

Loïc Fauchon

Opening speech

The C20 Virtual Summit / “In Dire Straits – the Need for Collective Action for Water Security”

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Dear colleagues,

Dear friends of water,

I would like to thank the C20 Presidency for inviting us to participate in this virtual Summit. It is great honor for the World Water Council that I am chairing, and its 400 member organizations to join you for this occasion.

Securing water is at the heart of our thinking, at the heart of our daily action - to provide water to everyone, everywhere and at any time. Water security insures life and harmonious development for human beings as well as for nature.

For us, the international community of water that I like to call “the great family of water” - water security lays on 3 pillars. And these pillars are Governance, Finance, and Knowledge.

Governance first, and foremost is a strong but mysterious word. A word that touches upon political and economic power.

Nowadays when it comes to water, but as well as all essential needs, we want to promote a new approach to governance: Concerting, Deciding, Sharing.

To Concert, to discuss because defining a water policy can no longer be the prerogative of a few at the top of a State or an international organization. Local communities know the best the local water history, the needs, and realities on the ground.

To Decide, by setting up competences and responsibilities at each level particularly concerning hydrographic basins and municipalities and cities.

Decisions taken at appropriate level, make a real impact on the daily life of populations.

To Share, water for all and not just for a few, sharing rather than looting.

Sharing means pooling together local resources such as boreholes, seasonal and other reservoirs. It also means preventing pollution of some from poisoning the lives of others.

But good governance, alone, is not enough. It must have the means at its disposal. First, financial means.

Water lacks money, for sure. Why is it so? Because guns often come before taps, military budgets come before civilians and cell phones before fresh water.

There is no doubt that financing determines demand and therefore the volume and the type of projects retained. The investor is the one to determine the type of operation he intends to finance - the specificities of the target country, or region, are not always considered.

The principle of sub-sovereignty, which is not widely applied, should not be omitted. It allows a city or a region to borrow without state guarantees.

In this respect, The World Water Council strongly encourages the increase of blended finance both in terms of volume and quality. The Council also recommends considering local authorities' and communities' expertise because they are often too poor and vulnerable when facing financial and bank institutions.

Beyond financial resources, the third pillar is the one of innovation and knowledge sharing.

Innovating is not exclusively owned by rich and technologically advanced countries.

Reused water has been practiced for more than 30 years in Tunisia and Morocco. The South outpaced the North.

It also concerns water treatment plants adapted to arid regions, which were installed in the Middle East or in the Mediterranean thanks to local engineers' knowledge.

Water security clearly needs to make people understand and accept the idea that additional resources are needed to cope with population growth and climate evolution.

To increase water supply, and simultaneously to regulate demand, through change in human behavior - for better management and water savings.

In one word, produce more and consume less.

Only when these principles will be applied across the planet, we will have the opportunity to achieve water security for all human uses but also to preserve ecosystems and enhance biodiversity

Water for people and Water for nature, this is the necessary mix to guarantee the future for our planet.

These are the first comments with which I would like to contribute with to this debate.

Thank you.

Loïc Fauchon

How can resilience to climate disasters such as floods and droughts be improved and sustained?

Water-related disasters have always been there. They have existed over centuries when climate evolution had not been at the centre of public debates yet.

We observe that water-related disasters are good customers for the media.

Cyclones, hurricanes, tsunamis, landslides, and floods fascinate with terrifying images from disaster movies.

There are mainly two kinds of water-related disasters, those caused by excess water, usually referred to as floods.

And then there are those less known, less mediatized, which are the consequence of the absence of water. These are the droughts that affect man and the natural environment on the scale of a region or a continent.

This is how we speak of the "Thirst Triangle" from the south of Spain to Pakistan and back through the Horn of Africa.

Today a billion inhabitants are subjected to climate variations.

More recently, a third type of water-related disaster has been added: the pollution of rivers, lakes, groundwater, and the sea.

Chemical pollution of industrial or agricultural origin, pollution by plastics or pharmaceuticals. And still others such as possible radioactive pollution.

Floods, droughts, pollution are as harmful to man as they are to nature.

The climate is not responsible for everything, man is never far away. And the climate should not be the scapegoat for human errors.

Demography, the urban concentration on the banks of oceans and rivers, is also the major cause of the damage caused by these disasters.

Sprawling housing, anarchic construction without respect for urban planning.

Drought, the growth of cities in desert regions, far from water resources, but also poor management and waste are also causing water shortages.

How can we protect ourselves from this, how can we mitigate the effects of these disasters?

We must reduce the number of deaths and injuries, avoid exodus for millions of refugees from climate and poverty.

Through huge national and local prevention policies. Warning systems must become mandatory.

The presence of human activity in high-risk zones must be strictly regulated, emergency plans must be generalized everywhere and regularly updated.

Prevention must become an integral component of development and resilience to the effects of disasters.

It is a political issue, but also a societal one.

Prevention and resilience must take place in school curricula, as seen for example in Japan or in certain regions of Indonesia.

A high-level panel for water related disasters was initiated by Mr. Ban Ki Moon.

It is now chaired by Dr Han Seung Soo, former Prime Minister of Korea.

Its mission must be amplified, and its means strengthened in order to continue to implement an international policy of disaster prevention but also post-disaster assessments and repairs.

Similarly, the competence of UN-Water could be redefined to better coordinate the efforts of States in this field.

Thank you.

Loïc Fauchon

Conclusion

Dear friends,

World Water security requires, first, a political response.

Because Water is Politics, and all citizens must join the political debate.

Giving priority to water means: first, that States decide to increase water resources and ensure the best and most balanced water distribution between water for men and water for nature.

It also means becoming totally aware that water security requires passing laws and regulations along with budgets translating this priority into action. The role of all parliaments wherever in the world is crucial.

It also means the right to water – an easy question to put forward but so difficult to achieve.

No doubts, the United Nations and the international community must insist that each State must enshrine the Right to water in its Constitution.

But in slums or the most remote areas the minimum allocations of fresh water remain difficult – this is the exact moment when water security and the Right to water merge together – it is about respect, dignity for each person, family, and community.

Through these goals lay the objectives for collective action bringing together – innovation and knowledge sharing, blended finances, and honest governance.

All governments and Parliaments, basins and municipalities, media, and citizens must go with this. We must speak about water everywhere, daily and at every platform.

This is also the purpose of the World Water Forums that we have been organizing since 1997 by bringing together people from all over the world to speak loudly to give priority to water.

Next Forum will be held in Dakar. The collective action that we are all striving for needs contribution from everyone to address peoples' expectations through concrete responses.

You are all, with no exception, welcome to contribute to shape the future of our planet.

Thank you.