places where water resources are plentiful.

The second problem is a consequence of the first: cities, intensive farming and industry severely pollute the air and water. This threatens the health of billions of human beings. But more important, this activity degrades the quality of the water resources. And to a level that is such that today, when we considering the state of the rivers or groundwater, we can actually talk of a new kind of "sanitary bombs".

The third critical problem we are faced with is related to the climate and its evolution. What will be the consequences of this evolution in ten or fifty years? No one can answer this question with certainty. We understand that we will have to face increasing differences between excess rains on the one hand and droughts on the other.

These problems are most often due to Man's behaviour. His lack of concern, of foresight and his irresponsibility are at the origin of the difficulties I just mentioned.

This clearly means that we must, through our mobilisation, establish a new relationship between Man and water.

If we are not able to make this relationship evolve, we will condemn the women and men living on our planet to remain unequal when it comes to access to water and sanitation. If we do not change it we then promise our children a world where it won't be possible to breathe or drink at will.

Obviously we do not want any share of that world and this is why the access to water for all resolution shifts from the status of a priority to that of a prerequisite..

A prerequisite to life, development, prosperity and even, may I dare say, to simple well being.

Air and water are the challenges of the modern world. Human kind will manage to solve the other issues as long as it can survive to the two previous ones.

We have to convince that, everywhere and for all uses, we need to consume less. Not only by taking a shower rather than a bath or by using water saving toilet flushing devices.

The real challenges aren't there. They are in water for agriculture, water for energy and water for industry. That is where the greatest savings lie that can have a substantial impact on the consumption chart.

But this isn't enough because this water needs to be better, much better managed. We must convince of the universal virtues of drop irrigation, detect leaks, prevent pollution; Man's genius is challenged to come up with new and bold solutions.

The most recent innovations already introduce a new component in the geography of water. We will dig deeper for water while trying to prevent drying out the planet's womb. We will better protect the deep water resources than we have until now protected oil reserves.

We increasingly master the extraction of salt from water. Not only for seawater desalination, but also for the millions of square kilometres under which the groundwater is brackish.

We will transfer water from one region to another, over increasingly large distances. Algeria is undertaking a transfer of water over close to 800 km in the South of the country. China is entirely mobilised on the project to transfer water from the Southern part to the Northern part of the country, which constitutes the greatest voluntary transfer project of water reserves ever imagined by Man.

We will also know how to recycle treated water for use in agriculture or leisure activities.

But whether it is for pumping, desalination, transferring, recycling or recharging, water in all its states will always require more energy.

There is a topical issue I would like to address here in Russia, one of the leading world powers for water and energy.

Since a few years and even more in the last few months, oil prices have considerably increased. The consequences are dramatic with transport and several agricultural product costs having doubled in the last twelve months.

This phenomenon also concerns the cost of the energy required to operate water and sanitation facilities. Today we are witness to a real decline of the access to water in the poorest countries.

Without energy, namely electricity, there is neither pumping nor transport. Yet there is a shortage of energy for water. The increase in its cost, particularly in the majority of African countries, deprives part of the population of access to the resource.

In places like the bush of Benin or Mali where we used to pump water for eight consecutive hours three years ago, we can now barely pump for three hours and for the same cost.

This prerequisite is a key issue on which we need to mobilize our intelligence as well as our willpower.

Obviously, we will come up with new solutions through technological progress and alternative energy sources so that we make increasingly more water available with less and less energy.

Obviously, our scientist and engineers, with their genius and know-how, will see to that. But this is not enough. We must convince the energy sector which also badly needs water, that part of the energy for water needed by the poor and the destitute be made available at a reduced cost.

All together, we must come up with new solutions which can contribute to a better access to energy for water.

Can we imagine a kind of moratorium on the cost increase, a solution aimed at, somehow, neutralizing part of the costs or their present and future rises?

A possible approach would be to have access to a specific type of fuel oil, to produce the energy needed for water. This solution exists or has existed in several European countries with the fuel oil called domestic fuel for farmers, fishermen and taxi drivers.

Another idea would consist of applying a specific tax to oil products to be negotiated with producing countries who would accept to directly replenish a specific fund dedicated to water to the benefit of the poorest countries.

All this is not simple and calls for a lot of discussions and diplomacy. But we've been through other far more complex schemes and it is our duty to work so as to make new ideas arise. In any case, we have decided, along with the World Energy Council, to work together at raising awareness on this imperious obligation to obtain, in a way or another, a kind of "sanctuarization" of energy for water.

You are well aware that the world is changing. It is changing at a great pace and so is the water world. These changes will be positive in so far as we manage to convince decision makers and chiefly political leaders that they must include this issue among their key priorities.

And only the pressure exerted by public opinion relayed by the media and driven by the fear of growing tensions with a view to the shortage of water, can give this issue the importance it deserves as a true planetary challenge.

At this stage, it is easy to understand that the issue of water is going towards a new field.

The debate will no longer remain technological since solutions are multiplying but rather much more of the political order with its different financial, legal, institutional and educative components.

Water like air belongs to the new scarcities and the notion of scarcity is before all an economical notion. Are these new scarcities a lasting phenomenon?

Yes, certainly for water and this leads to finding out how we can act on this scarceness and its durability.

The answer obviously lies in what we could call political accessibility and which lies on four factors:

1. Making financial resources available;
2. Asserting clearly the right for each individual to have access to the resource;
3. Sharing the governance of water between the right institutional levels:
 - The State and international organisations level, to vote laws and enforce the truly strategic policies.
 - The hydrographical basin level, which provides a true coherence for the setting up of infrastructures aimed at protecting and enhancing the resource.
 - The local level, where people know better how the resource should be allocated and how to fight against pollution.
4. Transferring and adapting knowledge to the needs of the poorest countries and regions.

Looking at these issues at the global scale, we easily understand that there is an urgent need for a water diplomacy which would agree on the balance of the great continental water reserves, the mitigation of potential conflicts over several transboundary basins and on the refinancing of the debt of the poorest countries in favour of water and sanitation.

You will agree that the water cause will only make progress if we can exchange and debate over it.

Russia can contribute along with all the countries of this large region. Russia has always been a major water country, a great hydrographical region. Throughout the last century,

it has developed state of the art hydraulic techniques. Several of the most important hydraulic works around the world were built based on Russian knowledge transfers. In the former Soviet Union, a genuine hydro policy was put in place despite the size of the country and communication difficulties.

The World Water Council would now like to encourage Russia in this approach to continue to share its experience with the water community. The Council wishes to establish collaborations in this sense, another reason for my coming to Moscow.

We would appreciate your contribution to the next Forum in Istanbul. We would appreciate having a large number of Russian organisations and from neighbouring countries join the Council so that the voice of this region can be heard.

Only together can we initiate and then develop a true world water policy.

Please join us and participate in the Istanbul Forum. Once again please be thanked for your warm hospitality.

ANNEXE II: List of questions for interview.

1. The 5th Forum will take place in Istanbul on March 2009.
 - Will the issues of this Forum be oriented towards the principal goals of the WWC ?
or main subjects of the Forum will discover proper concrete water global problems?
 - How are going preparatory processes?
 - Do you know how many states, government representatives, and participants will be represented at the 5th Forum?

2. How can you assess the ability to achieve one of the principal strategic goals of the WWC, water and environment, in the present context of climate change?

3. Do you think that public awareness of population and decision makers in different regions of the world about the water availability are enough for the adoption of proper measures for adaptation to this global challenge?
- What do you propose on behalf of the WWC for the growing of public awareness in this direction?

4. Huge quantity of international congresses, symposia, exhibitions and different events took place in relation to water problems. Can you give your opinion of Water Forum in Moscow (ECWATECH conf., etc...) about its importance and this scale?

5. Do you have in the WWC plans of actions, to development of some projects or activities in Russia?

6. Each World Water Forum is completed by an announcement of political declaration but unfortunately often did not find the proper follow-up of this good will. How do you want to correct this situation through the results of the 5th Forum?