

August 14th 2007

« CLIMATE IS A POLITICAL ISSUE TOO »

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In the middle of this summer, Europe is either sneezing or suffocating. It depends. Floods, forest fires, wind storms or dog days. It depends and sometimes it goes against any geographical rationale. And we point out to what we think is responsible for all this harm: climate change, something that could lead us to wonder why we had to wait until the beginning of this century to be alarmed.

Maybe our attention is as near sighted as our egotism. So little in the media recently about the 20 to 30 million, perhaps more, Indians, Bengalis, Chinese and others who have drowned under masses of water, thrown onto the roads, refugees in their own countries.

But in those remote countries, we often hear, people are used to the yellow river overflows, the water rises of the Ganges: this has been going on for centuries. And in the meantime, we, poor Europeans, are the sole victims of climate changes since it is of common knowledge that the melting of the glaciers and the rising of the sea level will only hit the richer countries...

Accepting the risk of going against the flow and current beliefs, let's clearly agree that the climate has always had these sudden variations, these unpredictable angers and that humans have suffered from them, paying a regular and heavy tribute to its wrath. To be convinced, those who don't know him already will certainly read with great interest the writings of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, the best climate historian.

But don't get me wrong, the purpose here is not to say that the climate cannot go wild. It is possible but we are not sure of that either. And accordingly, we must first and foremost strongly claim that, even though we should obviously protect part of humanity against these coming changes, we must, above all, be concerned with the fate of the other part of the planet's population: that of the poor, of the weak, of

the forgotten, of those progress left behind and who were excluded from the benefits of development.

A billion or more who do not know what a water tap is, or maybe have just heard about it. Double that number of those who are not given the dignity of basic sanitary installations. Moreover, the situation is not improving since the reality today, and for a long time I'm afraid, boils down to an anarchic growth of thirsty megacities and a terrible increase of river and sea pollutions. And all this leads to turn these urban concentrations into genuine sanitary bombs, that have already been activated.

It is definitely important to say that the climate, whatever its evolution may be, must not serve as a scapegoat to our inconsistencies. No, the climate warming, however serious it may be, cannot serve as a shield behind which we can hide to avoid facing our carelessness and negligence.

But solutions exist. They consist in bigger reservoirs, increased water transfers, more accessible desalination systems, the widespread reuse of wastewater, improved leak detection, alternative energy resources and many others. The genius of our researchers sees to that. The skills of our engineers contribute to improve things, day after day. Their combined know how brings technological evolutions which allow to secure the resources and ensure a more rational distribution.

This is no longer where the problem lies. The problem is now simply of a political order. A politically incorrect statement! What are you saying? All this would simply boil down to politics? And nobody ever told us?

But it's nevertheless true; at this present moment, water, its access for the largest number, suffers from a great deficit of interest. And yes, right now, access to water suffers from too little financing, from a mediocre governance and the lack of a rational transfer of know how. And all these issues depend on those who decide, those who govern at all levels.

Worldwide, military budgets continue to increase while those dedicated to development aid are stagnating. And it is to better inform on the unacceptable fate made to water, to contribute to help making better choices, to bring governing authorities and decision makers to take the responsibilities for which they were elected or appointed, that the World Water Council created the Forums named after it.

The next 5<sup>th</sup> Forum will be held in a year and a half in Istanbul. Along with our Turkish colleagues, we decided to invite Chiefs of State and Government Officials. We want them to gather with us and state that, yes, water is a precondition to the survival of Humanity and its development, and that we will do what needs to be done to achieve

our goals. We want them to join us to express these simple facts to the media and to the general public.

Those who will come will have accomplished their duty. Those who won't cannot pretend afterwards that they didn't know. We will all know that they just didn't want to.

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