



Opening of 2d Stakeholders Meeting, Bali, 12 october 2023

Inspiring Keynote speech

Loïc Fauchon, President of the World Water Council

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Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Friends of Water,

Eight months ago in Jakarta, taking advantage of the legendary Indonesian hospitality to open the kick-off meeting of the 10th World Water Forum, I said to you :

"why? yes, why have we come here together?"

Today I can ask the same question: why have we come to this beautiful island of Bali, nearly 700 of us, from all over Indonesia and more than 70 countries around the world, representing several hundreds of organizations and governments, local and basin authorities, civil society leaders, public and private operators?

Why is this so?

My personal answer is as follows:

Mainly, because we have strong beliefs and convictions, because we have given ourselves a mission, the mission of no longer leaving the planet in the dark about water.

Because water is a vital necessity, because water is life, nature, development, prosperity and peace.

But above all because water is under attack. Of course, climate change, floods, droughts and disasters are disrupting the great water cycle.

But we should not forget demographics: 3 to 4 billion more people by the end of the century, primarily in the poorest continents and countries. Particularly in Africa.

Let's face it, these megacities are reservoirs of poverty and insecurity, and no one knows how to control their development.

Climate and demographics represent billions of additional volumes of fresh water. With their consequences, the need to control mega-pollution and the urgent obligation to develop massive sanitation systems.

All this is because we have ignored water with lack of respect. We wanted to enslave it like so many other natural resources.

Well, dear friends, that time is over! Water is not our slave! water must once again become our friend. And I would go even further for the times to come, water will be our partner.

Water surrounds us, water brings us together. Water stimulates us. It is our present. And it will be our future and the future of the next generations, if we know how to protect it from the dangers that threaten it. And primarily climate and demographics as I have just mentioned.

What can we do about this situation, and what have we actually started to do?

On the one hand, we need to have more water resources at our disposal, through a combination of measures.

You know what they are.

First, we need to call on underground reserves, making the invisible visible. Secondly, transferring water over greater distances, and increasing our capacity to desalinate seawater and brackish water. And still more, widespread reuse of wastewater, which will undoubtedly be the revolution of this century for water resources.

These new resources will require us to know how to better reserve them from a rainy year to a dry one. The concept of dam, with which you are all familiar, will gradually give way to "aquatic reserves", as protector of biodiversity and ecosystems.

Protect, conserve, treat and use.

All this will only be sufficient if each and every one of us can force ourselves to change our relationship with water. This is not only an individual obligation, but also a collective one, based on solidarity and sustainable sobriety. A new economy of water resources lies ahead, making better use of digital developments and, no doubt, some part of artificial intelligence.

In this context we are facing numerous challenges and I would like to mention the most important but also the most difficult to solve.

First and foremost, we need to give priority to the new balance between water for Humans and for Nature.

Nature Based Solutions provide some of the most sustainable responses to ensure water security in the long term, for example to prevent floods while restoring riverbanks in big cities. And many other solutions still to be studied and implemented.

Sharing water for Humans and for Nature is also a way of maintaining a necessary balance between rural areas and cities. There may be smart cities perhaps, but do not forget smart and productive rural areas also !

Second, Food production is in danger.

We have all together to provide answers to a major crisis whose reality is already known : the global food crisis is upcoming !

Water for agriculture and irrigation is to be reconsidered, at all levels, to produce better with less waste and more consideration for bio-diversity. Adaptation of crops, soil protection, saving and good management of underground water and surface water, micro-irrigation, all these techniques, and others should be better encouraged and planned to help people stay in their rural areas and value their work.

Securing the resources to feed the planet without damaging nature. In the case of Africa, this is a planetary challenge in itself. 1.2 billion inhabitants today, nearly 4 billions by the end of the century. Where is water, how are soils, what crops, which fertilizers, which eating habits to reinforce or create ?

Third is the question of IWRM- integrated water resource management- which has also evolved a lot. Basins and transboundary cooperation are still the best level to practice intelligent water resource management. And a lot is still to be done. But there is also an urgent need to enlarge the concept. The planet earth is our common home and water is a life condition for sustainable development. We, as humans, need to translate into facts that water, food, energy, health and education are the five fingers of a same hand. The hand of share and peaceful development.

Dear colleagues, artificial intelligence applied to water will be part of our daily lives, but it is above all through education and training that we will succeed in changing our relationship with water. And our youths are obviously a key element in the new relationship we need to create with water.

The World Water Council will soon be proposing to the United Nations, States and local authorities a text aimed at implementing a specific water education program for elementary school children worldwide.

These major challenges, which are all essential priorities for the future of the planet, will require us to make even greater efforts in the years and decades to come. On the one hand, we are going to produce greater quantities of fresh water through groundwater, water transfers, desalination and wastewater reuse in particular.

On the other hand, we are entering an era of sobriety. Sobriety of use, sobriety of consumption in mining, agriculture, industry and at home.

We are all going to improve our behaviour and, as often mentioned, improve the efficiency from every drop of water.

This, dear friends gathered here in Bali, is what I call the "Water Deal", a new relationship with water, a new relationship between us, humankind and water, which first and foremost justifies saying "stop ignoring water".

The "Water Deal" calls for constant hydrodiplomacy to convince opinion leaders and political leaders that "Water Is politics", and that, as we said in May in New York, during the UN Conference, "It's time for acceleration".

This is an absolute necessity, and I call on each and every one of you to mobilize, to commit, so that at the Bali Forum, we can justify this cry of "Save water for shared prosperity".

Continue to take part, dear friends, in the preparation of this great Forum, by contributing with your expertise to the thematic, regional and political processes.

Thank you for your support, thank you for the solutions and the responses that you will place on the big table of access to water.

Terima kasih atas perhatian dan minat Anda untuk menjadikan air sebagai prioritas politik di setiap negara di dunia.

(Thank you for your attention and interest in making water a political priority in every country in the world.)