

Opening IWRA Congress, Daegu

Dear President Eckstein,

Mr. Mayor of DEAGU,

Mr. Ministers,

Dear participants, Dear Friends of Water

It is a great pleasure to be with you today in Daegu, despite the difficulties due to the pressure of Covid.

The World Water Council and its Governors who are present with me, have very warm memories of the 7th World Water Forum organized here in Daegu in March 2015. I would also like to underline the very strong links that our Council has maintained with all the organizers of this congress. IWRA of course, the Daegu municipality, K Water and K Water Forum and the Ministry of Environment of Korea. The influence of the 7th Forum, especially on the importance of innovation in water security, still inspires us today and for the future.

Dear colleagues, why are we gathered here in the great water nation of Korea?

Why are all the water managers and authorities in the world working together to ensure access to water?

Because the planet is thirsty, because it is getting more and more thirsty. And when the planet is thirsty, people are hungry. And the world is not only thirsty for water and not only hungry for food. No, the world's inhabitants are also thirsty and hungry for progress, development, and equity. And the need for water is increasing every day, every year, because populations are growing in almost every country. And it is also due to the improvement of living standards, the growing equipment of families, cars, food production, which are constantly consuming more water.

And the evolution of the climate comes in addition, with its uncertainties, with its injustices. Some regions, some human communities will receive more water, torrential rains, floods. Other human communities will experience more heat, drought, lack of water. And we don't know which ones yet ! But when there is too much water or too little water, either too much or too little, this

creates crises and tensions for people, but also for the environment, biodiversity and ecosystems.

Yes, dear colleagues, the world is in danger when water and air are themselves in danger. Because protecting and respecting water and air means allowing life, allowing food, allowing health, education and therefore peace and development.

This is why water, like air, has become an essential element of geo-strategy, a component of geopolitics. And this is why water is above all a political priority. This priority is important as we have become aware, step by step, of a new obligation. It is the obligation to share between Man and Nature. Today the human impact on nature is too strong, often violent. This new obligation obliges us to a harmonious and balanced sharing between human development and protection of biodiversity and ecosystems.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, our public and collective mission, as citizens of the world, is to guarantee the security of water for us all and by us all. And for that we must consume less, consume better, and protect the resources and the conservation of nature. This will be the objective, the motto of the next few decades.

As you know, this mission must be based on three pillars. The first is knowledge and innovation which are to be shared and not begged.

The second one is finance which should be adapted, and not granted. The situation of water financing can be summed up as follows : water is short of money and money is short of water. There are two conditions on which the World Water Council is working. The first one is to help the poorest, the least prepared, to make projects bankable. The second is to generalize the principle of sub-sovereignty by gradually giving the local authorities the possibility to finance investments from their own budget, with national and international aid.

The third is governance, which must be clearly accepted and not imposed on citizens. Let us understand that the era of water centralization will soon come to an end, step by step. Water management has to be smoothly shared between the State, government and parliament, Basin authorities and local communities.

They must each, in their own role, share the availability of resources, ensure quantity and quality, as well as treatment and cost collection.

But guaranteeing water security also requires a special attention to a more sensitive issue. It is the case of water reserves or water storage systems.

With demography and climate, there are more and more regions in the world which are experiencing scarcity. This is why it is urgent to rethink the concept of dams. We need to enter a new era, to prefer reservoirs of aquatic biodiversity, which can both guarantee water for today and water for tomorrow, and at the same time protect ecosystems.

I would also like to underline the importance of rural areas. For years, we have only talked about "smart cities" when it comes to innovation, but never about "smart rural areas." Who, however, guarantees water protection? Who is responsible for water production? Who is responsible for the preservation of forests and rural areas? People from rural areas, not city inhabitants. Where does the food come from? The farmers, not the city inhabitants.

Allow me to conclude by mentioning the right to water. It is a complicated right that is simple to declare but difficult to enforce in practice. For more than two decades, we have demanded that every human being have access to sufficient, high-quality water at a cost that is affordable to the poorest.

Some of the numerous possible solutions include the inclusion of the right to water in constitutions, the availability of free minimum allowances, or social tariffs. The solutions are political, and we must insist that they be provided.

Dear colleague, dear friends of water,

The organizers of this 17th Water Congress are to be thanked for the choice of theme: "Foundations for global water security based on knowledge, technology and policy."

These issues are essential for the future of humanity.

The World Water Council has been insisting for more than 10 years on innovation to increase the available water supply.

We also say that the use of water should be more economical and more respectful. And that the sentence "consume less, consume better" should be based on knowledge, finance and governance. We believe in the necessity of new storage capacities, in a more efficient link between the rural and urban worlds and in the uncompromising affirmation of the individual and collective right to access and free use of water.

Our World Water Council appreciates that its ideas are shared and valued.

This is why four years ago, with our Senegalese partners, we wanted to focus on water security, cooperation, rural development and innovation during the next World Water Forum to be held in March 2022 in Dakar.

We want these issues to be the subject of very concrete proposals. We call them responses, proposals that will improve the daily lives of billions of people.

These proposals, these ideas, these actions, thanks to you IWRA, but also to you Korean stakeholders, thanks to your commitment, thanks to your expertise, our Council will continue to carry them forward after Dakar, again and again, because water is a political priority every day, every year.

Yes, dear friends, thank you for what you will bring during this congress to Dakar, and beyond.

If there is only one thing you should remember from my speech it would be: Water is politics and it is the only way to stop water misery. Water is politics. Water is above all a political issue to which every citizen has the duty to contribute.

Thank you Daegu, thank you Korea, thank you IWRA for contributing to this peaceful battle for access to water.

Great success to the congress and have a good day.