

Forum « Value of Water » The European House Ambrosetti, Teha.

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« L'acqua canta sulle pietre del fiume e porta lontano la voce della terra » come dice il poeta Salvatore Quasimodo.

Dear Mr de Molli,

Your Excellencies,

Signore e Signori,

I am delighted to be here in this beautiful city of Rome, and I am deeply grateful for your invitation and for the wonderful Italian hospitality.

It is a great honour to be among you for these days dedicated to 'The Value of Water'.

Does water, so essential to life, indeed has a value?

Among the elements of nature, it is undoubtedly at the very top of the scale of values.

In the beautiful Italian language, I would like to say 'l'acqua è valorosa'.

Valuable, powerful, furious, unpredictable, bringing both life and death, water is at the centre of all things, in history, in religions, and in the cultural traditions of every human community.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Speaking to you today about the state of our water resources does not mean we should forget the current situation.

Navigating this century means navigating between war and peace, growth and stagnation, inflation and deflation. Between poverty and prosperity.

The countless conflicts around the world, causing devastation and suffering, are the most tragic illustration of this.

And the natural elements and natural resources are also among the best examples of this situation.

Air, freshwater, soil, rivers and oceans are all heavily polluted.

Natural resources themselves are being systematically plundered: minerals, rare metals, forests and grasslands, agricultural fields and fishing waters – all these resources are in serious danger.

Signore e Signori,



As you can see, step by step, the planet and Nature have become humanity's slaves. And now they are rebelling.

In this modern world – and it is a paradox – we are struggling to drink, eat and breathe, at the very moment when human intelligence is bringing about a digital revolution unprecedented in the history of human societies.

But today I would like to deliver a call for trust, hope and determination to provide positive and concrete solutions for the future of water worldwide.

Dear Mr de Molli, together with your Group, you have taken a worthy initiative: assessing the current situation in Italy through “the value of water”. You have been doing this rigorously for years, drawing on scientific data and professional analyses.

You have done so without self-indulgence, without concealing certain weaknesses in the situation or in past public policies.

Let me also say, most warmly, to you and your entire team, that you are sometimes too hard on yourselves and on Italy's water situation.

The perspective I can offer from our international point of view allows for comparisons with nations comparable with Italy in terms of development.

Italy is on the right track to improve. But you are right to underline there is still much to be done to ensure a secure and sustainable ‘future of water’.

Now let us leave the past behind, as the Italian proverb says: ‘Acque passate non macina piu.’

Today, all over the world, water is under attack, and it is our role, our duty, to protect it.

The future of water is a concern for all of us here. Divagating climate, of course, but also uncontrolled demography, water-related disasters, floods and droughts.

These water-related disasters see us navigating between excess water, water scarcity and polluted water. And these periods of drought and sudden heavy rainfalls are now affecting the same regions, the same countries. Droughts and floods: same struggle! With new and costly impacts on water infrastructure and the need for a new kind of early warning system. That is my first message.

But climate is not the whole story. We must take a realistic view of the growing link between water and demography. And despite all the policies promoting water conservation and digital innovation, it is certain that we will need significant additional volumes of water to ensure the survival of human communities.

To illustrate this point, take the example of the metropolitan area of an African capital, Kinshasa in the Congo: around 9 million inhabitants in 2000, 18 million today, and a projected 22 million by 2030. This represents an additional 120 to 150 million cubic metres each year, and that is solely to meet domestic water needs, excluding agriculture and industry.

Furthermore, I would like to express our legitimate concern here regarding the uncontrolled urbanization that is already affecting more than a hundred megacities, each with over 10 million inhabitants. Every year, they require the mobilization of huge additional volumes of water. At a time when floods are becoming more severe, when aquifers are drying up, when deltas are sinking, when coastlines are receding, when water is scarce, these huge human gatherings face grave difficulties. When water overflows, activity stops; when water is polluted, human societies are poisoned.

In many of these megacities, innovation, governance and funding are lacking. They deserve a change of scale and approach.

To prevent disaster piling upon disaster – epidemics upon malnutrition – the World Water Council has proposed the establishment of a coalition for Water in Megacities.

This coalition will also need to rethink the relationship between urban and rural areas. Urban growth can no longer be regarded as inevitable. This threat facing urban areas must be seen as an opportunity to recover a more balanced distribution of the population. We need, in a way, an urban emigration following the rural emigration. And this is my second message and proposal.

My third message relates more directly to water supply to ensure greater security. The use of non-conventional water resources is essential everywhere, starting with groundwater – which is often called ‘invisible water’. It will need to be better mapped and used prudently in the future.

And above all, the revolutions of this century: the desalination of seawater and brackish water on the one hand, and the recycling and reuse of wastewater on the other. Desalinated and recycled water must necessarily be coupled with renewable energy sources—wind and solar, but also geothermal and tidal power—which complement hydroelectric and nuclear power.

At the heart of these measures lies the need to increase the water supply. This must be achieved by safeguarding groundwater, inter-regional transfers, desalination and recycling.

But let us not accept, as we are realizing now, that these various indispensable infrastructures can be compromised during times of conflict, terrorist attacks, tsunamis or severe flooding.

The very recent cases in Bahrain, on Kharg Island in Iran, and no doubt others, such as previously on the border between Ukraine and Russia, show that in the future, desalination plants and recycling units need to be more evenly distributed across territories, smaller and partly built underground.

Let us take the opportunity of these examples to recall that, in accordance with the case law of international Courts to the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols: “It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render inoperative objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs and the agricultural areas that produce them, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies, and irrigation works [...]”

But, dear colleagues, simply securing more resources is not enough. We must act responsibly and take decisive action to control demand. Technology and artificial intelligence are not enough without a profound and lasting transformation of our behaviour.

Let us be clear: sobriety is neither a step backwards nor a punishment. Sobriety is half the battle: consuming less, wasting less, polluting less, so that we can innovate better and share better.

We are talking about digital sobriety, of course, but also industrial moderation too, considering the water and energy consumption in 2030 of 25,000 data centres, several hundred nuclear power stations, and over 3 billion air conditioners, bearing in mind that a mega-data centre can consume the equivalent water of a town of 30,000 to 50,000 inhabitants and an open-loop nuclear power station 3 to 5 times that amount.

That is why, aware of this challenge, the World Water Council, together with its partners, has taken the initiative to lay the foundations for a Digital Laboratory for Sobriety. This is the fourth message.

As I conclude, allow me to complete these four commitments to the cause of water. They will not be enough if we forget the issue of sanitation – the great neglected challenge.

To ignore or neglect sanitation is to undermine health and to restrain the recycling of wastewater. Sanitation demands our attention everywhere. Let us make it more visible, better funded and a political priority. Fifth message.

Here, dear colleagues and friends, are a few considerations which, among others, represent actions to be implemented to support essential priorities. In the Council, we prioritize three of these, amongst others:

The first is water for health. Making sanitation universally available, and promoting early detection of pandemics through water monitoring. Why feed people to let them die ?

The second is water for food. So many mouths to feed. Two billion in Africa alone by the end of this century. Reducing losses in irrigation, rethinking food systems, reviewing consumption habits, and so much more. You know all this better than I do.

The third is water for nature. To echo the philosopher Alphonse de Lamartine: “la natura è li che ti invita e ti ama”. First, we need to set aside water for both humans and biodiversity. Then, we should move from dams to water reserves. Reserve water whilst protecting nature, and design a new generation of aquatic dams that combine human food supply with respect for nature. This is the very essence of nature-based solutions. These priorities are my sixth message.

Very soon, ladies and gentlemen, there will be two billion more of inhabitants in a world where water supplies are not growing. And water takes no account of electoral cycles or borders. The future of water depends as much on our collective creativity as on our political courage.

So let us emphasize the importance of education and the role of young people. Youth are, of course, the future of our world.

Thank you, dear Italian friends; be proud of your initiatives. Let us all talk a little less about what water costs and a little more about what it gives us.



Ci rendiamo conto del valore dell'acqua solo quando il pozzo è a secco. We only realise the value of water when the well runs dry !

Thank you for what Italy brings to the world water family.

In March 2027, the 11th World Water Forum will be held in Riyadh. You are all welcome to participate. Bring your experience and your solutions to help advance the cause of access to water for all.

Thank you for your hospitality. And let's not forget "Roma non fu fatta in un Giorno".

Grazie mille per la vostra attenzione !