OECD Water Days
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Speech by Loïc Fauchon
President of the World Water Council

Mr. Secretary General Angel Gurria, Mr. Minister Abdelkader Amara, dear Aziza Akhmouch,

Ladies and Gentlemen Mayors, Madam Mayor of Dakar,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would not like to go any further in my speech without paying tribute to you, dear Angel, on behalf of the great water family. As you pointed out, on your arrival at the head of the OECD, you were keen to make water one of your organization's priority issues. And dear Angel, I should say, you imposed water, among so many priorities.

You have always supported the World Water Council and you have participated in all our forums since 2006 in Mexico. You have presided over our work on water financing. And today, I would obviously like to join my predecessors in thanking and congratulating Mrs. Aziza Akhmouch for her work, as well as the whole team around you.

After receiving the Hassan II Great Water Prize - your modesty means that you didn't tell us, but let me disclose it - you have devoted the amount to various actions for access to water in Africa, and more particularly in African cities, and to other projects in favour of water. And so, dear Angel, for all your work, as we say in France, you deserve more than others the title of friend of water, and for this reason too, I would like to emphasize
that you will be the guest of honour at the next World Water Forum in Dakar in 2022.

Ladies and gentlemen, mayors, dear friends of water,

If I go back to the origin of things, I would say that if the community, the municipality, or its equivalent in each country, is the basis of territorial unity, the city is the foundation of the urban fact.

From immemorial times, the city has been the place of growth, reactivity and even change. And since the dawn of time, cities have made unceasing efforts to provide their populations with water, water for drinking, washing, food and health care. And to do this, they have carried out considerable work. They have bypassed insurmountable obstacles and travelled incalculable distances.

Many of these cities, the cradles of our civilizations on all continents, have left us works that tell of the struggle against thirst, the battles in search of water or protection against its wrath.

The African continent has not escaped this rule, it has not escaped the quest for water to survive and canals, aqueducts, reservoirs are there to testify to our eyes. From Morocco to Ethiopia, from Zanzibar to Ghana, there are many heritages that testify of the importance of water for the fate of cities.

No one can deny that African cities are being tormented by climate change, population growth and uncontrolled urbanization. They must agree to mobilize all their technical, human and financial resources to supply water to their inhabitants.

And many of them, it must be said with serenity, only manage to do so with difficulty and the presence of water is capricious, as much as its quality. Restriction often rhymes with pollution, the resource is sometimes scarce and, it must be said, water management is not always satisfactory.
And yet in Africa, there is will everywhere and the capacity is indisputable.

But knowledge, governance and finance need to be perfected. So what can be done to ensure that everyone can drink to their hearts' content, that agriculture can feed its people and that industry can respond to the rise in living standards? Let me put some ideas for dialogue and action on the table.

Firstly, to put intermunicipal cooperation at the service of water through water pacts, local water pacts between the so-called suppliers and those who are the consumers. It is a question of pooling capacities to allow progress. Working at local scales, within water community, within hydrographic basin or citizen communities, depending on the case, is essential, because in this matter, reasonable and accepted union is the strength of all.

Secondly, to be obliged to conserve water from one season to another, from one year to another, from one use to another. This is known as a reservoir, a tank, a dam, or an aquatic reserve. Storage capacities must correspond to the growing needs of growing cities. And these storages are indispensable to mankind and to the development of humanity. They must be carried out, and I insist on this point, in harmony with nature. Conserving water and protecting ecosystems are not contradictory, they are complementary, while producing the renewable energy that humanity so badly needs.

Thirdly, controlling the water cycle by treating its effluents is an absolute necessity. Sanitation is an essential part of the small water cycle, and cleaning up our cities, even if it is costly, means guaranteeing quality water for food and public health. I would say: water and sanitation, same battle!

Fourthly, and this is the purpose of our meeting today, to make governance as transparent as water, if I can use this image. It is an “ardent obligation”, as General De Gaulle would have said. It is a pressing obligation that is imposed on everyone.
On governments, international organizations, parliamentarians, basin authorities, mayors and local elected representatives.

Let us quote these obligations very quickly. The first one is clear: the responsibility of treatment, distribution and wastewater should be given to local authorities, municipalities or their inter-municipalities. And I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my friend, the Minister Mr. Abdelkader Amara, for the spectacular progress made by the Kingdom of Morocco, which under his leadership is deploying a national water plan that is a true model of water security. I will visit him tomorrow, as we will be together in Rabat.

The second is to create revenue for water by law. We say here in France that “water pays for water,” that is to say that the services operate with autonomous water and sanitation budgets in each community, even in the case where the price of water is subsidized by the State or the basin authority.

The third is to systematically create training institutes for senior technicians, because they are the one - and not only engineers - who make public water services work.

The fourth is to give ourselves the human, technical and financial means for maintenance, and I insist on this point. The maintenance of equipment and infrastructures is essential to extend their lifetime and thus reduce the debt burden on States and cities.

Finally, the fifth is to stop opposing cities and rural areas, as it is too often done in international forums or within countries. We need to talk as much about “Smart City” as about "Smart rural areas". Digital innovation in the field of water belongs to everyone, to all citizens. Ensuring essential services in the African countryside means reducing the rural exodus and the swelling of shanty towns and precarious housing.
I would like to pay special tribute to the mayor of Dakar, Mrs. Soham El Wardini, with whom the World Water Council is working hand in hand, as with the Senegalese government, to make Dakar 2022 a special momentum in the history of access to water.

As my friend Angel Gurria announced, there will be a forum of mayors, on the initiative of the OECD and UCLG, and we invite you all to be present in Dakar.

Good luck on the road to Dakar in March 2022.