Korea International Water Week

Opening Ceremony

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DIGITAL WATER FOR HUMANS AND NATURE

Keynote Speech

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellencies,
Dear Minister of Environment of Korea,
Dear Mayor of Daegu,
Dear Ministers and ambassadors,
Dear President of the Korea Water Forum, Dear Lee Jung-Moo,
Dear Friends of water,

This is a great pleasure for me being here as I believe that many of us keep very fond memories of the 7th World Water Forum held four years ago in this same venue.

By working so closely with our Korean friends over the past years, I have seen much that encourages me to say that Korea and the World Water Council remain close partners, sharing the same objectives for water, for both humans and nature.

We all want to provide a better access to water to the poorest.

In 2015, the 7th World Water Forum was a clear example of the Korean leadership addressing global water issues with all stakeholders and political leaders.
In the past decades, Korea has achieved great success in protecting its water resources. The “Miracle of the Han River” and “The Four Major Rivers Restoration Project” are excellent examples of this success.

That shows that Korea has acquired incredible knowledge and skills that must be shared.

Today, the Korea International Water Week is well placed to become a long-term development platform for Asian countries by establishing Korea as a key-player providing scientific and technical solutions in the region.

I would also like to congratulate the organizers for their professionalism and kind hospitality.

I wish to extend greetings to my friend, President Lee Jung Moo. Please allow me to assure you of my full esteem.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Since the beginning of this century, the world is going from crisis to crisis. They are political, commercial, diplomatic, military. But also migratory, energetic, sanitary, or food related.

And of course, hydric crisis, due sometimes to over-abundant water. Or sometimes due to the lack of water with repeated droughts.

Our behaviour, our mistakes, our selfishness are the main causes of these crises.
Urbanization is ever-growing and creates cities where poverty is spreading.

And the climate is malfunctioning year after year.

It is mainly because, we, humans, and specially the decision-makers, have become blind when making political, economic and financial decisions with the objective of greater production but little sharing.

We left our natural resources unprotected.

And water is one of those natural resources which is now scarce in quantity and in quality.

Our collective and individual responsibility is to secure water availability.

If we do not guarantee water security, we condemn entire populations to stay out of development and basic human rights.

These are the reasons why we must concentrate our will and our efforts to provide water security,
Everywhere, for us all, by us all.

Provide water security means, first, securing availability and protection of water resources.

Provide water security everywhere means establishing a balance between water for today and water for tomorrow.

To attain such goals, all our efforts should focus on two essential aspects. First, produce more resources, and then consume less.

To reverse this trend, to improve access to water, we must increase our capacity in making water and sanitation benefit from the digital revolution which is happening now.

Digital technologies can be integrated at any step of the water cycle to improve water's value chain.

Digital technologies range from:

- Sensors to detect pressure, losses on the whole network;

- Monitoring to control, optimize, and anticipate operations;
- Forecasting to predict weather events;
- Data processing to understand the demand, adapt the offer, and optimize billings and tariffs;
- Process improvement for greater cost and energy efficiency;
- Virtual and augmented reality to design new plants and networks.

All kinds of mobile tools using mobile phones or private computers are playing step by step a major role.

Day after day these tools are establishing greater links between those who deliver a public service and those who consume it.

Let us make the best out of wireless networks, data analysis, Internet of Things, clouds, blockhain solutions, for water, but also for sanitation, waste, air, and energy.

The digital revolution is making the citizen feel closer from the decision making process and is reinforcing the feeling of a more local and participative democracy.

But don’t be fooled dear colleagues, all technological progress has its limits and burdens.

Let’s never forget to always put the human being in the loop. Man is not meant to serve technology.

It is technological progress, today being digital, which serves humankind.

But, the Internet of Things, cloud technology, blockchain, cryptocurrencies, cannot allow users to step away from public authorities and create what I call “Uncontrolled and Autonomous Authorities.”

Besides, I must also mention the great threat posed by cyber security.

Not a day, not an hour without, a public or private service, civil, or military, national or local authority, being breached by hackers.

The water and environmental sector are not left apart from these threats.

Water treatment plants, factories, water services are going to be stopped or damaged as much as financial services or human resources.

We, here, ministers, mayors, company presidents, experts, are all aware that the digital machine can get carried away and lose control of water management.

And I would like to express to you all our consideration and our congratulations for this awareness that is revealed by the choice of the theme for the next three years: Water Management for Humans and Nature.

It is the affirmation of a new paradigm: to give priority to this new balance between water for Humankind and water for Nature.

Humankind and Nature are both travelling on the same boat named “The Future.”

This brings me to two recommendations I would like to propose very modestly for your consideration before concluding.

The first concerns the relationship between urban and rural. The trend, the action, the money, today, are all going towards Smart Cities.

We wish to imagine cities like heaven, while a vast majority of them are actually hell on Earth.

Mega-cities that are developing very quickly are too often receptacles of poverty and of ignorance, while we should be able to speak of water access and progress for sanitation.

But, dear friends, who bears the weight of nature conservation, of protecting the resource and of agricultural production?

It is in rural territories that we ensure water, sanitation, food, energy and health security.

Without protecting and cultivating lands, without farmers and foresters, how will cities live? How long will they survive?

We advocate for Smart rural areas and for rural vitality, as opposed to what the urban world dictates.

The second recommendation concerns water conservation. Our planet is cruelly lacking water reserves. It lacks water from one season to the next, from one year to the next, from one region to another.

This water scarcity creates droughts and famines and contributes to many crises, like those we see in the USA, in France, in South Africa, in India and in so many other regions of the world.

We have an immense need for new water reserves. The concept of dams must evolve. It's no longer a question of blocking the passage of water but of explaining that water must be valued, maintained, restored.
These areas of consideration, or what we shall call water and biodiversity reservoirs, would be simultaneously places of human progress, harmony of life, and protection of fauna and flora.

We must work all together towards this new concept of reservoirs that are indispensable to the balance between humankind and nature that you formulate in your wishes and in your three-year program.

Dear Friends of Water,

We may think, you may think, that we have the technical, economic and social solutions to feed the world that is to come.
But we are nothing without the political will, without the commitment of international institutions, states and local authorities.

Again and again, water is politics, and we must raise awareness around the world among the political powers.

We must demand that political leaders give continuously give real priority to the five fingers: water, electricity, food, health, education, which comprise the 5-finger alliance.

This is the duty of the political powers to support our action, to restore dignity and ensure the rights of billions of children, women and men, and to promise them a better future.

Congratulations for the great job done here in Korea and especially by the organizers jkof this Water Week.

Be assured, Dear Friends, of the World Water Council's commitment and support to achieve this.

Thank you (Kamza Hamnida)