

Recorded speech by Loïc Fauchon, President of the World Water Council
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Excellencies,
Vice-Minister Chen Min of the Chinese Ministry of Water Resources, Friends of Water,

I remember that there is a saying among farmers and fishers of the Mekong Delta:
“Water keeps the rice green, and the crocodile awake.”
In twelve short words, they capture the twin nature of water—provider and predator.

Whether we stand on the banks of the Seine in Paris or the Chaobai in Beijing, we draw calm from the river’s mirror even as we watch the forecast for the next flood alarm.

Climate turbulence, demographic pressure, and ecosystem collapse form a single, planetary storm. Yet, in this storm, we still have a compass: Dialogue and Cooperation—two words that have bound China and the World Water Council for fifteen years.

Last year, Chinese President Xi Jinping’s book ‘Water Governance in China’ proposed four pillars:

Prioritize conservation, Balance spatial distribution, Adopt systematic approaches, and Promote government-market synergy.

My summary is simple. **Conserve first, Distribute fairly, Think in systems, Finance together.**

Any river that forgets its own flow becomes a canal, and any society that forgets its river becomes a desert. With that compass in mind, let us see what it means to restore a river’s memory.

In this regard, we need to prioritize water conservation – save every drop before you seek a new source.

Balance spatial distribution. Channel water from surplus to scarcity, from one basin to another, just as the South-to-North Transfer now refreshes the Yellow River basin.

Take systematic approaches. Manage the whole cycle including mountains, rivers, forests, farmland, lakes, wetlands and aquifers as one living body.

We should not forget to promote government market synergy by blending public leadership with private innovation, finance and entrepreneurship in this water management considering both humans and nature.

These principles echo the World Water Council's own three pillars of knowledge, good governance and adapted finance. They remind us that water is politics—but good politics is also good hydrology.

We cannot protect what we have not first secured. To preserve, we must reserve. Reservoirs, aquifer recharge, storm-water capture and smart dams are the insurance policies of biodiversity and civilization alike.

Yet every cubic meter stored must return to nature in a healthier condition. That is why modern reservoirs must include fish passages, environmental flow releases, nature-based embankments, floating wetlands and other Nature-based solutions. When we reserve and preserve, we turn hydraulic infrastructure into ecological infrastructure.

Allow me, therefore, to propose a simple watchword for our deliberations. Reserve and preserve: Store wisely, restore bravely.

To do this, we also do not need to forget the following elements :

Protect headwaters, reconnect floodplains and give rivers space to meander.

We should also go aligned with Water for Food. By 2050, agriculture must feed two billion more people with less land and more erratic rainfall. Precision irrigation, drought-tolerant crops, treated wastewater reuse and blue-green corridors can break the false choice between rice and river bank life.

In a world of “too much, too little, too dirty water”, droughts and floods are two faces of the same battle. Early-warning digital systems, pumped-storage hydropower and basin-scale solidarity funds are some of the solutions to keep societies functioning when extremes strike.

Across all three fronts, biodiversity is not a luxury. It is the engineer of resilience. Water ignores borders but respects cooperation. From the Amazon to the Lancang-Mekong, hydro-diplomacy can transform potential conflict into corridors of prosperity. The forthcoming 11th World Water Forum in Riyadh can be the place for creating a special track to “Water Reserves for Peace and Nature,” which was born from the Chengdu Declaration last month. I invite every institution here to bring your stories and commitments on water security for our future.

Excellencies, friends,

From the Grand Canal that linked five rivers in ancient China, to the Delta Works taming the North Sea with nature in mind, and the Marina Barrage in Singapore harvesting rain from the sky, humanity has proven it can write hope in the language of water. Let us write the next chapter together—Reserve & Preserve, Dialogue & Cooperation—so that water may forever keep the rice green and the crocodile at peace.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to meeting you again on the road to Riyadh—where ideas become action, and action becomes security for all.