

Central Asian Regional Preparatory Conference
for the 9th World Water Forum
19 October 2021

Opening ceremony

*Keynote speech by Loic Fauchon,
President of the World Water Council*

Your excellencies, Ministers and Ambassadors,
Dear Chairman, Mr. Sulton Rahimdoza

Dear friends of Water,

Let me first of all regret to be away from beautiful Dushanbe, where I was so well received during my last travels.

On my personal behalf and on behalf of the World Water Council let me express admiration and respect for the dedication of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea and the work of its Executive Committee in order to unite five countries around the noble cause of ecological improvement of the Aral Sea basin.

The World Water Council is much involved in enhancing water security at all levels, including regional levels and basin levels, and I have been promoting hydro-diplomacy and dialogue on trans-boundaries water issues for many years.

Let me congratulate you Mr. Chairman, for the organization of this Central Asian Regional Preparatory Conference for the 9th World Water Forum.

This Conference, which has been particularly well prepared by the organizing committee, the advisory committee and the members of your working groups. This conference will be of the utmost importance to identify and discuss the main directions of regional processes and key topics that will be presented for dialogue during the 9th Forum. It will also underline the most important issues for the Central Asian Region and bring to the rest of the world the various experiences, good practice and solutions that you have successfully developed.

This conference is the best way to strengthen cooperation and partnerships at all level to promote, again and again, a better access to water for all.

Why do we have to make so many efforts to better implement the right to water for all ?

Because the Earth is thirsty. And when the earth is thirsty, Man is hungry. Our countries are not only thirsty of water and hungry of food. We are craving for development and progress.

While global population is increasing, so are its living standards, calling for additional amounts of water every day. Water surrounds us, brings us together and stimulates us. But when water is scarce, not only its absence generates tensions and crisis between communities and countries. But it also threatens the environment, and global ecosystems.

The world is in danger because water is in danger, therefore everyone is in danger. But the problem is that in all the burning issues which the world is facing, water, in all its aspects, is still struggling to become one of the most urgent political priorities.

Water is important because with water comes life, food, education and peace.

Water is now an essential element of geostrategy and, as such, a component of geopolitics. This is the reason why water should be a political priority.

In addition, there is a new emerging obligation to share water between Man and Nature. Man's impact on Nature is too strong. We must respond to the requirements of human development and at the same time to the respect of nature, by maintaining biodiversity and protecting ecosystems.

The excessive urbanization reduces the quantity of non-renewable resources, but also generates pollution and waste that modify, alter or destroy the functionality of ecosystems, both on a local and global scale.

These threats are showing that demographic growth and climate evolution are intimately linked, the former automatically leading to a degradation of the latter. This is why it is urgent for nature conservancy that we learn to consume less and to consume better.

It is our mission, as citizens of the world, to guarantee water security, for us all and by us all, at every level possible. To ensure this mission, the World Water Council works on three pillars:

- Knowledge, which is to be shared and not begged

- Financing, which is to be adapted and not granted
- and Governance, which is to be accepted and not forced upon citizens

The first pillar, knowledge, could be defined as enhancing research to find new ways of managing water that are both economical and ecological. The more we innovate in research, the more we can bring renewable resources and nature-based solutions for water management, thus benefiting water security. For example, due to research progress, desalination of sea water using reverse osmosis is implemented in more than 70 countries around the world at an acceptable cost.

The reuse of wastewater is also a significant step forward that will gradually gain attraction.

Secondly, the development possibilities brought by knowledge are enabled by the second pillar, which is finance. The situation can be summed up as "water is short of money, but money is short of water".

One of the fundamental issues is the generalization of sub-sovereignty which allows, for example, a city in a poor country to borrow without a state guarantee while demonstrating its ability to repay. Another issue is that some of the poorest countries and communities lack the capacity to construct programs that meet funders' bureaucratic criteria.

All in all, that means that the era of water centralism is over and that we must ensure fair distribution and complete openness. That is why the third and last pillar is governance. Water governance must be efficiently shared by the State, which ensures the resource's availability and regulates its proper use, with the assistance of the private sector. Then there is also the role of river basins authorities, which coordinate resource distribution and use, while ensuring quality through public policy. Basin management has helped countries like Mexico, Senegal, Brazil, and many others improve their water security. Finally, there is the level of local governments and residents who are responsible for treatment, distribution, and cost collection.

Therefore, if the citizen, who is also a consumer, gets involved in this 3-level governance, the pillars are proving their efficiency.

There is one more point on which I insist, and it is a sensitive one: water reserves or water storage systems. Today, there are locations on every continent and in nearly every country where humans and nature lack water at some point. Today, as previously stated, scarcity is a problem not only in Africa, but also in the United States, India, Australia, and even France.

That is why it is more than urgent to re-think the concept of dams and reservoirs. We must enter a new era of freshwater management based on the concept of aquatic biodiversity, the only sustainable way to protect biodiversity.

Aquatic water reservoirs will not only protect the ecosystem, but also benefit mankind by helping it to cope with thirst. As this concept, due to its novelty, is still criticized, the World Water Forum in Dakar will be the perfect scenery to discuss and expose concrete solutions.

I would also like to underline the importance of rural areas. For years, we've only talked about "smart cities" when it comes to innovation, but never about "smart rural areas." Who, however, guarantees water protection? Who is responsible for water production? Who is responsible for the preservation of forests and rural areas? People from rural areas, not city inhabitants. Where does the food come from? The farmers, not the city dwellers.

To fulfill these commitments, we must all work with a horizontal and fundamental approach. Local authorities understand things better than the central government. Therefore, mayors, local communities and local groups must be given more responsibilities. Indeed, if there is no electricity, no water, no medical facility, it is impossible to build a school in the poorest countries. This horizontal and basic approach is required. In the future years, it will most likely become mainstream in the field of 'water-thinking.'

Allow me to conclude by mentioning the right to water. It is a complicated right that is simple to declare but difficult to enforce in practice. For more than two decades, we have demanded that every human being have access to sufficient, high-quality water at a cost that is affordable to the poorest.

Some of the numerous possible solutions include the inclusion of the right to water in constitutions, the availability of free minimum allowances, or social tariffs. The solutions are political, and we must insist that they be provided.

"Water is politics," and the only way to stop water misery is for everyone to commit. This is the World Water Council's mission, but it is also ours as individuals. Dear friends of water, if you should remember only one thing from this presentation it could be:

Water is a political issue to which every citizen has the duty to contribute.

Thank you for your attention

