

Bridges over troubled water: Water Security is Human Security

Remarks by Dr Ursula Schaefer-Preuss, Chair, Global Water Partnership

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Ladies and Gentlemen;

I am very pleased and honored to address this Forum. I would like to thank the organizers for their wonderful arrangements and warm hospitality.

Before sharing a few thoughts with you on the topic of my presentation “Bridges over troubled waters: Water Security is Human Security” let me express our gratitude to the Kingdom of Morocco which is tirelessly contributing to elevate water as a global communal concern. We all know that the first World Water Forum was held here in Marrakesh in 1997. The declaration of Marrakesh recommends, in particular, “action to recognize the basic human needs to have access to clean water and sanitation, to establish an effective mechanism for managing shared waters, to support and preserve ecosystems, to encourage the efficient use of water, to address gender equity issues and encourage partnership between the members of Civil Society and Governments..” end of quote.

I come to you from the Global Water Partnership an international network open to organizations both within and outside the water community, including government institutions, UN agencies, NGOs, civil society groups and the private sector. Our vision is for a water secure world. A water secure world is vital for a better future; a future in which there is enough water for social development, for sustainable and inclusive growth, and for ecosystems. A water secure world integrates a concern for the intrinsic value of water together with its full range of uses for human survival and well-being.

A water secure world harnesses the productive power of water and minimises its destructive force. It is a world where every person has

enough safe, affordable, clean water to lead a healthy and productive life. It is a world where communities are protected from floods, droughts, landslides, erosion, and water borne diseases. Water security addresses environmental protection as well as social justice and the impacts of poor management; all of which will become more challenging as climate variability increases.

A water secure world reduces poverty and improves living standards. The human rights to water and sanitation are now enshrined in international law. Putting this into practice will ensure that the quality of life is improved for all especially for the most vulnerable, particularly women and children, who benefit most from good water governance.

I would like to stress that in our vision water security is human security. As such, social equity in water management is primarily about people, not water. Water may be allocated equitably, distributed equitably, and even accessed equitably, but if people are unable to derive benefits from it, the end result is not social equity. Thus it is not enough to consider only policies and processes within the water sector, but also the combined effect of these with other policies in other sectors and national development and economic policies. Ultimately, social equity should be judged by the final situation of people, and the distribution of the totality of benefits from water, both direct and indirect.

We all know that today, too many people still lack access to water, food, and energy. The rising social risks and gender disparities of water supply, which add to the burden of women and girls in particular, are unacceptable.

A human rights-based approach must be used to remove these inequalities and achieve sustainable development. Indeed, a human rights-based approach supports the view that people have a right to actively participate in development. With regard to water, the focus is on the rights and obligations that relate to water resources management. Particularly, on those to whom these rights and

obligations apply and the deficiencies there may be in their application in order to contribute to more equitable resource allocation. Therefore, framing development in terms of human rights can be seen as a tool to galvanise collective action. This requires:

- country ownership and leadership (with a consensus on the benefits of the Human Right Based Approach);
- enshrinement into national law (it is essential that the law contains human rights principles);
- capacity building (both on the side of civil society and communities but also authorities); and
- increasing citizen awareness and oversight to improve transparency and accountability in decisions concerning water resources access and supply. Governments can be pushed by civil society to implement policies and allocate water in ways that further implement rights.

The message emerging from the current international debates on setting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 is one of urgency for the world to act to prevent water crises. The size of today's water security challenge should not be underestimated. The social, economic, and political consequences of water shortages are as real as disastrous floods and droughts. Threats to water security come from many quarters – rapidly growing and urbanising populations with changing lifestyles and consumption patterns; competition from agriculture, industry, and energy; unpredictable risks from climate change and environmental degradation; and growing tension over scarce water resources that flow across administrative boundaries. All of us can, and must, find ways to safeguard water and, with it, the future of humanity.

We in the Global Water Partnership strongly believe that the SDGs should set new strategies in motion governing the way we live and interact with our environment to ensure there will be enough water to

support development and future generations. Global sustainability is, fundamentally, about our ability to influence the future of our freshwater resources and the future of humanity. We recognize this is a complex undertaking. Good management of both natural and human induced water problems requires a broad set of stakeholders to engage in long-term collaboration. This is about stewardship of water resources for the greatest good of societies and the environment. Stewardship is a public responsibility requiring dynamic, adaptable, participatory, and balanced planning and, at the end of the day, it is all about coordinating and sharing.

My talk is about building bridges to connect the water community with the human rights community. The strengths of these two communities complement each other. Building the bridges requires dialogue and partnerships, working, planning and conceiving together each at its own level and with its own mandate. By combining government policy-making with NGO's contact with the people, together they will make the right to water an imperative of the present and not a desire of the future. Working together is not optional: it is essential if we are to achieve our vision of a world in which all have access to safe water, effective sanitation, and enough water to grow food. We can and must achieve that vision! This requires fundamental changes in values, beliefs, perceptions and political positions among all stakeholders.

Thank you for your kind attention