

3rd JOINT SPECIALITY
CONFERENCE

“Sustainable Water Management in
Response to 21st Century Pressures”

OPENING CEREMONY

Keynote Speech

“JOINING FORCES FOR WATER”

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Thank you Mr President, dear friends, for your invitation to open these working days. Thank you for your hospitality and for the attention you pay to the World Water Council and its President.

Your conference is important and the themes you have chosen find their place in a crucial period in the long History of water, of biodiversity and of the ecosystems on our planet.

The place of water, its conservation, its uses, will have huge consequences for the future human development.

“Water is life” is an expression present in all languages around the world. Water is at the origin of life, water is the universal symbol of fertility, of purification and regeneration. It is both the more common and the more essential of the existing substances.

Today water is threatened more than it has ever been before. Threats of dependence when it is withheld or embezzled, threats of being spoiled when human thoughtlessness is responsible for multiple forms of pollution and threats of depletion when the climate change aggravates drought to an unprecedented degree. These threats are due to Man and his erratic behaviours making him water’s worst enemy.

In Johannesburg in 2002, the International Community agreed to set ambitious objectives for water and even more for sanitation. What have we done since? Both a lot and too little. According to the UNDP, halfway into the process, the world is about to meet the goals set for drinking water: provide access to water to 900 million people by 2015.

But this achievement owes a lot to the progress made by China and India. At the same time it hides the broad gaps that exist between countries. If we do not gain momentum, 55 countries run the risk of not reaching the objective.

For sanitation, despite all the efforts made, backwardness is more severe and close to 400 million people should be left behind when we reach the 2015 deadline.

Yes, water is under attack and its main enemies are clearly identified. Today the enemies of water are known as demography and migrations, urban development and pollution. They are also known as climate changes and disasters.

Demography because the world is struggling to accommodate an extra billion inhabitants in the coming twelve years and another billion by 2030.

Additional resources will have to be found for these newcomers and to the least, water resources that are available in good quality at the right place and time. Otherwise, we would accelerate even more the migrations, which cause injustice and instability.

Urban development because as you know, half of the world's population today lives in cities. Urban development leads to rural exodus, shanty towns; it leads to the pollution of underground water, rivers, basins and these phenomena give rise to unacceptable tensions.

And of course there is the climate we hear about every day, its changes and potential excesses. On this aspect, allow me to say that I think we certainly talk a little too much about the causes of the climate warming but seriously neglect its consequences for mankind and for water.

Yet, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, even though water has enemies it has never had as many defenders.

Never have the population nor the media been so aware of the issue of water. Never have political and economic leaders been as active in this field as shown by the number of political summits held and related to water like in Beppu, Japan last December, Charm el-Cheik, Egypt this coming July, or Iguaçú, Brazil in November this year.

Never has the international water community been so mobilized to convince each and everyone that the water issue has become a global and planetary one: we all know that water is a prerequisite to development.

To this extent, allow me to make some commentaries on some topical themes that join the big issues of water.

First I would like to say that we have to clearly express that there is first a need of water for health and that we have, in priority, to contribute to solve this issue. Year after year, diseases linked to water represent a huge cost in terms of human lives. This crisis is unforgivable, because it can be avoided. The lack of water or its bad quality remains the first cause of mortality and particularly among children. It is a question here first of water intended for domestic uses and of access to toilets, which about 2.5 billion human beings are lacking around the world.

Then I would like to mention the second real priority, which is water for food. Since many weeks, a privileged part of humanity is discovering that the majority of the inhabitants on our planet is hungry. "Hunger" demonstrations and riots are blowing up in many countries, being violent and even often murderous.

Agricultural prices have increased by at least 40% in one year and the cost for land and maritime transportation has almost doubled in 2 years.

We are told that there are multiple causes to this: the increasing demand, the explosion of oil market price, indeed even the global warming, here again. But we should stop making climate change be responsible for all our mistakes...

And, above all, let's look in front of us; in order to face the real food crises, where at the global level, probably for the first time in human history, we are producing less food while the population and its needs are increasing.

To feed the planet, we will have to produce more. And to produce more, we will have to have an ever better productivity for water dedicated to food.

Agricultural water represents at least the 2 thirds of fresh water used by humanity. It is also the one that, for various reasons, is subject to the highest wastes.

The challenge for the coming years is really to be able to have the water necessary to our needs and our activities: for health, for food, for industrial production. Allow me to remind here that one ton of water is needed to produce only 1 kilogram of corn and 600 tons of water to produce 1 ton of steel.

Strategic choices have to be made, new policies have to be implemented, new means have to be dedicated to access to water.

In order to satisfy these needs, we must imperatively and ineluctably change the way we consider and relate to water. No doubt too that, year after year, we will have to change our behaviors and habits.

But obviously, we will not solve this issue overnight. We must steer clear from spectacular discourses. Of course, we must foster technical progress, whether it is pumping, transport, treatment, desalination or re-use, to increase the availability of water resources. But we have at the same time to get to consume less and manage the available water in a sustainable way for the years and decades to come

Water obviously needs science but it also needs our awareness.

So in order to mobilize these water resources and guaranty quantity and quality, there are some conditions that need to be met and I would like to take this opportunity to go over some of them with you and propose a few simple and concrete solutions.

The first condition, undoubtedly the most urgent and deep, is energy for water. 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 poor countries, in African ones for example, where they 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?

Another 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 could consist in 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.

Obviously, 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.

The rest, all the rest and most important, will be a long process. Only time can help convince people of the necessity to establish a new relationship between man and water and foster new behaviors.

This is why, since the 4th World Water Forum in Mexico in 2006, we have tried to reposition water and sanitation at the heart of the political debate because political

commitments alone, at the international but also national and local levels, can bring what I call the World Water Equity, in other words the possibility given to all to have access to water.

The stakes are clearly of the political order and so are the solutions. When we talk about financing, governance, knowledge or know-how, what else but politics are we talking about?

All over the world, the responsibility of the political instances consists of ensuring the coherence of the “water triptych” that gives a real consistency to the priority given to water and sanitation.

There is a financial priority, which consists of:

- dedicating a greater part of our budgets at all levels
- implementing public accountability especially devoted to water and sanitation
- determining truly innovating financing
- justifying and explaining the real cost of water services in a transparent process

All are political decisions and activities demanding to adapt and to rethink the link in some cases between political and financial issues.

There is also a governance priority and it is not an easy process. But water needs to receive the benefits of a modern, accepted and well-controlled decentralization. This implies preparing women and men to the demands of equipment maintenance.

This is why during the Mexico World Water Forum, we expressed the wish to see maintenance costs be included, as an obligation, in all projects submitted for a national or international funding. We are still far from this today and we should convince that it is a necessity.

Good governance also boils down to a fair distribution of responsibilities between the regulatory obligations of the State, the Parliament’s capacity to set a legal framework, the coherence provided by the catchment area authorities with common action to secure water resources and prevent pollution and lastly a greater proximity with the field and its population brought about by local authorities and notably municipalities.

Calling for decentralization each time we see a state or government try to initiate and control everything is not enough. A good decentralization is not one that consists in traveling twice as much and twice as fast from a province to the capital city. A good decentralization is one that gives a province the means to deploy its

own capacities and come up with solutions that take good account of local specificities.

Good governance is the capacity to seek harmony between all the stakeholders in order to foster the better use of water and efficient implementation of sanitation.

Last but not least, priority to knowledge or more specifically, for an efficient and respectful exchange of competencies. Sharing experience means being convinced that one takes as much as one gives. Giving a little means taking the time to understand the local context. Granted that generosity does not exonerate from the duty of intelligence. It is also not a matter of efficiency at all cost. The most fragile regions in the world are those who need most support. Let's make sure that we do not impose too strict financing, governance and knowledge transfer conditions to these regions with the risk of leaving the poorest on the road side.

Of course, you are all more than aware of these issues. More than 50 years ago, a great political leader said "governing is anticipating".

Man has to be careful with regards to water. He has to be modest and treat it with respect.

This is the reason why we invite you to cooperate, to exchange and to share experience and knowledge in the World Water Council.

Together with our Turkish colleagues, we want to have, in one year, a Forum that advances the cause for water. A Forum, where concrete solutions will be presented to secure water resources and to enable a better management of agricultural and domestic use of water.

This is the Forum to which you should bring your experience through this conference.

Because by bridging the Voice of Water from local and regional levels, you will bring the Voice of Water to the world.

Once again, thank you for your warm hospitality.

We, the Council and its President, are waiting for the outcomes of your works. Join the Council. Become a member, and help us to prepare a very successful Istanbul World Water Forum.

Thank you.

Loïc Fauchon