



6th Arab Water Forum

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

16/09/2024

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Mr. President of the Arab Water Council,

Dear Mahmoud Abou Zeid, Dear friend,

Excellencies, Ministers and Ambassadors,

Dear colleagues and friends,

It is a great honor to take part once again in the Arab Water Forum. And it is a pleasure to meet you again here in Abu Dhabi.

Dear President Abou Zeid,

Our two councils, the Arab Water Council and the World Water Council, have been closely linked from the very beginning.

You have been the first president of the World Water Council.

And also, the Arab countries are very present as members and Governors of the World Water Council. So we thank you very much for that.

Dear colleagues,

This past spring and summer have reminded us of cruel realities: tensions, crises, conflicts and even wars. But also, climate disruptions, and disasters with catastrophic consequences for both humans and nature.



Here in this part of the world, after long droughts, we have had to deal with torrential rains and devastating floods on several occasions. And all this is exacerbated by urban anarchy, rural exodus, coastal concentrations, out-of-control tourism and catastrophic pollution of rivers and oceans.

We live in a world where so many long-standing balances are being called into question. A world that is experiencing multiple crises, while at the same time progressing through economic growth and social progress.

Yes, dear colleagues, navigating this century means traveling between war and peace, inflation and deflation, poverty and prosperity.

After all, humans themselves generate both good and harm. And natural elements and natural resources are the best examples of this.

All over the world today, air, fresh water, soil, rivers and oceans are heavily polluted and constitute a leading cause of death.

And in this modern world, where innovation is king, it is a paradox that a large proportion of its inhabitants have difficulty eating, drinking, caring for themselves and breathing.

Water, dear friends, water is at the heart of everything; it stimulates us and, more often than not, brings us together. But “water is under attack”, and our responsibility is to defend it, to protect it, to conserve it and to make better use of it.

And at this point, on behalf of the World Water Council and myself, I would like to share with you a few convictions that I believe should guide the actions of the water family in the coming years.

The first has to do with climate change and what I would rather call climate divagations.

Not so long ago, we tended to think of the world as divided into arid zones and humid zones. And it took us so many years in the water community to get people to admit that drought, too, was a form of water-related disaster.

Meteorological events in recent months, particularly in this region of the Middle East, have seen an alternation between high temperatures, without rain for almost a year, and storms and torrential rains that have devastated rural areas and flooded the very centers of major cities



such as Muscat, Dubai and Jeddah. The same phenomena were observed in Morocco, Niger and Somalia.

One conclusion is clear: droughts and floods represent now the same battle to secure water resources in terms of quality and quantity.

My second conviction, beyond climate, concerns the link between water and demography. World population growth will remain strong until the end of the century.

Regardless of sobriety policies for the use of water and digital innovations to reduce wastage, one thing is certain: additional masses of water will be necessary and even indispensable to the survival of humanity.

An overly restrictive and unrealistic dominant way of thinking does not seem to accept that the world is developing, that living standards are improving.

Demographers today rely on a science which is more accurate than climate science.

Let's take the example of Abu Dhabi. Between today and 2030, demographers foresee an increase of 300 000 inhabitants. It represents 10 to 15 million cubic meters per year at the minimum. For Dubai, not far from here, it will probably be 40 million cubic meters per year that will need to be found. Can you imagine the colossal amount of water that is needed every year for Africa and for the whole planet? Little by little, it is around 60 billion cubic meters that will be needed every year.

We have to take these figures as scales of magnitude, but can you imagine that by the end of the century, the number of inhabitants in Africa will have risen from 1.8 billion to 3.5 or 4 billion, which represents enormous volumes of water, as well as quantities of energy, reservoirs and intrants.

And all this is only for domestic use.

Then what happens to the question of water for industry and, above all, water for agriculture and food production?

So, ladies and gentlemen, even if all these figures have to be treated with caution, we can learn some important lessons from them.



Firstly, obviously, we need to reduce our consumption per capita, thanks to technical and digital progress, which allows reasonable use of artificial intelligence.

Consequently, we will be producing more food with less water - 'more crop per drop'.

But in fact, we have to be clear and courageous about the fact that global demand for water will continue to grow significantly until the end of the century.

Together, how are we going to cope? Because the survival of humanity is at stake, we will succeed by following what I call the 'engineering genius' path.

We will transfer water over greater distances. We will make better use of our underground resources. We will desalinate more water thanks to the widespread use of reverse osmosis, and we are going to reuse wastewater by recycling it on a large scale.

We are going to manage our essential water reserves more effectively by transforming the old concept of dams into the concept of aquatic reserves. It is a perfect illustration of water for humans and water for nature and a great example of a Nature-based solution.

And it is my third conviction that shared innovation is not enough if we do not implement bold and sustainable institutional and financial actions.

The management of water resources should be implemented through accepted and decentralized governance which is not imposed by the central authority. To be as close to the ground as possible, through river basins and local authorities which should be able to have access to direct financing.

The work that our Council is doing on debt cancellation for water and on the acceptance of sub-sovereignty or on blended finance also concerns financing of water for agriculture and food.

This leads me to reiterate firstly, how our approach needs to become horizontal, and not just vertical, through IWRM.

And secondly, how political the water issue is: after 'stop ignoring water', we are saying to political leaders, 'Water is politics'.



You, I and all of us have a duty to raise awareness among the general public, and in political and economic circles.

After the 10th World Water Forum of Bali, we are now turning our attention to the organization of the 11th Forum, to be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 2027. With our Saudi colleagues and friends, we want it to be more regionalized, more diversified towards health and food, to be more turned towards international cooperation, hydro-diplomacy, and strongly focused on sharing concrete solutions.

All Arab countries have an essential role to play in this preparation, as well as within the various Council Task Forces. Your welcome today is a great opportunity to put the link between climate, demography and development at the center of the debate on securing water resources.

Let us not miss this opportunity and let us move forward together for the future of water.

Thank you for your hospitality and for your attention, and I wish you a successful Arab Water Forum.