2020 Annual Conference of the International Association for Hydro-Environment Engineering and Research and the Chinese Hydraulic Engineering Society
18 October 2020

SPEECH

Speech of Mr. Loïc Fauchon
President of the World Water Council

Mr. Secretary General, Mr. Tang,

Dear Mrs. QUIUCHI SHI, Governor and Member of the Bureau of the World Water Council

Dear friends of water,

I am very pleased and honored to participate in the opening of this annual conference of your prestigious association which brings together numerous participants, political and administrative authorities of your great and beautiful country as well as local governments, universities, research organizations and companies working in the field of water.

I would be even happier if I could be with you in Zhengzhou, on the banks of the Yellow River, to shake your hands and share friendly conversations.

The World Water Council has had a deep relationship of trust and friendship with China for many years.

Since 2009, our Council has been working with Chinese members to strengthen our voice in the global water community. Today, we proudly have 33 member organizations from China, representing all sectors of expertise.

Over the years we have been able to work on the most critical issues facing the water world, from disasters to the role of hydropower.

But, over the years, the issue of water security has only grown in importance in our discourse.

Water security has become one of the main subjects that have shaped water policy for the harmonious development of our societies.

To illustrate my remarks, I would like to highlight the high-quality editorial work carried out jointly.

This work has enabled us to present international case studies presenting the multiple aspects of water security and its implementation.

Dear friends of water,

1. Water security remains more than ever the challenge of the 21st century.

Water security is the key word.

It is not just one SDG among 17 others, which is an abstract concept, an objective to be achieved.

We all know that water security is a daily imperative, a constant reality, a need for all, and a right for all.

The mission of the World Water Council is to put water at the top of the political agenda so that water security is a reality for everyone, everywhere and for everyone.

Together with you, dear Chinese friends, and with the other members of the working groups preparing the next World Water Forum in Dakar, we are working on a better definition of water security, on the detection of good practices and on recommendations to advance humanity.

Because that is what is at stake in what we call "Water Security",

This means "producing" more water and, at the same time, "consuming" less.

Because despite our constant efforts, the demand for water is growing faster than the supply.

In concrete terms, this means that the professionals that you and we are committed to consist in:

- having more resources: pumping deeper when necessary, transferring over long distances, improving treatment, but also desalinating seawater or reusing wastewater,

- But at the same time, it is essential to control water use and save water: manage our resources correctly, use modern leak detection techniques, put an end to the enormous waste in agriculture in particular, and,

It is a question of moving towards sharing resources while avoiding waste and educating the younger generation on the importance of saving resources.

On the one hand, we need to rely on technology, especially digital technology, to implement all the solutions we are familiar with: continuing to develop pumping, transfer, storage, distribution, desalination, and reuse of wastewater.

And on the other hand, know how to reduce collective and individual waste through a change in policy approach, and use our knowledge and expertise to better balance the different uses and thus change our behaviors.

2. But if we must secure water for humans, we must, at the same time, secure water for nature.

Water availability is primarily linked to population growth, but also growing urbanization and the rise in living standards, both of which lead to significant increases in water consumption.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, a new imperative has been added. Humans have gradually understood that they must conserve part of their water for Nature, to enhance biodiversity and protect wildlife and ecosystems.

Securing water resources on the scale of a continent and the planet, for today but also for tomorrow, is an essential challenge.

Bringing sustainability and equity, requires the wisdom of not using all our resources immediately and to preserve the balances and ecosystems that have an incredible capacity to adapt and that will allow future generations to find their own solutions, to provide their own answers.

Man cannot live without nature.

Leaving our children, a planet without enough water in sufficient quantity and quality is to condemn them to death. What is our responsibility?

Let us put all our knowledge to work, let us share our knowledge at an international scale, provide economic, sustainable answers, as well as solutions based on nature.

This leads me to wonder about the relationship between cities and the rural world.

Alongside water security, this theme is a major challenge for the future of the planet. Water is interlinked to agriculture and food.

Without rural areas, how could we feed the metropolises that are growing denser and carrying the burden of growing demographics?

We cannot have "SMART cities" opposed to rural areas. We need them to complementarity, and we must give ourselves the means to promote a harmonious and equitable development for rural areas, by taking into account their economic, social and ecological roles to share the resource.

Engineers and technicians, who excel in the creation of mega-projects that amaze us, must think of " SMART countryside". This demands finding solutions to provide sufficient water resources, to build small and interconnected reservoirs, to recycle resources, to develop water-saving techniques for agriculture, to study projects to provide rural communities with water, sanitation, energy, health and education, for the populations we need most for the future of the planet to thrive.

Besides the huge dams and kilometers of pipes that are needed to supply water to cities, we need to make room for greater local innovation, with customized solutions, duplicated hundreds of times to the need of local populations. Digital solutions also have their place in rural development.

To conclude these few thoughts that I wanted to share with you, my Chinese friends, I would like to point out that in recent months, water and sanitation have received increased attention on the international political agenda.

The greatest protective measure to protect oneself against epidemics and in particular COVID 19 is to wash your hands.

And the international community, which had somewhat forgotten this, realized the urgency of accelerating access to water for all. Not only for humanitarian reasons, but also for health and economic reasons.

The World Water Council welcomes this.

The World Water Council, notably through the organization of previous World Water Forums, has made a major contribution to making water a global political priority. It is now time to translate our words into concrete responses.

This is the challenge that Senegal and the World Water Council will take up by organizing the 9th World Water Forum in 2021.

It will take place for the first time in sub-Saharan Africa, but it is addressed to all countries, to the entire international community, because our futures are linked and we are aiming to a planet where water issues are paramount.

The purpose of the World Water Forum is to bring together the main political actors, professionals, NGOs, funders, and international organizations, sharing experiences and know-how, to further contribute and facilitate access to water and sanitation.

We are waiting for many of you, Chinese friends, to share your thoughts, knowledge, and know-how with the international community.