



MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES ET EUROPÉENNES

6th World Water Forum

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HENRI DE RAINCOURT
French Minister in charge of Cooperation

Ministerial Conference

High-Level Roundtable: “Water for Development in Africa”

Ministers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be with you here this morning. This Forum, which we have spent a great deal of time preparing over the past several months, has finally given us the chance to meet together here today. I would first like to thank the governments of South Africa, Niger, Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Togo and all of you, my esteemed colleagues, for offering to organize this roundtable.

The French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, which was given the important responsibility of conducting the political process of the 6th World Water Forum, found this method for the working sessions, as established at the 5th World



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Water Forum in Istanbul in addition to the ministerial declaration, to be very useful. Governments or groups of countries who so wish can move forward and share their solutions and their commitments with other governments, and more generally with other Forum participants, representatives from civil society, international organizations and the private sector. So I would like to sincerely thank you for demonstrating that the time we spend sharing ideas and working so extensively is worth it, given the number of people participating here today.

I would also like to thank you for the theme that you have chosen: water for development in Africa. At a time when in addition to the Forum, we are preparing for the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development which addresses a theme entitled “the green economy in the context of poverty eradication”, I know how important water issues are for Africa.

First, African peoples are extremely affected by insufficient access to safe drinking water and the problem is worse for sanitation, yet in today’s world they are everyone’s right. The population is growing faster than infrastructures are being developed, making it difficult to provide basic urban services. The rate at which sanitation is falling behind is particularly



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alarming because it affects public health, undermines the education of girls, limits the productivity of families and pollutes sub-soils and housing areas. In the countryside, access to water is the biggest problem, and again women and children are affected.

I would like to commend the national reforms undertaken in several countries, at times with France's support, that have significantly helped to improve access to water and sanitation services and to give concrete expression to this right with more effective sector-based frameworks and capacity building. I would also like to commend the national "A l'Eau l'Afrique" dialogues with government representatives and all those concerned by water management that have been held during the last months in the five West African countries co-chairing this session. These dialogues are a requirement for good water management at national and local level. They are also a way to raise the general public's awareness. It is paramount for everyone to understand the issues and then to be able to act accordingly.

Along with African countries and other donors, France wants to improve the effectiveness of instruments that would accelerate the implementation of the right to safe drinking water



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and sanitation for all. It strongly supports the revitalization of two African Development Bank initiatives: the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative and the African Water Facility, in connection with the African Ministers' Council on Water.

These two instruments have already amassed valuable experience and produced undeniable results in the field, and they need fresh political and financial support. I will unfortunately be unable to be with you tomorrow, for the day the African Development Bank and the African Ministers' Council on Water will devote to these two instruments. But I would now like to announce that France is going to renew its commitment by pledging another €40 million to the Rural Initiative in the hope that its operation will improve to optimize its leverage and articulation with the Water Facility.

But I would also like to stress, because we tend to speak first of those who do not have water or sanitation, that Africa's water potential is considerable on the continent as a whole. Africa is irrigated by powerful rivers that are also commercial waterways. This potential should be tapped because it could generate growth. To produce more food and generate income for farmers, irrigated area could be increased. Hydropower potential is likewise underexploited whereas hydropower could



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play a major role in future economic development. That is an essential topic the G20 addressed at France's instigation.

When water resources are shared, joint and responsible management by the riparian States is key, in mutual trust. And the benefits produced, namely the economic benefits, are good for everyone. Regional cooperation frameworks are effective instruments to accomplish this, and France is proud to provide assistance to several African Basin authorities in developing them. I have already talked about this topic many times, but I would just like to say once again how important France considers the upcoming entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UN Watercourses Convention), which will provide an incentive-based framework for cooperation with respect to the governance of shared waters as well as an instrument to further the growth and development of Africa.

Last October, I attended the Bamako Forum at the invitation of the Malian government and the Chirac Foundation. We discussed these issues there, with a particular focus on the Niger river region, but with possible solutions that were much farther-reaching. Yesterday, the follow-up session of this Forum



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showed the importance of political support at the highest level if things are to progress. That is why governments have a special responsibility via this Forum. It is our duty to take the messages that we have prepared here beyond Marseille, to Rio in June, and then to New York. But every one of us must also bring these messages back to our own countries. I am convinced that this session could help achieve these ambitious goals and I commend all the participants for their commitment and the action they have taken to further this cause that makes such a difference to all our peoples.

Thank you./.