INTERVIEW OF M. LOIC FAUCHON, PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD WATER COUNCIL

AT CHATHAM HOUSE, LONDON

Questions 1 and 2

One-quarter of humanity faces a looming water crisis including the prospect of running out of water which may seem inconceivable when 70 per cent of the Earth's surface is water.

Why is the world facing a crisis of water scarcity? The world is using up to 80 per cent of available surface and groundwater every year and water demand globally is projected to increase by 55 per cent by 2050. What is driving this increase in water consumption and how is it contributing to water scarcity?

Answer

For two main reasons.

The first one has to do with world population growth while the water supply remains at the same level. One billion more inhabitants each 15-20 years leads to a progressive deficit.

The second one is due to population concentration in large urban areas and regions where water scarcity has been lingering for centuries.

This is for example what we call the "thirst triangle", stretching from Southern Spain, to Pakistan and India, and containing the Horn of Africa, where live 2 billion inhabitants living under water stress.

Question 3

Water use has grown at more than twice the rate of the human population over the last century in part due to industries, such as agriculture, which accounts for 70 per cent of global freshwater use. Given that food production will need to grow by up to 70 per cent by 2035 to feed the growing human population, how do we balance the use of water with the need to provide food?

Answer

There are three types of solutions we are going to implement in the coming decades in order to feed the world population.

First of all, greatly improve what I would call the agricultural water drop efficiency. Which means increasing yields without increasing the use of industrial chemicals products. It will take time to expand efficient and economical organic farming.

Then, to deeply reduce food waste all along the supply chain, from farm to fork.

And at last, by progressively changing food habits towards low animal protein diets.

Question 4

More than 1 in 3 people globally do not have access to safe drinking water and more than 4 billion people lack adequate sanitation. How can waste water be more efficiently used and do you think global goals to provide everyone with safe and clean drinking water are still realistic?

Answer

Sanitation is still the "poor relation" when talking about access to basic services. Most probably because policymakers focus their attention on access to drinkable water.

The World Water Council is asking all international funders to only finance water if sanitation is also financed in a more balanced way.

In the future, the development of water reuse will certainly incentivize economic and political decision makers to implement networks and sanitation plants meant to supply fresh water.

Question 5

With the depletion of water supplies, how can governments avoid the politicization of water, as seen in cases such as the Nile River Basin and across the Middle East, to avoid conflicts over water?

Answer

To avoid conflicts related to water sharing, dialogue is indispensable among everyone and everywhere.
I will always be difficult to avoid populism and attempts to politicize this issue.
We believe we must first tackle the roots of these conflicts, by ensuring good water management and an improved use of new technologies, while at the same time tackle all kinds of wastage.

Question 6

Countries across the Middle East have invested in desalination plants as an answer, but this can have a negative impact, notably on marine life. What is your view on desalination as an answer to the global water crisis? What other solutions are available?

Answer

Desalination is a solution for littoral areas and for hinterlands when water salinity is too high.
Other resources are also to be tapped, by drilling deeper, by saving water in aquatic reserves, and transferring water on longer distances,
And of course, water reuse which allows to supply drinkable water out of water treatment plants.
Over time, this process is going to be broadly developed as production costs decrease, mostly in the agricultural sector.