

## 4<sup>th</sup> Cairo Water Week

October 2021

Mr. President of the Republic of Egypt

Mr. Prime Minister

Mrs. and Mr. Ministers, Ambassadors,

Dear Friends of Water,

It is always a great honor for the World Water Council and its President to participate in the Cairo Water Week. The relations between Egypt and our Council are long-standing and friendly.

The government of Egypt contributed to the creation of the World Water Council, and its first President was Dr. Mahmoud Abu Zeid. Let me greet him and assure him of my full consideration.

Talking about water in Egypt is natural. The Nile is a nourishing river that throughout the centuries has irrigated the Egyptian intelligence and culture.

Thanks to the Nile, Egypt is a great water nation that knows the evils of water scarcity and the benefits of pure and abundant water.

And yet, in the world, dear friends, water is suffering, and it is no longer sufficient to satisfy the water needs for Nature and Human beings.

It must be said clearly and forcefully, humanity is living beyond its own water means. Yes, humanity is mistreating water. Water is missing, wasted or abused almost everywhere in the world.

Can we imagine, ladies and gentlemen, that this situation can continue? Can we imagine that the planet can continue to live with polluted air and abused water?

Water is in crisis, in addition to the many other crises that threaten our survival. Food crisis, health crisis, energy crisis. And this water crisis is also added to diplomatic, military, nuclear, ocean and geostrategic tensions in general. There are so many crises !

But air and water are the first resources essential to life and we must therefore take special care to protect them.

This land of the Mashreq, is particularly affected by these threats to water.

Aridity, of course, has always been a characteristic of this great region, from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, from the Black Sea to the Horn of Africa, from the Arabian Peninsula to the great Sahara.

Over the centuries, humans have sometimes allowed the desert to expand through carelessness or resignation. But we have also, through our creative genius, managed to tame it and multiply oases and irrigated areas, to provide abundance and prosperity.

However, the world's population is growing faster than the desert and the population demands more and more water to produce food, to manufacture cars, to meet better hygiene standards.

The earth is thirsty and men are hungry, not only for food but for security, for progress, for development

Cities are becoming more and more populated. Megacities are not smart cities, they are first and foremost reservoirs of poverty, of misery and labor force, where the new slaves of modern times are packed.

The climate and its evolution is an additional difficulty. Here, some more water and torrential rains are appearing, and there,

increasing droughts and scarcity is expanding. And sometimes both at the same time, one after another.

Sometimes, water related disasters cause more deaths, injuries and damage than all the wars put together.

This is the current situation : natural aridity, economic growth and social progress, overpopulation and climate are the enemies of water security.

The demand for water is growing much faster than what we can provide. And the prospects for this century are not good if the international community does not realize the danger.

And another danger is that we should understand that Nature also requires water to protect ecosystems and enhance biodiversity. We need water for Men and water for Nature

We no longer have a choice!

To do nothing, to hear nothing, to remain silent, to look the other way, is to give way to tensions, conflicts and who knows, wars.

The necessity is to wake up, to consult, to innovate, to carry the voice of water, to create a true water consciousness. To make water a prerequisite, a pre-requisite to reach the famous SDGs.

This is our imperious obligation.

How can we do this ?

First, by conviction. By convincing all the leaders of the planet, heads of state and government, ministers, parliamentarians and basin authorities, mayors and local elected officials. Convince them that providing, respecting and sharing access to water for all is both a duty and a right.

It is a universal and collective right first of all. It is an urgent right to be included in the constitutions and founding texts of

each country, each region, each city. At a time when the rights of every minority are called to respect and consideration, the right to water, including sanitation, is to be imposed on humanity for ethical, moral and human reasons.

Let us recall that today, only less than fifty States have met this necessary obligation.

It is a collective right, but it is also an individual right, a social right for each child, each woman, each man to have access every day, every hour, to the minimum water supply, the necessary quantity and the acceptable quality.

At local implementation, step by step, all towns, rural communities, and villages, supported by Basin authorities, will have to set up free minimum allocations, essential for daily life, hygiene and food. To guarantee that everyone has the right and freedom of access to water. And above all, to respect the dignity that comes with free access to essential services.

So ladies and gentlemen, citizens and friends of water, all this does not prevent us from acting to increase supply and regulate demand.

And at this moment I would like to say that if Egypt suffers from all these threats to water, experiencing water scarcity, Egypt is the best laboratory of solutions that the world must implement.

Egypt is taking the best of the latest technological innovations to increase water supply. Let me mention some examples :

Egypt is already operating around 19 desalination plants and is planning to construct 47 before 2030 ! They are situated all along the coast.

Egypt is implementing reuse of wastewater with modern wastewater treatment plants, which gradually allow to re-inject water for nature, for agriculture, and even tomorrow for domestic use. In 2020, the Waste Water Treatment Plant of Al Mahsamma, in the governorate of Ismailia, received the first prize of the “best project of reused water in the world” delivered by the Engineering New-record.

The Red Sea Governorate has been experimenting, since 2016, reused treated wastewater to irrigate parks and public gardens, like other cities in the Maghreb, including Rabat in Morocco.

More interesting is the project conducted by Med Sea Water with Waste Water Company, which has created a specific sewage network for nearly a thousand houses and public buildings. This grey water is then conducted into a treatment plant for irrigation.

In other regions of the country, progress is being made in controlling groundwater recharge in the Sinai Peninsula, for example.

These actions are examples of the ability to use advanced technological and digital developments to cope with the decline in resources from the Nile.

Of course, the more traditional actions of deep drilling and transferring water from one part of the country to another remain essential to quench the thirst of a nation whose population continues to grow.

But Egypt is also a forerunner in terms of regulation and control of the demand for fresh water and its consumption.

The government of Egypt is showing courage and foresight in this area. Farmers are now enticed to respect new regulations. From now on, restrictions on certain crops such as rice, sugar cane or bananas are under way.

A wide supervision is progressively set up, drip irrigation is becoming the rule and a specific pricing system is being prepared.

At the same time, a national awareness and training program for farmers has been set up to promote these techniques and change their behavior.

Saving water in agriculture, in industrial production, in urban management, in the consumption of citizens, this is the basis for a drastic decrease in water consumption.

On this path, Egypt is indeed a laboratory, an example for so many countries experiencing water scarcity. And through me, the World Water Council assures the Egyptian authorities of their consideration for the quality of the efforts undertaken.

One more word about transboundary basins which are today at the center of a new hydro strategic order.

As you know, half of the world population lives along 250 river basins flowing across several countries.

Successful example of basin governances exists such as the Senegal River, the Rhine River, the Parana River, established through treaties and dedicated organizations where dialogue and sharing are the rule.

There are more other complex examples where tensions continue due to strong political sensitivities and permanent media pressure. This is the case of the Nile River where the construction of the Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia had triggered major tensions with downstream states such as Sudan and Egypt.

These tensions, these conflicts, clearly show the need for a real hydrodiplomacy that our Council has developed since its creation 25 years ago.

These tensions also show that achieving water security requires a political will first.

Let us be very clear, Ladies and Gentlemen : Water is Politics !

The priority to be given to politics is first and foremost a decision of the States.

It is also a universal awareness that requires the adoption of Laws and regulations and budgets, that will translate this priority into concrete actions and immediate responses.

Egypt has a major role to play in this context.

We invite Egypt, in the coming months, to bring its experience, its know-how, its own answers to the world of water which will meet on the occasion of the 9th World Water Forum. This Forum, as Mr.Minister Thiam told you a few moments ago, is co-organized

by the Republic of Senegal, the City of Dakar, and the World Water Council.

This 9th World Water Forum will be the Forum of solutions and responses as populations demand to give real expression to access to water for all.

Join us to win this peaceful battle.

Join us and become a member of the World Water Council.

Thank you for your contribution.

Congratulations for this new innovative edition of the Cairo Water Week which enlarges the participation to scientists, students, young professionals, best practices for farmers, to bring the voice of water from Egypt to the world.

Thank you for your support and your hospitality.

I wish all of you, full success in the work of the 4<sup>th</sup> Cairo Water Week.