



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

Opening ceremony 7th Cairo Water Week and 9th Africa Water Week

October 13th 2024

Excellency Mr. Prime Minister of Egypt,

Minister Prof. Hani Sewilam, dear Friend,

Excellencies Ministers, Ambassadors,

Dear friends of water,

On behalf of the World Water Council, I would like to thank you for your invitation to participate in this 7th Cairo Water Week and 9th Africa Water Week.

It is a privilege and an honour to be here.

Egypt is at the center of a meeting of continents, Asia, Africa and Mediterranean Basin. This particular geostrategic situation gives rights and duties.

Egypt is a great nation of water. Over the centuries and since antiquity, Egypt has been able to master the wrath of water.

We do not forget that the World Water Council was created on the initiative of Egyptian leaders.

This year, Minister Sewilam, you have decided, as President of AMCOW, to give a spotlight to Africa. It is a wise initiative, given the hydro-political challenges facing the African continent, which are essential to its survival.

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.

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

And natural resources are the best examples of this.

Water, dear friends, water stimulates us. Water 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.

We need to take into account some important developments for the future of water.

Our first conviction 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 Muscate, Dubai and Jeddah. The same phenomena were observed in Morocco, Mali, Somalia, Senegal and many others.

And all this is exacerbated by urban anarchy, rural exodus, coastal concentrations, out-of-control tourism and catastrophic pollution of rivers and oceans.

One conclusion is clear: droughts and floods represent now, and in the future, the same battle to secure water resources in terms of quantity and quality. We can claim today :

DRAUGHTS AND FLOODS, SAME FIGHT

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

One thing is certain: additional volumes of water will be necessary and even indispensable to the survival of humanity.

Let's take the example of the Greater Cairo. According to World Population Review and other sources, there were 13 million inhabitants in 2000. And in 2023 the area had a population of 22 million with an expected population of 28 million in 2035. On the basis of usual domestic consumption, water volumes ranging from 500 million cubic meters to 1 billion cubic meters will be needed, per year. For domestic use only !.

Can you imagine that by the end of the century, the total number of inhabitants in Africa may rise from 1.8 billion to 3.5 or 4 billion. Can you imagine the enormous volumes of water, for domestic use, reservoirs, food production, energy and industry ?

Africa water security is our greatest challenge.

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

As a first message, we need to reduce our consumption per capita significantly. Digital control and behaviour sobriety are not only a necessity but an obligation, a duty. And Egypt has begun to do it for some years.

So, 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.

The second message is that we will undoubtedly need to transfer water over greater distances. We will make better use of our underground resources. We will desalinate more water and we will increase wastewater reuse by recycling it on a larger scale. All this with precautions.

The third message is that 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. Again with precautions.

My fourth message, as a personal conviction, is that shared innovation is not enough if we do not implement bold and sustainable institutional and new kinds of financial actions.

The management of water resources should be implemented through accepted and decentralized governance. To be as close to the ground as possible, through river basins and local authorities.

This leads me to reiterate, as fifth message, how our approach needs to become more horizontal. Water is growth, Water is development, Water is life. We advocate a “Five Fingers Alliance”, an integrated approach between water and sanitation, access to energy, food security, health protection and of course education for all.

The two following messages are necessarily political,

The sixth message is that after claiming “stop ignoring water”, we have to continue to say again and again “water is politics” !

And finally, my last and seventh message, illustrated by previous and recent context, is the necessity of cooperation, and especially trans-boundary cooperation in international basins.

I would like to express here very clearly the position of the World Water Council : upstream and downstream regions have the same rights and the same duties. The duty to protect water. The duty to share it. Nobody is the owner of water. Water is a gift from the Sky, and our duty is to manage it peacefully. Upstream and downstream, same rights, same duties !

And I would like to take the opportunity today to add a few words : water does not deserve war, water is an element for Peace. And international conventions on water must be respected, everywhere, everytime.

In any armed conflict water and sanitation infrastructures must be protected and respected. This obligation must be respected by all parties.

Tomorrow, not far away from here, it will be necessary to “heal the wounds”. It will be time to place taps before guns !

The World Water Council, with its member governments, with your support, is ready to be part of a great plan to repair, to rebuild, to secure and to restore. It will be our duty, our pride, and a great purpose for the Water world and our global planet.

Thank you to Egypt, its government, thank you to all of you, and great success to both Cairo and Africa Water Weeks.