



**28th ICOLD Congress and 93rd Annual Meeting,
Opening Ceremony
Speech of Loic Fauchon, President of the World Water Council
21 May 2025, Chengdu, China**

Mr Minister Li Guoyin,

Mr President of ICOLD

Dear colleagues, Presidents of Chinese and international organizations,

I am honoured and delighted once again to be in the heart of China, surrounded by so many friends.

Let me begin by thanking my dear friend Minister Li Guoyin for your invitation and hospitality. We have worked together for many years, and I am happy to be here once again to celebrate the cooperation we have established under your leadership, dear friend.

My gratitude also goes to the welcome extended to us by the province of Sichuan and its governor Mrs Shi Xiaoliu.

And, of course, I would like to thank ICOLD and its President Michel Lino for inviting us to this very important meeting.

ICOLD, dear colleagues, and the World Water Council are long-standing partners who have worked together to defend the policy of dams and reservoirs, which is misunderstood and sometimes unfairly attacked.

Both Humans and Nature have a vital, I would even say existential need to reserve water. And to do this, dams, reserves, storage and reservoirs are essential. I am not talking of any kind of dams, but energy, health, food, industry, cities and rural areas all need to reserve water from one day to the next, from one season to the next, from one year to the next. This has been the very basis of water security since the dawn of time, in every human civilization.

Right here, in the land of China, humans have for centuries built reservoirs and canals to facilitate the movement of water and goods. Hydraulics is a heritage here.

The workshop organized under your leadership, Minister Li Guoyin, enabled us to see the richness of this heritage, whether in the form of reservoirs or canals. The Grand Canal of China is a prime example, dating back nearly

2,500 years and stretching 2,000 kilometres from Ningbo in Zhejiang to Beijing through five river basins, linking five of China's largest rivers.

The nearby Dujiangyan, which is on the middle course of the Minjiang river, the first tributary of the Yangtse, is further evidence of the Chinese hydraulic heritage. Built 2,300 years ago as a legacy of the Qin dynasty, it is one of the oldest examples in the world of an irrigation reservoir, combining storage and diversion, making it a life pillar of the Chengdu plain.

Two examples among many others which are the pride of the Chinese authorities who, through major restoration and maintenance work, are taking into account the cultural and ecological importance of the water reserve infrastructures inherited from the past, as clearly shown on World Water Day 2025 in Beijing's Tougzhou district. This is a striking proof that the history of water in China, and all over the world, is nourished by both ancient times and modernity.

In the words of Pen Jing, head of the China Water Resources Research Institute, it is 'the living heritage of man-made waterways'. All gathered here in Chengdu, we are all heirs to this heritage. And this heritage is binding on us.

But at the same time, we are living in a world where so many ancient and recent balances are being called into question. This world, our world, is living between war and peace, inflation and deflation, poverty and prosperity. Our world is questioning its path between isolationism and globalization. Crisis after crisis. And it is a paradox, because between these crises, the world is still moving forward.

We are experiencing brilliant advances in health, mobility, communications and now artificial intelligence. But at the same time, humans are sometimes destroying with great violence what they have taken centuries or decades to design and build. Natural resources are often a tragic example of this. All too often they are systematically plundered, ruining landscapes and destroying biodiversity.

And what is our current scope today? Within a framework of climate disruption and demographic disorder, the global planet machine is going out of control. So many men and women are facing difficulties to drink, to eat, to breathe and to get healthcare, at the very moment when human intelligence - and I do mean human intelligence - is embarking on a digital revolution unprecedented in the history of our civilizations.

Climate divagation, or rather climate complexity, leads our world navigating between too much water, too little water and polluted water. Since ancient times, we have considered the world as being divided between arid and rainy regions. And now we have to face up to the fact that periods of drought and sudden rainfall affect the same countries and the same regions.

Like me, you have seen the torrential rains in Dubai, Saudi Arabia, but also the flooding in the Sahel belt, in Niger, Senegal and Somalia, after long periods of drought. And in recent days, we watched pictures of the prestigious site of Petra in Jordan, completely invaded by water.

The conclusion is clear. Tomorrow, droughts and floods are the same approach, the same battle to secure water resources in terms of quality and quantity.

My dear colleagues, climate is not everything. It is our duty to look realistically at the growing link between water and demography. It is a fact that the population of the planet will continue to grow until the end of this century, particularly in Africa, where demographers predict that there will be more than 2 billion extra inhabitants by 2100.

Obviously, like me, you are aware of the new consequences of climate and demographics in terms of planning, regional development, new types of infrastructure and early warning systems. With major implications in terms of investment to reserve, secure, transfer, treat, distribute, purify, supply and recycle.

Despite all the policies to reduce consumption and promote digital innovations in order to save resources, it is absolutely certain that we will need large quantities of additional water to guarantee the survival of human communities. And for our survival, for both water and energy, additional storage and transfer capacities are essential.

In view of this, the World Water Council considers that we have three challenging thematic priorities to highlight.

The first is water for health. Extending wastewater treatment and implementing hydro-detection of pandemics. For this purpose reservoirs have a fundamental role to play. In addition to river flood control, they can also prevent infected water from causing so many water-borne diseases.

The second is water for food. Developing irrigated areas while limiting water loss. For this purpose, increasing the capacity to reserve water to supply agriculture areas is a main challenge of our century.

The third is water for nature. Let us not let Mother Earth disappear. Let us share the poet's words: 'Nature is there, inviting you and loving you'. It is our duty, and I would even say our honour, to reserve water for both biodiversity and Humans. It means reserving while protecting.

“RESERVE AND PRESERVE”

This is the very meaning of Nature-Based-Solutions, as close as possible to the ground.

Yes, dear colleagues, history will judge us on our ability to anticipate global change and satisfy the joint needs of Man and Nature.

The recommendations you make in the Chengdu Declaration are a step in this direction.

The world urgently needs to increase its water reserves.

These reserves must be more respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, but also of existing human communities.

The development of hydroelectricity will provide access to energy for more than a billion people, thanks in particular to the widespread use of pumped-and-turbined sustainable storage.

More generally, the Chengdu declaration marks a positive evolution in the concept of reservoir-dams and aquatic reserves, and we welcome it. This new generation will support our efforts for diversification of water resources by recharging aquifers, desalinating seawater and brackish water, and recycling purified water.

To achieve this, water and water-related energy policies are based on three pillars, which are the very foundations of what I call the 'House of Water'.

The first pillar is knowledge based on intelligence and innovation. But let's be careful: artificial intelligence should be strictly controlled by human intelligence.

The second pillar is water governance: a governance which is accepted rather than imposed. Governance closer to the ground, more devolved to basin authorities and local communities.

The third pillar is finance. Water is short of money, but at the same time, money is short of water. For several years now, the World Water Council has been calling for the cancellation of the water debt of the poorest countries, the generalization of mixed financing, the creation of public guarantee mechanisms, and the development of the principle of sub-sovereignty guarantee.

The task ahead is as great as our ambitions. Rest assured of the World Water Council's support, and allow me to make a few modest contributions.

The first is to disseminate the Chengdu Declaration to international institutions, development organizations, the media and the general public. More specifically, as an experiment, we could launch a specific information campaign aimed at children and teenagers in schools in several countries. Today's young people are tomorrow's decision-makers.

The second is to organize a webinar at the World Water Council, specifically for young professionals on the subject of water reserves and their link with energy.

The third, in agreement with our Saudi colleagues, is to set up a specific working group on water resources during the 2 years ahead of preparations for the 11th World Water Forum.

Finally, the fourth is to broaden the scope of the World Centre for Non-Conventional Water Resources coupled with Renewable Energies, which we are preparing to set up with the Moroccan government, to include the subject of intelligent dams and future generation dams.

Dear Colleagues, we are at the heart of issues which go beyond technology. We have long been saying 'Water is Politics'. And underlining even further the need to link politics and hydro-diplomacy. Hydrodiplomacy generates aqueducts of cooperation. We all want peace of rivers, and 'hydro roads' to help sharing water from rivers and transboundary basins.

There is still a long way to go to achieve this, but as the Wise Man said, 'it is not the path that is difficult, it is difficulty that is the path'.

It is quite simply the path of water for peace and peace for the world.

Thank you to ICOLD, thank you to China.