



3rd Asia International Water Week Opening

Opening Speech By Loïc Fauchon, President of the World Water Council

24th September 2024

Distinguished guests,
Colleagues and friends of water,
Esteemed organizers of the 3rd Asia International Water Week,

Mr. Li Guoying, Minister of Water Resources of the People's Republic of China,
President of Asia Water Council, Ministers and Ambassadors,
Minister Basuki, my friend

Congratulations on the grand opening of the 3rd Asia International Water Week.

First of all, Dear Minister Li Guoyin, I would like to thank you, on behalf of all of us, for your great hospitality and tell you how honored we are for the great commitment of the People's Republic of China to the global issue of water at regional and international level.

The World water Council, Mr. Minister, is proud that for 15 years, China and the World Water Council have shared a common history based on the acceptance of 2 words: DIALOGUE and COOPERATION.

The role of the World water Council is to convince. To advocate. To lead the way to inspiring routes.

We have learnt much from each other.

We are proud to have been pushing forward the concept of water security with you, and to have established bridges with water for humans and water for nature.

Proud that a great nation like yours is sharing its experience and know-how to show the world that it is feasible. Step by step.

China responded with very concrete actions, and one of them is the book "Water Governance in China" that you disseminated at the 10th World

Water Forum. Thank you for sharing inspiring insights and very concrete actions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we converge here, we face the profound challenges and opportunities of the water sector in Asia—a region of unparalleled diversity and vibrancy.

We live in a world where so many long-standing balances are being called into question. A world that is experiencing multiple crises, while at the same time progressing through economic growth and social development.

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

And natural resources are the best example of this.

And in this modern world, where innovation is king, it is a paradox that a large proportion of its inhabitants have difficulty eating, drinking, caring for themselves and breathing.

Water, dear friends, water is at the heart of everything.

Water stimulates us and, more often than not, 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.

Let me today share with you a few convictions that could guide the action of the water family in the coming years.

The first 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.

One conclusion is clear: droughts and floods represent now the same battle to secure water resources in terms of quality and quantity. We can claim in our world today : “Draughts and floods : SAME FIGHT !”. And it will have important consequences in terms of innovation, finance and governance.

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

Regardless of sobriety policies needed to prevent too much use of water and digital innovations to reduce wastage, one thing is certain: additional volumes of water will be necessary and even indispensable to the survival of humanity.

An overly restrictive and unrealistic dominant way of thinking does not seem to accept that the world is developing, and Asia countries are a true example of this.

Demographers today rely on a science which is more accurate than climate science.

Can you imagine that by the end of the century, the number of inhabitants on our earth could grow from 8 to 10 billion inhabitants, which is a huge and fantastic additional amount of volume of water resource, between 30 to 50 billion cubic meters more every year.

Then what happens to the question of water for industry and, above all, water for agriculture and food production?

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

Firstly, obviously, we need to reduce our consumption per capita, thanks to technical and digital progress, which allows reasonable use of artificial intelligence.

Consequently, we will be producing more food with less water - 'more crop per drop'.

Secondly, we must be clear and courageous about the fact that global demand for water will continue to grow significantly until the end of the century.

Together, how are we going to cope?

We will transfer water over greater distances. We will make better use of our underground resources. We will desalinate more water thanks to the widespread use of reverse osmosis, and we are going to reuse wastewater by recycling it on a large scale.

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.

And it is my third conviction that shared innovation is not enough if we do not implement bold and sustainable institutional and financial actions.

The management of water resources should be implemented through accepted and decentralized governance which is not imposed by the central authority. To be as close to the ground as possible, through river basins and local authorities which should be able to have access to direct financing.

Our Council is working on water debt cancellation and on the acceptance of sub-sovereignty or on blended finance. This leads me to reiterate how much political the water issue is: after ‘stop ignoring water’, we are saying to political leaders and economic and social stakeholders, ‘Water is politics’.

Asia nations need to secure all kinds of water resources during the next decade. The solutions developed everywhere in Asia have the potential to contribute to shape water strategies around the world. In the spirit of solidarity, the World Water Council places its trust in Asia countries role in bridging the water gap.

As a great illustration of it, the 10th World Water Forum was a great success, co-organized and magnificently hosted by our Indonesian friends, and at this moment I would like to pay tribute to my friend, my very brother minister Basuki Hadilmujono, for being so clear-sighted as well as for his personal commitment.

In Bali, I spoke about the need for all of us, and specially the youth, to become “water warriors”. The purpose is clear : youth are the future, and they will lead this peaceful fight.

In the near future, we will be working with our Saudi colleagues to prepare the 11th World Water Forum. We want this upcoming Forum to be more decentralized, regionalized and diversified.

To achieve this, we are counting on dynamic, inventive and collective regional processes. We are counting on Asia, on the Asia Water Forum, to bring a breath of fresh air to Riyadh 2027.

Let us make the most of this opportunity and work together for the future of water.

Thank you to the Asia Water Council, thank you to China and to you, dear Minister Li Guoyin for your wonderful hospitality and our cooperation. thank you and much success to the 3rd Asia International water week.
