

7th World Water Forum
2nd Preparatory Committee Meeting

Room XII, UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France

Welcoming remarks



Benedito Braga

World Water Council President

Your Excellency Ambassador Yun

Dear Co-Chair of the Political Process,

My dear Co-chair of the ISC, Prof. Soontak Lee,

Distinguished members of the foreign delegations,

Members of the 7th Forum preparatory process,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply honored to be with you today to witness the opening of the Second Preparatory Committee of the Political Process for the 7th World Water Forum.

It is a privilege to be once again at the headquarters of UNESCO. I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Mrs. Irina Bokova for welcoming us here today. UNESCO has been, and remains, a long standing supporter of the World Water Council and World Water Forums.

Today, over 200 participants are gathered here, including 50 delegations representing governments from Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa, the Americas, and Arab regions. I thank you all for your participation.

Our purpose today is to engage in dialogue. I look forward to a rich and inspiring dialogue between representatives of national governments, local and regional authorities, parliamentarians,

and major groups including international organizations, civil society, the scientific community and water users. Our goal is the construction of a clear, concrete and concise message for the Ministerial declaration to be adopted during the 7th World Water Forum in Korea.

Before this important dialogue begins I would like to take a few minutes on the water challenges faced by governments from all over the world. Water challenges that are no longer limited to low income countries – they now represent the number one risk in terms of impact on our global society.

These challenges - these global challenges - jeopardise our wellbeing and demand action to secure our water resources to sustain our society, economy, and our environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Climate variability and change stands as one of our water challenges. After much effort on the part of the water community it is pleasing to see more and more decision-makers who appreciate that, by and large, all the impacts of climate variability are manifested through, by and with water. I believe that this is one of the main reasons why the concept of water security continues to grow and develop.

At the same time I would suggest that the climate debate must move beyond mitigation, through adaptation, towards resilience. This is an important question for water, and one that I think deserves more attention.

Given the increasing gap between supply and demand it is clear to me that water infrastructure is central to delivering water security. We will need more storage capacity, more efficient water resources use and management, strengthened governance, and better information. There are many technical solutions available today, and innovations emerging every day. But, are these solutions resilient in face of climatic uncertainties?

Water storage infrastructure must be viewed through the water supply, energy, transport, food, flood, and drought lens. It must take into account the upstream and the downstream social, economic and environmental impacts. As with any intervention in the natural environment there are choices to be made, each with impacts that are both positive and negative, there are costs and benefits. I firmly believe that the positive impacts of water resources infrastructure and management outweigh the costs.

A key challenge in delivering water security through resilient multi-purpose water infrastructure and management regimes is investment. At a global scale we are simply not investing enough to bridge the gap between demand and supply. More needs to be done.

It is for this reason that the World Water Council and the OECD established a High Level Panel on Financing Infrastructure for a Water Secure World. The work of this panel is almost complete, and the final report will be launched at the 7th Forum in Korea. I expect that this work will be of significant interest to political leaders, financiers, the development community, as well as the water community.

The second key challenge that I see is that of achieving true shared responsibility for our precious water resources. In my experience, most discussions around water start, and often end, with a heated debate of who is responsible.

However, have we ever stopped to consider the consequences of identifying responsibility in this way? On the positive side we can identify who should take action. However, a more serious implication, in my view, is that it allows everyone else to abdicate their responsibility – if you are responsible, then I am

not. This is wrong. We are all responsible, and we urgently need to address ways of realizing this shared responsibility.

Engaging decision-makers at national, regional and basin levels, water users, technical practitioners and experts, the business community, members of the academia and NGO representatives is essential to build shared responsibility for effective water management. Yet, we need to build shared responsibility across sectors as well. Experience shows us we cannot achieve sustainable water resources management without engaging actors across sectors, from the energy sector, food production, or sanitation services. It is for this reason that the World Water Council, over many years, has built up enduring relationships with organizations in many different sectors.

Ladies and Gentleman,

I would urge you to consider these four issues: resilience, multi-purpose, investment, and shared responsibility as you engage in dialogue. Consider how these issues interact and connect with the four key pillars of the Forum:

- Water Security for All.
- Water for Development and Prosperity.

- Water for Sustainability: Harmonizing Humans and Nature.
- Constructing Feasible Implementation Mechanisms.

The Ministerial message should build upon the commitments agreed during the past World Water Forums and should aim at moving from solutions to implementation.

It must be based on the excellent outputs from the thematic, regional and science and technology preparatory committees.

It is with this in mind that the 7th Forum propose to establish Implementation Roadmaps and an Action Monitoring System as key outputs. We expect that these roadmaps will not only guide our collective actions, but will also help us hold each other more accountable for the commitments expressed in the Ministerial Declaration.

Through the Action Monitoring System we are also reaching out to create a concrete link between successive Forums. As a veteran of many Forum events I truly believe that they are not a single event but a process, which mobilizes the political class towards better water resources planning, development and management.

2015 is a vitally important year for our water community. In April we will gather in Korea at the 7th World Water Forum, in September the United Nations General Assembly will adopt Sustainable Development Goals, and we will end the year debating a global climate agreement in Paris at CoP21.

Our added value here must lie in our capacity to address all parties and to bring together both the supply side and the demand side to find resilient solutions that will promote economic, social and environmental benefits. This ministerial message needs to be the driver of change and must contribute to implement adapted policies for water problems at the local, regional, national and global level. I firmly believe that reaching these heights will ensure that the voice of water is heard loudly and strongly.

I look forward to the dialogue and I wish you all a very fruitful meeting.

Thank you.