

**WORLD HIGH-LEVEL PANEL**  
**“WATER AND PEACE”**  
**DAKAR – SENEGAL – 5 APRIL 2016**  
**SPEECH BY JEAN-FRANÇOIS DONZIER**

Secretary of the International Network of Basin Organizations

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Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Heads of Delegation, Dear Colleagues and Friends of Basin Organizations.

It is a great honour for the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO) to be able to speak before you on the occasion of this World High-level Panel on “Water and Peace”.

It is said that "where there is a Will there is a Way".

**This is definitely what we need today, a strong and lasting political will in the long term to face a critical situation.**

The overall situation is serious:

- The quality of water deteriorates,
- The aquatic environments are eutrophic,
- The ecosystems are destroyed or in poor ecological status.

85% of pollutant emissions are not treated and discharged into natural environments and non-point source pollution, mainly from agricultural origin, is not controlled.

But above all, freshwater is already and will be most clearly "the first victim of climate change".

The ambitious agreement reached in Paris in December 2015, at the COP 21, to drastically reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases will only have a visible effect at the beginning of next century...

By then, the regime of all our rivers and the water level of our aquifers will be significantly modified!

In just a few decades, climate change will increase the frequency, intensity and seriousness of floods and droughts....

What will we do if...

- For the supply of drinking water, catchments are drying up?
- For hydropower, dam reservoirs are no longer filled?
- For food, there is a shortage of irrigation water?
- We remain unable to cool thermal power plants and, even worse, nuclear power plants?
- How can we guarantee waterway transport or the production of fish for food?
- How can we protect populations against more severe and more frequent flooding?

**Freshwater is a “time bomb” for all our societies!**

**Conflicts over access to freshwater will multiply, firstly at the local level, then at the State level, when transboundary resources have to be shared.**

**Water is becoming a major threat to World Peace, although not sufficiently evoked at high level....**

Thus, it is therefore necessary to adapt and face the major challenges for our planet that are, in particular, the quick human population growth and its needs for food, energy and transport, and the adaptation to the effects of climate change that we cannot avoid.

It is right now that we must take action to adapt to these inevitable changes. **We have no time to lose!**

**We must organize the management of surface and ground water resources and aquatic ecosystems where they are, that is to say at the level of local, national or transboundary basins or sub-basins of rivers, lakes and aquifers.**

Do not forget that aquatic ecosystems are not only an irreplaceable natural heritage and unique biodiversity reserve, but they are also a "green infrastructure" playing a very effective role in regulating and preserving water resources, as well as in self-cleaning some kinds of pollution: we must protect them and restore them when thoughtlessly destroyed.

**River basin organizations, in various forms and with different mandates, have an essential role to play in implementing a real integrated management policy in their respective territories.**

They must be given clear mandates as well as human, technical and financial resources to enable them to fulfill their role effectively and support to their establishment in river basins where they do not exist.

**There are 276 rivers, 156 lakes and at least 400 transboundary aquifers.**

At transboundary level, the riparian countries establishing joint bodies bring obvious benefits for:

- Ensuring dialogue and avoiding conflicts,
- Sharing information and summarizing it,
- Developing joint action plans,
- Building structures and facilities of multilateral interest,
- Monitoring the effects of projects and producing indicators to facilitate decision making,
- Facilitating the sharing of benefits of joint management.

In short, ensuring peace between the riparian countries of the same basin!

**Once again, joint bodies should have a clear mandate and the human, technical and financial resources needed to carry out their mission effectively.**

**You Can't Manage What You Don't Measure!**

Available information on the status of water resources and, still more, on aquifer ecosystems, is insufficient to allow real diagnostics, set priorities and implement responsible management and monitoring.

But the exchange of reliable information is the basis on which to build dialogue between all partners, allowing them to make joint and unquestionable assessments: data sharing is the path to peace and agreement between the parties.

It is thus necessary to implement proper information systems on water and ecosystems, with adequate sustainable resources for investment and operation. But today too few resources are devoted to them and many projects are not lasting for lack of commitments to ensure their operation over time.

**Also, nothing can be done without the involvement of representatives of the different economic sectors, local authorities and associations, all working in the field and who are the real agents of change.**

A partnership, in particular, between the sectors of electricity, navigation, mining and agriculture is essential. We must work "out of the water box" and in an intersectoral way.

The creation of "**Basin Councils or Committees**" in appropriate forms, appears today as a mean of involving all stakeholders in the management of water resources and ecosystems. They have been proven wherever they were introduced, but this requires substantial resources for information, data access and training to decision-making for their members, as indeed for the entire population from whom acceptance must be obtained of a common vision for the future of their basin, defined through dialogue.

**But of course, nothing can be done in the very short term and water policy takes time to be applied and bear fruit:** Management Plans or Basin Master Plans should set targets to be achieved in the medium and long terms and to be implemented in a given period through the development of Programs of Measures and successive multiyear priority investments, which require mobilizing **significant amounts** of funds that will have to be obtained especially by the application of the "polluter pays" systems and "user pays" principle, which will only be possible with the acceptance of the populations concerned. As regards adaptation, basin governance projects should become a Green Fund financing priority.

**Regarding droughts:** control of water demands is a priority with, of course, the creation of reserves and the implementation of natural water retention measures: water saving, wastage reduction, leak detection, recycling, reuse of treated wastewater, groundwater recharge, desalination of sea water, irrigation modernization, research on low-consumption uses ... must become priorities!

**For flood control:** a strategic basin approach is needed and based on an increased upstream-downstream common cause!

Once again, the creation of reserves and the implementation of natural water retention measures should be considered in an integrated prevention and control plan, including the protection of people and property, the reduction of vulnerabilities, the forecasting of risk events, the control of urbanization and soil sealing, the reopening of flood-prone natural areas, means for warning and educating people.

**Finally and in conclusion:**

**We should not "reinvent the wheel"**

- Many successful experiments have already been made in the field.
- Basin management has been working and positively been recognized for over 50 years and in many countries for the last 20 years.
- Transboundary water management agreements are applied without major difficulties, when there is a common will of the riparian States, especially under the UN Water conventions, the UNECE Water Convention of 1992 and the New York Convention of 1996, and the European Water Framework Directive and under the AMCOW policy, but also in all other regions of the world.
- OMVS is certainly one of the most successful examples of effective cooperation on a basin scale; its accomplishments should be better known all over the world, because it is an excellent model of solidarity and shared management between the four riparian countries!

We must therefore identify good practices and disseminate them by mobilizing experts' knowledge, through platforms for the exchange of experience and the training of the staffs of Basin Organizations and of their partners. This is INBO's main objective: sharing best practices. This will be again the topic of our next World General Assembly to be held from 1 to 4 June 2016 in Merida, Mexico, to which you are, of course, all invited!.

**The problems are often not technical but mainly institutional and financial; we should follow the example of these undeniable successes.**

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nothing is possible without a strong political will of all the World's countries.

Freshwater management should also be a priority for donors, not just to finance major infrastructure, but also good governance tools.

We must therefore get mobilized to win the water battle and prepare the future for the future generations.

**Integrated management of water resources and aquatic ecosystems in basins is an obligation, but it is profitable for our societies.**

**We need you!**

Thank you for your attention