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**President World Water Council**  
**7<sup>th</sup> Beirut Water Week**  
**Opening speech**  
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Dear friends, ministers, ambassadors, representatives from civil and military authorities, governors from the World Water Council, dear Fadi Comair, dear friends of water,

What you said, my dear Fadi, is spot on. We came here to find out more about Lebanon, while at the same time carrying out our duties as the World Water Council, i.e. representing the entire “water planet” here in Lebanon.

It's been said before: The world is parched. And yet, the planet is covered with water.

Lebanon and the rest of this region are parched. Sometimes they are even forced to go hungry. Here, water levels are insufficient. Water is being abused and water is leading to suffering.

But why is this the case?

Everywhere, in all regions of the world, we're hearing more and more about climate responsibility. But every now and then, we need to be a bit politically incorrect. I'm going to tell you something now that I truly believe: it is not now so much the climate that is causing us to suffer, it is not so much the climate that is forcing us into action, but more than anything else it's population growth, it's population pressure, it's rising living standards, it's the concentration of people in megacities, where additional water resources are needed. More water is often consumed in cities than in the countryside, that's just how it is.

The world's population is increasing, becoming more and more concentrated and more demanding, which is only natural. The issue, though, is that this is creating a terrifying amount of pollution in many large cities and along our coastlines.

This is a fact: when it comes to water, demand is increasing a lot more quickly than supply, something which is set to last for decades to come, believe me. On top of all this, our climate, and the way in which our climate is changing, something that we know so little about, is the cherry on the cake of all of this imbalance. Climate-related disasters are yet to come.

Of course, if what we are told is true, it will be just as his majesty the King of Morocco said at COP 21 in Paris, “the final injustice to strike the most vulnerable people on the planet”.

Climate is the scapegoat for all of the mistakes mankind has made. This climate that is so changeable - hot here, colder there, dryer here, wetter there - that water is not there where we need it and when we need it. Water has been plundered for decades, but we want to see it properly shared.

We want it to be sustainable, but we also want it to be fair. What good is sustainable development if not everyone gets an even share?

What can we do to put an end to these water crises, or at the very least alleviate their impact?

The answer comes in the form of a term that we as water professionals use every day, “water security”. This question is of great concern to us and is central to our overall strategy. There are two aspects to water security: the first involves rendering the resource itself secure in order to widen access to the resource, to pump deeper or transfer water across larger areas, as is the case with the Red Sea-Dead Sea Water Conveyance project, or other projects to come in the future, because we’re going to need them, let’s not be under any illusions in that regard.

There are new possibilities, and they are a lot more significant. There is desalination, for example, a field in which an enormous amount of progress has been made in recent years, not only from a technological point of view, but also in the sense that its cost has been reduced by a factor of 10 in the space of twenty years, with the technology enabling around 70 countries to employ the use of desalination.

We can’t afford to put all our eggs in one basket, however. Another cutting-edge technological advance, water reuse, is a process that we will be able to use once we have been able to overcome certain technical, administrative and psychological obstacles. All of this will generate more resources.

However, in order to meet demand, and this is a point I am really keen to stress, we need to be able to store this water, we need to be able to retain this water: water from the winter for use in the summer, water from now for use in the future, water for development and water for the natural world.

Across the world there is a real shortage in terms of the capacities for storing water resources.

The era of dams is over, in their current guise at least, based as they are on an antiquated approach, and we are now entering the era of water reserves. Dams get a lot of bad press, which is often justified.

In the future, the aim will not be to dam a valley, but rather to conserve it, to maintain it and to restore it, turning these areas into areas where ecosystems can be reborn as well as spaces for electricity production, storage and nature conservation.

In a way, if you will allow me to make the comparison, we will be returning to the concept of “wadi, source of life”, like the people of sub-Saharan Africa, who kept water reserves from one season to the next. We will be returning to nature conservation through lifegiving rivers. I call upon all communities, whether scientific, technological, civic, environmental or ecological, to talk to each other and to open up dialogues in order to determine these new concepts for multi-purpose water reserves.

This must not lead to confrontations, tensions or disputes, as has been the case in so many countries. We must ensure that productivity does not stand in the way of unity.

Once again, it is essential that we render these resources secure, that we conserve them and that we manage this water, entrusted to us both by nature and as a result of our technological and financial capabilities, in a more economical and more effective way. We need to cut down on the waste that we see everywhere - no country, no city is immune to this waste, which is often substantial.

This isn't just about tracking leaks. That's important, but we also have to reduce water consumption. This has already been observed in a number of countries, and it's time we changed behaviour. This isn't something that can be imposed, and it's not going to happen overnight, which is why working with young people is so important.

I also want to stress how important it is for us to make the most of the opportunities offered to us by the digital revolution, something that has been spreading across the world for a number of years and which is set to spread even further. The water sector must not let the possibilities of this revolution get away from them: monitoring, analysis, connected objects, etc., all of which could be used to help manage water. This needs to be done skilfully and professionally, but we also have to be cautious, whether in terms of using telemetry or receiving management or consumption data from a water service on our phones.

All of this will help ensure that water resources are better managed. As I announced in Rabat, the World Water Council, through its 400 organisations and 70 member states, will make available all of the solutions that we identify throughout the world, for all of the communities that wish to participate, in order to create a digital bank of solutions for water. I have entrusted this project to the Council's vice president, Mrs Asma El Kasmi, who is not yet familiar with all of the ins and outs of the project, but who will be in charge of running it. It's going to be a massive undertaking.

We will be focusing on the 3 pillars of the Maison de l'Eau: Understanding, Funding, Governance.

Understanding, because we need understanding that is shared, as opposed to being granted or begged for. We need funding that is tailored to suit each individual situation. We need to stop forcing people who need money to jump through hoops to get it, essentially telling them "that's just how it is, there's no other way". In reality, the opposite is what should be happening. Funding must be tailored to suit each individual situation.

Then there is governance, which is a vital issue. This must be accepted following dialogue. It can't be imposed.

All of which brings us back to a point that you're all familiar with and which is the very *raison d'être* of the World Water Council.

Water is political.

Water solutions are political. Technological solutions, engineers, which many of you here today are, you're familiar with them. You're even smart enough to tell us in advance what you will find in terms of solutions 15 years from now!

If only our political leaders were able to do the same. We all have to keep pushing if we want water to really be made a priority.

At the World Water Council, we are going to be working on a number of subjects:

Firstly, we want to get local authorities, parliaments and government forces on-board in order to “put taps before guns”, as I said a long time ago. Of course, sometimes a situation dictates that it is necessary to defend a country. But ensuring access to water is also about defending countries.

In any case, drinking water should have the same resources in place as for mobile phones.

What I mean by this is that we have to convince our political and economic leaders that access to water is an essential priority for development.

We also need to stop constantly pitting urban and rural against each other. There is no urban, no rural, towns and the countryside. We do not only have “smart cities”, we also have “smart rural areas”.

We are very happy to see that access to water in rural areas has been made a priority for the next Forum, and I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our colleagues from Senegal who are here with us and who will be responsible, alongside the World Water Council, for organising the Dakar Forum.

Water diplomacy is a subject that remains very close to my heart, and has been for a long time. In fact, we spoke about it for the first time not far from here. Water diplomacy helps to deal with cross-border tensions, but it also helps from a financial point of view when it comes to sourcing funding for the repayment of debts by developing countries. Water diplomacy brings us together.

We are extremely fortunate that the Council have decided to host the next Forum in Africa. Why Africa? This is because, as a continent, their needs are greatest when it comes to accessing water and sanitation.

It is our colleagues who, alongside us, will be jointly organising the next Forum, which I hope will be a different type of Forum. I hope it can be far more unifying than previous Forums have been, focusing on new subjects, including water security, of course, but also cooperation, access to water in rural environments and many more.

We need you to participate at this Forum, which is set to take place in Dakar two years from now. Two years is not a lot of time! Indeed, it is very little time to organise such an important forum. We are going to launch it on Senegalese soil on a date soon to be confirmed, and we hope to see many of you accept our cordial invitation.

I would like to thank you once again for your warm welcome, Fadi Comair, and thanks for listening.