



MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES ET EUROPÉENNES

6th World Water Forum

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HENRI DE RAINCOURT
French Minister in charge of Cooperation

Lake Chad Workshop Speech

Mr President of the Republic of Chad,

Ministers,

Your Excellencies the Ambassadors,

Representatives of the Lake Chad Commission and
representatives of the international community,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be with you today at this high-level workshop on Lake Chad. My presence here is testimony both to the wish of the President of the Republic that France should be represented by a member of the government at this important event, and to my own personal interest in a subject that has such a large impact on the lives of 30 million Africans.



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Mr President,

I believe that the issue of Lake Chad exemplifies the new challenges that must be addressed by developing countries and the responses that the international community must bring to bear, working alongside them. We are at the heart of these issues that have brought so many of us together here in Marseille. We are at the heart of interlocking dimensions – environmental, economic and political. We are at the heart of the development of Chad, of the region, of Africa and, it is my belief, of a large part of humanity. Indeed, we have here, as you have said Mr President, Africa's second largest freshwater reserve, which in just twenty years has shrunk by half before our very eyes. The causes of that decline can be found both in the climate and in human activities. It is legitimate and useful for experts to analyse in great detail the reasons for its shrinkage, a subject to which I shall return. But for the populations concerned, for the region's economies and, I believe, for the proper ecological balance of the planet as a whole, an environmental upset on this scale is quite simply intolerable and remedies must be found. Those solutions are to be found by Chadians, by neighbouring countries, by the international community and, first and foremost, by the friends of Africa, among which France has the privilege of being counted.



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The preservation of what is a global public good, freshwater reserves, is not dictated by some uncompromising, abstract conservationist dogma. What is above all of concern to us here is the welfare of local populations. For them the lake is a means of subsistence, and survival in some cases, and they have also proved to be capable of adapting to changed conditions, such is the genius of humanity. The retreat of the lake's waters has meant that some who once fished now farm, and some who were nomads now lead sedentary lives. However, the relationship human societies build with their environment is complex, fragile and sometimes unstable. This is a region in which the risk of conflict linked to the increasing scarcity of natural resources is a reality. This is also a region hard hit by recurrent food insecurity. France has directed its efforts against that scourge wherever it has been able to do so, acting both on its own account and in international forums, notably the G20, at the instigation of the President of the Republic.

What has perhaps been lacking until now in projects to protect Lake Chad, is that local populations have not been able to make their voice heard sufficiently. However, the many projects that you have just presented to us, Mr President, stem



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from just such a new approach, one that involves taking as a starting point the needs expressed by countries – governments naturally, but also civil society and local communities. “Ownership”, a term familiar to the development community, all too often remains an abstraction. But the projects that have been described for us are projects conceived by Africans for Africans. As the donor community well knows, because they have made it a recurrent theme of their meetings on aid effectiveness, such projects are those that have most chance of success. It is such projects, designed for the best possible fit with the concerns of local populations, that offer the best cost-benefit ratio and they must have priority for funding in the present budgetary situation. This is a deeply held belief for France, one that flows from the principles of the Paris Declaration and which now provides the guiding thread for our cooperation policy.

Mr President,

You can be confident that France will support your initiative and we shall endeavour to mobilise all our partners in order that each should examine the ways in which they can contribute to the projects that have been presented. I have particularly in mind here the European bodies in which France will make



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every effort to ensure that the needs of the populations in the Lake Chad basin are heard, understood and addressed. It goes without saying that the donors will need to take the necessary time to examine each of the projects. And while this workshop in Marseille represents essential and, I believe, decisive progress towards the mobilisation of the donor community, we are not starting out with a blank sheet of paper. Specifically, there is an imperative need to conduct detailed studies of the parameters for integrated management of the water resources of the Lake Chad basin. France, working through the FFEM (French Global Environment Facility) has been addressing these issues for several years and it is my pleasure to be able to announce that a major study project has just been finalised. The relevant agreement can be signed following this meeting. It covers an initial tranche of funding of €800,000 out of a total of €12 million for the project, which also relates to aspects linked to water governance and capacity-building for the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC).

With this move, and implementation of the first of the projects presented here today, France is demonstrating its belief in the preservation of Lake Chad. It is indicating that it has taken the welfare of the local populations to heart and is convinced that combined action by the countries in the region,



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along with international actors, can save this treasure of the natural world, which is located in Africa but belongs to the whole of humanity. Several years ago now, France focused effort on ensuring that forests, and African forests in particular, are considered a global public good of essential importance in the context of global warming and afforded special treatment in the Climate Convention. Such an approach seemed utopian at the time. But gradually, innovative mechanisms have come into place to encourage forest protection and contribute to improving the living conditions of local populations. In the face of the challenges posed by development and the environment, today's utopia can sometimes be tomorrow's realism. That is the real importance of our commitment to innovative financing. And that is why I am so optimistic as to the success of the mobilisation in favour of Lake Chad.

Mr President,

This workshop in Marseille has not enabled you to put forward a utopia but rather to offer hope. You can rely on France to stand alongside you and I am sure that our European partners will follow our lead. I also salute the presence of the financial institutions of the Arab countries whose commitment to development is well known and who are well aware of the



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issues of aridity and desertification. A gathering of all these actors is a sign that during this 6th World Water Forum in Marseille, one that announces that it is “Time for Solutions”, all the solutions to settle issues of access to water around the world will perhaps not be found, but where Africa is concerned, hopes have certainly been raised for Lake Chad, thanks to your faith, Mr President, and those hopes are shared and supported by France.

I thank you./.