

2nd coordinators meeting

5th Forum - opening

Thursday 7 February 2008

Istanbul, Turkey

Message from Benedito BRAGA
Vice-President of the World Water Council

Prof. Oktay Tabasaran, General Secretary of the 5th WWF

Dear colleagues and friends,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be here with you today to open this 2nd coordinators meeting.

On behalf of the World Water Council and of its President Loïc Fauchon, who will join us tonight, please let me express my most sincere gratitude to our Turkish colleagues for the efforts put in organizing this meeting. Thank you again for hosting us in the beautiful and historic city of Istanbul.

And thanks to all of you for coming so numerous from Turkey and from all around the world for this 2nd Forum coordinators meeting. These two working days will be particularly important for the preparation of the 5th Forum.

Mr. Paul Reiter and Prof. Necati Airaliolu, who are in charge of the Programme Committee of the Forum, will explain right after all the details and new developments of the thematic and regional programme as it stands today.

From my side, I would simply like to offer, within a more general context, the main guidelines and messages that we should all keep in mind while preparing the Forum.

And first, let's not forget our experience from the past Forum. Let's just go back to the Forum of Mexico for a moment. If I was asked to define the main spirit of the Forum of Mexico in one word, I would without any doubt define it as a gathering. Yes, Mexico is still present in our minds as a great gathering of the Family of Water. In Mexico, all the voices of water have been raised. It was the opportunity to debate openly through a respectful dialogue and with a common goal: make the message of water and sanitation loud and clear.

At the 4th Forum, for the first time, everybody came and sit around the same table: experts, Ministers, Parliamentarians, local authorities, NGOs, private companies, international institutions and professional organisations. About 20000 participants from 150 countries relayed by some 1500 journalists. Beyond the speeches, the declarations and the reports, the future was contemplated together.

But the World Water Forum is not a week where everyone comes to deliver its own message. A Forum is a process. Valuable as much for its preparation as for its holding. The preparatory process itself is a "learning process" that will catalyze before, during and after the Forum.

There are a great number of conferences and seminars dealing with water all over the world. But more than ever, the 5th Forum will be different from those events. Its added-value comes from the multiplicity and diversity of voices expressed. And we do count on all of you to build this multi-stakeholder dialogue, to make everybody seat around the same table because water deserves this gathering.

Water also deserves new thinking and concrete action. It deserves clear debates and adequate solutions. That is why the World Water Council, together with the Turkish Government, has designed a totally new process for this Forum. A process that emphasizes the participation and interaction.

We have only one year left until the 5th World Water Forum. At that point, a framework is set, an organisation is being implemented. But what is essential lies in our hands: in Istanbul, we will put all our efforts in “Bridging Divides for Water”, which means all type of Divides, not only technical divides but cultural, economical, social and above all political. This is our challenge to make progress, our challenge to succeed. This is both your duty and your right to create and innovate within this framework, to bring solutions for the problems of those excluded from accessing water, development and quality of life.

The will of the World Water Council is to encourage action, a concrete, realistic and integrated action. We have built a precise and streamlined thematic framework, with fewer but more pertinent themes and sessions and greater opportunities for interaction. We have built a framework that will encourage action through elaborating concrete solutions to the main water and sanitation problems.

As our President Fauchon would say: “Find 100 concrete solutions to the 100 most crucial questions. And have 100 sessions to present those 100 solutions”. This is our objective for this Forum.

And for this purpose, the Council and Turkey will need the expertise and commitment of the organizations present here but also of the people that are not with us today and that will join us on the path to the Forum of Istanbul. Let’s say it clearly and loudly, again: the aim of this Forum is to bring everybody to the same table. And we are counting on YOU to do so: to work in an inclusive and participatory way and to be the Voices of Water all around the world.

The regional processes that are being developed will be particularly relevant in this effort to reach concrete solutions for action. The World Water Council will be attentive to what is happening at the regional level of the preparatory process, because regions are the first that will be able to bring concrete and local solutions.

Dear colleagues and friends,

Let us not forget that the world will be looking at us in March 2009. The world will be listening to us and will be waiting for concrete proposals and achievements. The solutions to water and sanitation issues are mainly in the political area. And the role, the priority for the water community, is to convince. Convince policy-makers, convince all kinds of decision-makers that technical and technological solutions can always be found thanks to man's genius. But that political solving, in a great number of regions and situations, still has to be found and to be promoted.

What we need more than ever are solutions that can lead to political commitments. Our goal for Istanbul is to bridge divides between technical and political issues, to bridge divides between politicians themselves, between politicians from different countries, from different levels of competences. And we will do it through a strong political process, a process that will associate Head of States, governments, local authorities and other stakeholders as well. And our Turkish colleagues are deeply committed to building a strong and innovative political process.

On Water Day this year, the Mayor of Istanbul Mr Topbas will launch the first meeting of local authorities for the 5th Forum, and has invited a number of mayors to come to Istanbul on this occasion to work on a framework document that will be named the "Istanbul consensus". This is a great step the cause of water, and I would like to thank him for that.

This political process will be efficient only if we combine it with a strong "communication device", addressing the public-at large and the media. Our messages must be clear, simple and strong. We must know how to translate our often technical and specialized jargon into words that are easily understood by the largest audiences.

It is this double awareness-raising action, that of the public and of the decision makers, that makes ideas evolve and allows to turn them into decisions.

Here are, dear colleagues and friends, some remarks at the opening of these two days of work. As I already said, the general framework is set. Some themes have been chosen and will be addressed. As for the rest, all the rest, we are here to listen, to speak and to understand each other. We alone do not hold the truth. On the contrary, together we will be respected. And if we are respected, we will be listened.

Let's work together to be build the "Forum village" and to raise the Voice of Water that is needed so much by the citizens on our Earth. Let's work together for a Forum that will be modern, open and useful. It is a great responsibility and we are here today to take upon this responsibility and to bear it until the Forum.

Thanks again for your participation and I wish you all pleasant days here in Istanbul.