



Opening speech by Loïc Fauchon, President of the World Water Council
10th WATER DIALOGUES
MADRID, 17 October 2024

Mr Minister of the Government of Spain,
Mr. President of CAF, Sergio Diaz Granados
Dear Friends from Spain and Latin America,
Dear friends of water,

It is a privilege and an honor for the World Water Council to be here with you, and I would like to thank CAF, its President and Directors, for their invitation to take part in these 10th Water Dialogues.

The relationship between CAF and our Council is long-standing and particularly close. CAF has chaired and continues to chair our working group on water financing, and I would like to take this opportunity today to thank Franz Rojas in particular for his commitment and expertise. I would also like to thank the Spanish government for its support, through the recent membership of the Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge.

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.

And 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 Latin America but also in Africa, 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 Sao Paulo and 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:

Lack of water, excess of water, 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 :

DROUGHTS 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: huge additional volumes of water will be necessary and even indispensable to the survival of cities and humanity.

Can you imagine that by the end of the century, the total number of inhabitants on our planet could be increased by 7.5 to 10 billions, perhaps more. Can you imagine the enormous additional volumes of water needed for food production, energy and industry. And it s a great challenge for Latin America, mainly for water supply in cities.

We often hear that Latin America, with its 660 million inhabitants, represents less than 10% of the world's population but holds 25% of the global water resources.

It is true of course, but sufficient water is not always available nearby the cities, whether large or small, and when available water resources are often polluted and require extensive and expensive treatments.

Latin America faces huge challenges in terms of water supply for drinking water as well as collection and treatment of domestic wastewater.

Another huge challenge concerns water for food production, which represents the largest consumption needs of water in the world, as irrigation is only at a start in Latin America with only around 10% of irrigated cultivated land.

Without forgetting the necessary link between water and energy, given that hydroelectricity accounts for 45% of Latin America's energy supply.

All these issues are source of wealth, but there are also source of tension between consumers, populations and states.

And the solutions, the answers to these challenges, Ladies and Gentlemen, are both global and local, urban and rural, at the heart of the global issue of water security, a major contest for the future of mankind.

So even if these figures are to be treated with precautions, they show trends and we must learn some useful lessons from them, through a few messages that the World Water Council is trying to deliver in the different regions of the world.

The first message concerns better controlling water demand and reducing per capita consumption, especially in cities. In practical terms, this means two things:

Firstly by making the best possible use of the digital revolution that is sweeping the planet. Technological progress serves humankind.

Digital technologies can be integrated at any step of the water cycle to improve water's value chain.

Digital technologies to detect pressure, losses ;

Monitoring to control operations, Forecasting to predict weather events;

And all kinds of mobile tools which will play step by step a major role.

Let us make the best out of technology but let us never forget to always put the human being in the loop. Man is not meant to serve technology but to control it.

And secondly, by getting people to accept the need to use water with sobriety, just the same as for energy. It's a long and difficult process. Evolutions of behaviors require dialogue, awareness-raising and education, aimed at the younger generation in particular, to achieve substantial water savings step by step.

And 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.

This is our second message : 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. Recycling is most probably the revolution of our century to gain more water resources. 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 new kinds of financial actions.

Now more than ever, it is important to improve the financial system effectiveness in mobilizing more capital from various sources towards investment in water and sanitation.

Attracting additional investors, including commercial and private investors, will require significant and fundamental changes in those areas. Blended finance, currently studied by the World Water Council working group on finance, is a mechanism designed to attract additional finance towards the water sector. It should be used more widely.

To strengthen the institutions, the management of water resources should also be improved by implementing 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, that we need to change our global approach to make it 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. .

And at this point, the following messages are more political and societal.

The sixth message is that we must stop thinking that the growth of cities, from mega-cities to medium-sized towns, is inevitable. Spatial planning policies need to achieve a better balance between urban and rural areas.

We have to stop oppose them against each other. Who produces food? Who ensures the availability of water? Who manages the land? Farmers and rural citizens. Access to essential services must be facilitated on an equitable basis between town and country.

Towns and countryside are fighting for the same rights, the right to water, electricity and everything that guarantees the dignity of women and men.

The seventh message is obvious : water is no longer just a technical issue, but a political statement. And it is the reason why, after telling political decision-makers to “stop ignoring water”, we continue to claim that “Water Is politics”.

And finally, the eighth and last message is in favour of all forms of cooperation, exchange and dialogue.

And these “Water Dialogues” events that you regularly organise are the perfect illustration of it.

This is also the “raison d'être” of the World Water Council and its 300 member governments and organisations.

Water does not divide, it brings people together, notably through thematic, geographical and political cooperation.

There is no doubt that basin policies have a decisive role to play in the future. A number of you here today have contributed to the creation of a Latin American Water Council. It's an excellent initiative that we support, and I am delighted that my friend Ben Braga was elected its first president.

We are going to increase exchanges and cooperation, and for example, we could link the African and Latin American continents within “Atlantic Dialogues”.

These, dear friends, are some of the messages that the World Water Council, through my voice, would like to deliver to you. We are at the heart of Hydro-diplomacy, water-diplomacy, diplomacy of cities, which is essential to their resilience.

This is the road to water peace and world peace.

Many thanks to all of you.