

Message from Pierre Victoria, Governor Alternate of the World Water Council
PECC, November 13th, 2007

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to apologize for not attending the Bora-Bora seminar about water management in Island Territories, Coastal Regions and Isolated communities. We are discussing, in this precise moment in Marseille, the details of the next Forum in Istanbul 2009, especially the political process.

There have been four Fora before Istanbul but there has never been a focus group of potential participants to see, right at the beginning of the process, what is feasible in the current political climate. The high level group we have gathered is a “test-drive” of the Forum. We are building a different approach to make this Forum more efficient. We already have 6 themes : 1) Global changes and Risk Management ; 2) Advancing human Development and the MDG’s; 3) Managing and Protecting water resources and their supply systems to meet human and environmental needs; 4) Governance and Management; 5) Finance; 6) Education, knowledge and capacity building. And we’ll have 25 to 30 topics and about 100 sessions. We’re trying to restrain the number of sessions in order to have a qualitative and better oriented organisation. It’s a unique opportunity to exchange and learn and I would like to invite the PECC to contribute to this cause.

The PECC work is meant to be integrated on the Istanbul Forum which title is “*bridging divides for water*”, as clearly stated by Loïc Fauchon, Chair of the World Water Council, in the letter he sent on June 29th, 2007, to Mr. Jacques Le Blanc. In this letter, Loïc Fauchon wrote: “*I would like to thank you all for this initiative about island territories and isolated communities. Your approach because it is meant to last and it is based on the reality of this area could certainly be integrated in the preparatory process which will lead to the [5th World Water] forum [to be held in 2009 in Istanbul]*”.

Loïc Fauchon added : “*As you all know, the next Asia Pacific Water Summit will take place in Japan next December. The World Water Council is strongly committed in the preparation of this major event. The PECC could take this opportunity in Japan next December to present the work done until now*”. [Please take a copy of this letter from Loïc Fauchon].

As Governor Alternate of the World Water Council, I am expecting the results of this PECC Seminar, since I am going to this Asia Pacific Summit in December.

Help is needed to facilitate the process forward, rallying high level political support, making the outcome be relevant to the interests of those who will be potentially involved and to link the topics of concern of various groups and regions around the world into a final document.

Island Territories, Coastal Regions and Isolated communities were almost forgotten during the Mexico Forum or at least, the Forum didn't really focus on this issue. The World Water Council has acknowledged the vulnerability and particular need of Small Island Countries by including the "Water in Small Island Countries" theme in the Third World Water Forum. The political support given by governments since 2003 has allowed the development of the Pacific Regional Action Plan, endorsed by 18 countries.

We should keep this topic on top of the agenda for many reasons; climate change is obviously one of them. But we should not forget that access to drinking water for all is a crucial priority.

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Let me first start with what appears to be the most worrying problem. Access to water and sanitation is one of the 8 commitments made by the United Nations for 2015. It is not just one of the Millennium Development Goals. On the contrary, it is the focal point of these goals, as it conditions the implementation of all the others: lowering infant mortality rate, universal primary education, promotion of women, etc.

Less than 10 years are left to achieve the Millennium Development Goals to halve, by 2015, the number of people without access to water and sanitation, first step to an universal service by 2025.

Thanks to the rapid progress made by China and India, the United Nations are confident that overall targets will be met. But the message coming from people on the ground is very different. Other than in Asia, the increase in the growth of service is behind schedule. Without a shift into high gear, in particular for sanitation, the international community will not meet its commitments, especially in Africa. East Asia and the Pacific will meet the water MDG in 2014 and the Sanitation MDG in 2018; Sub Sahara Africa, completely off track, will reach the MDG in 2040 for drinking water and in 2076 for sanitation.

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Political will, legal instruments, financial resources and human capacity, many of the needs of the Pacific could be addressed through the implementation of Integrated Resource Water Management.

And we should admit that this topic deserves our attention.

Islands and Pacific island countries are no different from other countries, in that freshwater is essential to human existence and a major requirement in agricultural production systems. But the ability of these islands is constrained by the small size, fragility, vulnerability and limited human and financial resource base.

I'll sum up some of the lessons learned from the Mexico Forum :

- In Mexico, we had the example of the Fiji. Information was lacking and the information that was collected by various government departments' agencies was not exchanged, the coordination of monitoring was absent. It was decided to address water governance, through a specialized agency on water resources in order to coordinate information and data exchange.

- Some interesting progress was made in the region and I would like to thank the actors in the region for what they've achieved : Fiji, with the National Water Committee and the cross-sectoral water policy; Papua New Guinea with the National Water Association; Tuvalu, which has reviewed the plan and it includes more integrated management approaches; Samoa, with two new national water policies...

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In the meantime, the Pacific is a region impacted by climate variability and the results of extreme events have a disproportional impact on small economies. Water resources on islands with limited storage are affected by climatic influences. The limited storage is also a problem, meteorological and hydrological services need to be integrated for better informed decision making and planning.

Concern is growing and no one should feel free from problems. Believe it or not, but we face the same difficulties as you in our islands in France. Some of them are confronted to scarcities.

Belle Ile en Mer is an island on the French west coast, not far from where I come from. Such a region shouldn't have recourse (fall back on) to desalinization. For those who had their holidays ruined in the near Brittany, rainfall was a problem because of the excess, not the scarcity. But still, in 2005, Belle Ile was plagued by a water shortage after a 3 year drought ! As a consequence, local authorities decided to supply the island by a desalinization unit that was implemented this year. Rainfall changes involve uncertain collection of rainwater which is a major resource in numerous island countries; most of the time, desalination is beyond their means.

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There are some lessons learned, concerns and challenges ahead. The challenges ahead are the capacity building of course, anticipation and good governance of the water business, in which all stakeholders must play a role. Identifying roles, responsibilities and linkages is crucial.

A good water policy can't be effective without a clarification of responsibilities between public authorities, service operators and financing organisations. Good governance, above all, requires formalizing the rights and duties between the stakeholders, in particular those who consume most water: farmers. The role of the organizing authority is to continually drive the operation: there can be no efficient operator without a strong organizing authority.

As mentioned in the Guidelines for Effective Public Private Partnership published in 2007 by PECC, trust is the key word. Trust is the key word for Public Private Partnership but trust is also the key word for an effective governance in the water sector, with or without the participation of the private sector. No water users can be mobilized to save a scarce resource without trust. No fund to develop alternative water resources such as wastewater reuse or desalination can be raised without trust. Trust means a clear sharing of roles between partners involved (local authorities, constructors, lenders, operators, etc); transparency through procedures for transferring information; a strict respect of the autonomy given to the different partners, whatever their status; performance evaluation criteria.

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There is, normally, no international competition to access to raw water resources, except in the case of trans-boundary rivers or aquifers. The cross-border river basins necessarily increase the economic and ecological interdependence of the states they cross, with a risk of unsustainable competition between different countries.

But competition between users take place first inside the same nation. In India competition for water is escalating in many parts of the country. Chennai, in the state of Tamil Nadu, is a model of a water-short city extending its hydrological reach. It is completing a 230 kilometre pipe to bring water from the Cauvery River basin—one of the most water-constrained basins in India and the source of a long-running dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Competition between users is increasing in intensity. In the Pallakad district of Kerala the abstraction of groundwater by a multinational soft drink company has depleted the aquifer, dried up several wells and caused serious environmental damage. In a repeat episode on the outskirts of Mumbai, the same company has provoked protests by farmers against its water abstraction operations to serve the fast growing middle-class mineral water market in the city.

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Water is a source of human interdependence. Within any country, water is a shared resource serving multiple constituencies, from the environment to agriculture, industry and households. As mentioned in the 2006 UNDP Human Development Report, water is the ultimate fugitive resource. It crosses frontiers, linking users across borders in a system of hydrological interdependence. 2 out of 3 of the world's major rivers are shared among several countries. The Nile flows among 10 countries. Water remains a recurrent tension among countries, numerous cross-border rivers lack coordinating agencies, remaining the privilege to the countries which are upstream. But cooperation should replace competition; it is from an inter-State cooperation that river management could prove the optimum solution. Some countries are moving fast and other should be encouraged to do so.

The Nile Basin Initiative is a recent and interesting initiative. Until recently, water issues were limited to volumetric allocations between Egypt and Sudan. But the initiative now focuses on a range of benefits that can be reaped across the entire basin, from hydropower to flood control and environmental sustainability, and a Strategic Action Programme is under way to identify cooperative projects. Some donors are trying to promote the participation of civil society groups through the Nile International Discourse Desk.

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Problems over water have been solved through negotiations. Throughout history, governments have found innovative and cooperative solutions to transboundary water management tensions, even in the most difficult political environments. But some problems are still worrying.

2008 is the year of sanitation. “Sanitation bombs” are thrown below the table, waiting to explode in 10 to 20 years time. Sanitation will lead to scarcity and tension. With pollution comes epidemics and if there’s an epidemic that starts in a mega city we don't know where it will stop. Sanitation bombs will strike either cities or rural communities.

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In some regions and it is the case of Small Island countries, water is a far too precious resource to be used only once and then returned to nature.

- According to UNEP, 25 % of the world’s population lives within 25 kms of the coast. Desalination, but also wastewater reuse, are technologies that need to be developed on a broader scale.
- Recycling used water is a way of producing water for industrial, agricultural or domestic purposes, such as irrigation, industrial processes...
- Development of irrigation and supplemental irrigation in agriculture has a critical role in increasing food security, especially in semi arid regions since almost one third of the world’s surface is covered by that kind of area. 18% of arable land are irrigated and responsible for 40% of the world’s crop production and employ 30% of the population spread over rural areas. There is still scope for medium and small scale public, and private irrigation, especially in Africa and Islands.

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I’ll take this opportunity to express two deep convictions:

1) The first is that water crisis is, most of the time, the result of deficient water governance. In small island countries, governance is highly complex. There are rights and interests linked to

cultural and traditional community structures. Many economies of the Pacific continue to be dependent on external assistance for the water sector. True partnerships, by all stakeholders, must prevail. Once again, we'll be glad to have your contribution to the Istanbul Forum and we must keep learning from the good work done at the PECC.

2) The second conviction is that water deserves bringing together our capacities and intelligence. We definitively want walls of water rather than walls of indifference and contempt. We definitively want men, women and children in any situation and from any continent to be born with an irrevocable equal right to access water, in cities and rural areas, isolated communities, island territories...

As M. Fauchon said in Mexico, water deserves tending hands, gathering hearts and merging minds.

Thank you for your attention

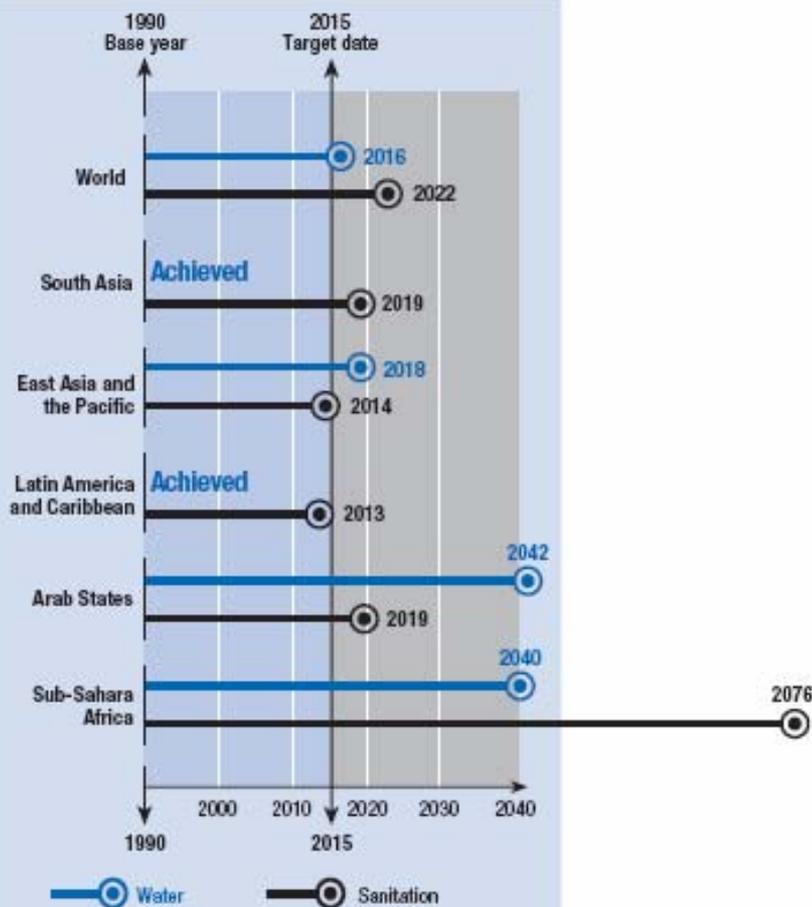
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Message from Pierre Victoria,
Governor Alternate of the World Water Council

Some regions are off track

Figure 1.20 Some regions are off track for reaching the Millennium Development Goal target for water and sanitation.



Source: Calculated based on UNICEF 2006b.

Water: 55 countries are off track, and the target will be missed by about 234.5 million people, with a total of 800 million people still lacking access to water.

Sanitation: 74 countries are off track, and the target will be missed by 430 million people, with 2.1 billion still lacking access to sanitation.