



Opening Ceremony IWRA World Water Congress

Beijing 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Loïc Fauchon, President of the World Water Council

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Excellency, Minister Li

Excellencies, Ministers and Ambassadors

Dear friends of water,

It is a great pleasure and honor to address you at the opening of this 18th World Water Congress.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Government of China, and in particular to the Ministry of Water Resources, with whom the World Water Council has long maintained friendly and particularly efficient relations.

I would also like to thank IWRA and its President Mr. Li Yuanyuan and its Director Callum Clench, for their invitation and active participation in the work of the World Water Council.

Our world, Ladies and Gentlemen, in the years in which we live, is going through multiple crises. You are observing them, you are all experiencing them here.

These global, and sometimes regional crises are leading to changes that are overturning established orders.

And these changes are accelerating under the double pressure of populations expecting better living conditions and the innovations brought by digital evolution.

We are forced to accept these geopolitical, economic and above all societal changes. And even more so as we are part of the water community, we should feel responsible to define a new relationship between Humankind and Water.

I deeply believe it, and I believe that we need to lay the foundations for a "Political Water Deal".

Dear friends of IWRA, you have placed this congress under the banner of "Harmony between Humans and Nature". It's a wise choice.

Because we all know that water is under threat.

It is subject to the divagations of climate, and the inescapable demographic growth. Urban growth and unreasonable human activity are aggressors, not only against water, but also against air, soil, seas and oceans.

Climate and demographics are increasing the effects of water-related disasters, both droughts and floods. These disasters are a reality, but they should not become inevitable fatality.

"To govern is to foresee", and our efforts, year after year, will consist of better anticipation and prevention, in the face of the lack of rain, huge forest fires, or the wrath of overflowing rivers and oceans attacking our coasts.

More broadly, we are fighting, and we will continue to fight, against the spoiling and waste of water.

Water, dear friends, water is not our slave, it is our partner !

To be concrete, a few simple words seem to sum up what is the "Political Water Deal":

Preserve, Produce, Save, Finance, Govern, Communicate. Six "saving water words".

Through these "saving water words", a new point of view is stated :

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.

Second, Food production is in danger.

The "Political Water Deal" aims 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.

International banks and agencies, States and local authorities should commit, and our ambition is to provide them with the necessary framework, a sort of "water sobriety" framework.

Year after year, our water community will have to participate in the citizen understanding of "stop ignoring water"!

The "Political 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, "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".

Take part, dear friends, in the preparation of this great Forum, by contributing with your expertise to the thematic, regional or 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.