

SOLIDARITY TO BRING WATER TO AFRICANS¹

Greetings and Salutations

President Omar Kabbaj,
Excellency Amor El Abad
The Honorable Alhaji Muhktari Shagari
Honorable Ministers,
Members of the Board of Directors, African Development Bank Group,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honored by the invitation of the Organizing Committee for their invitation to address this gathering at the First African Development Bank Water Week.

African Water Vision

President Kabbaj referred in his remarks to the World Water Vision. This Vision was arrived at through the participation of 15,000 water experts and other stakeholders in the Year 2000. They envisioned a world in 2025 in which almost every woman and man, girl and boy in the world's cities, towns, and villages will enjoy safe and adequate water and sanitation and have enough food to meet their nutritional requirements. It would be a healthy world - for them, and for all species that inhabit the Earth with them.

The African Water Vision, which was an input to the global Vision, which was sponsored by the African Development Bank, was even more specific in setting targets for the years 2005, 2015 and 2025 - so that progress could be tracked. In fact these targets for Africa were even more ambitious than those adopted by the United Nations General Assembly which are part of what is known as the Millennium Development Goals. For while the MDGs call for the proportion of people without access to safe water and adequate sanitation to be reduced by half by 2015, the African Vision set these numbers for 2015 at 75% and 70% respectively, with 95% to be served by 2025. I like the approach taken in the African Vision, for it clearly shows that the real target is to continue increasing access to basic services year after year until all are served. I have been questioned by more than one country planner about the MDGs who asked, "Which half of our unserved would you like me to leave unserved in 2015?"

But the African Vision is truly remarkable for another reason. It is subtitled *Equitable and Sustainable Use of Water for Socioeconomic Development*. Those who developed the Water Vision for Africa understood well the point that President Kabbaj made before me - that water is

¹ Keynote address as presented by William J. Cosgrove, President World Water Council, to the first African Water Week, Tunis July 1 2004

an essential component of achieving nearly all of the MDGs, and in particular for the reduction of poverty.

One of the reasons that African countries are having so much trouble escaping the poverty trap is the cycle of droughts and floods that affect so many. Studies by the World Bank and others have drawn attention to the fact that variations in rainfall in many African countries can be as much as 40% year on year, and that these have a heavy impact on the Gross National Product of countries whose main product is agricultural produce. In fact, while the average growth in per capita GDP in most African countries in the past decades has been less than five percent, cycles of droughts and floods can easily wipe this out - and these now occur more frequently than ever. Essentially these countries are doomed to economic stagnation by lack of infrastructure to control hydrologic variability. Even superficial studies illustrate that the growth of the industrialized countries of Europe, Asia and North America was accompanied by investment in water infrastructure. In fact, one could argue that there is a minimum level of water infrastructure that is essential for economic development.

In passing I would raise a question concerning the almost universally adopted principle that investments in water should be made only when there is proven demand for such investments. Experiences in the United States and other countries demonstrate that investment in infrastructure, often by the private sector, spurred and led the development that followed. Africa might learn from this. Even more, it is important to recognize that often it is *what* is produced with scarce water resources that determines the value added to the economy, rather than *how much* is produced. Given the constraint that energy poverty imposes on Africans, electric power should be one of the products generated through Africa's water resources.

Finally, I need not remind you of the benefits that water security directly brings in conflict avoidance, not to mention the reduced dangers when decent livelihoods are made available through access to water. We all know and understand the principle that water must be managed at the basin level. But the country boundaries drawn on maps during the colonial period in Africa have created a multitude of international basins that make it even more difficult for Africans to manage their ground and surface water resources. It would seem to me to be only equitable that those nations who created this problem for Africa help Africans to resolve them.

Let me continue this discussion of some actions to be taken and the actors who have roles to play if the African Water Vision is to be realized.

Action at the Local Level

The Mexican organizers of the Fourth World Water Forum, to be held in Mexico City in March 2006 have chosen for the theme of the Forum *Local Action to Meet a Global Challenge*. This is because we have learned that communities at the local level have been able to work wonders when empowered with a minimum of resources put at their disposal. The *Regional Action Plan for Water Supply and Sanitation* produced jointly by the African Development Bank and the World Bank states "The multi-sector experience gained through social fund and rural development projects has demonstrated that they pay dividends when implemented through local government programs. The greatest potential for achieving the MDGs is through national programs made up of individual district water and sanitation programs."

Former President Jimmy Carter in the speech with which he accepted the Nobel Prize said: "I have witnessed the capacity of destitute people to persevere under heartbreaking conditions. I have come to admire their judgment and wisdom, their courage and faith, and their awesome accomplishments when given a chance to use their innate abilities."²

We need to recognize that what poor families do is useful. Their efforts if properly valued on the international market would represent a sizeable contribution to the GNP of the countries in which they live. The challenge of national governments and the international community is to ensure that no community lacks the often-minimal opportunities and resources required to support their initiative and innate ability to work.

I have noted too that when these communities act, it is all elements of the community that work in concert - local government and civil society including the private sector. There is a lesson for us in this. I hope too that African young people will be more involved in these processes. After all, it is their future. They certainly demonstrate their capacity to contribute when they train and perform so brilliantly during events like the Olympic games. Why not trust them to contribute to the development of our societies?

NEPAD Principles

It is now generally recognized that access to water to meet basic needs is a human right. Some would argue that access to a minimum infrastructure to permit economic development is also a right. But accompanying this right is the obligation of states to ensure that such access is provided. By adopting the United Nations Millennium Goals and the Implementation Plan of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, the leaders of our countries have committed themselves to act.

The New Program for African Development (NEPAD) is a further commitment of Africa's leaders to take these responsibilities seriously. One of the most important elements of NEPAD to my mind is the agreement to submit the performance of individual governments to review by their peers. To make this possible in the water sector, I suggest that the African Ministers' Council on Water) request each country to adopt national targets related to achieving the African Water Vision. They should establish transparent monitoring systems with regular reports to their citizens as well as their peers in other countries of Africa.

Role of the African Development Bank

President Kabbaj, Honorable Ministers, and development partners - I submit to you that the African Development Bank should play a key role in the development of water resources for socio-economic development and poverty reduction in Africa. This Bank is not just any bank; it is the bank of Africans and for Africans. Yet the ADB does not have the financial human resources of the World Bank. It cannot and should not spread its resources across all economic and social sectors. The Bank recognizes in its Vision that it must set priorities. It was with great pleasure that I listened to President Kabbaj describe to us the three initiatives the Bank is launching:

² *The Nobel Peace Prize Lecture*, Jimmy Carter, Oslo Norway, December 10, 2002.

- The Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative
- The African Water Facility, and
- The Short Term Action Plan (STAP) for implementing the priority activities of NEPAD over the coming five years in the infrastructure sector, including the integrated management of transboundary water resources.

We are all here at the invitation of the African Development Bank for the first ever African Water Week. The convening of this Week by the Bank is concrete evidence of their intent to provide leadership in this sector in Africa. I wish to congratulate President Kabbaj for the personal interest that he has demonstrated by his presence at the opening session.

The Bank deserves the encouragement and support of the international community in carrying out these and other water initiatives.

The Problem - Inequitable Distribution of Income

In the speech of Jimmy Carter to which I just referred, he also said that he believed the source of most of the world's problems is the growing disparity of income between the rich and the poor. He drew attention to the fact that citizens of the 10 wealthiest countries are now 75 times richer than those who live in the 10 poorest ones. (We know that most of the ten poorest ones are in Africa). He further noted that the separation is increasing every year. Not only between nations, but also within them. And he identified this disparity as the root cause of starvation, illiteracy, environmental degradation, violent conflict, and unnecessary illnesses that range from guinea worm to HIV and AIDS. I would add that it is also a root cause of lack of investment in water services and infrastructure. While this alone may not be a sufficient condition for development, it is a necessary one.

Solidarity

I therefore call for community solidarity at all levels.

The disparity is increasing not just between countries but within them. The same applies in many local communities. In much of the developed world communities developed their water infrastructure when the wealthy element of the community realized that it was in their self interest to contribute to the financing of community infrastructure and services. In many of the successful examples of community action in developing countries this is also the case.

What happens when a community does not have the combined wealth or human capacity to cover the costs of the services they require? It then becomes the responsibility of the national government to distribute national resources to meet the needs. In this case the question becomes one of how to tap into the resources and income of the wealthier elements of national society. In reality, we know that governments adopt policies that respond to the wishes of the power structure in their countries, and in general this is those with the money. Therefore my appeal goes to those Africans with personal economic and political power to act to encourage their governments to adopt the necessary measures.

I believe that many African countries are wealthy enough to adopt such strategies. Our host country Tunisia is not the wealthiest of African countries. Yet this country has one of the highest

water service levels on the continent and their national water supplier meets not only operations and maintenance costs but also for the past 30 years has covered the capital costs of the infrastructure. It has done this primarily through a social tariff that ensures a minimum block of water at affordable costs for all, with higher rates with increasing consumption and for industrial users and especially tourist establishments. The government provided targeted subsidies to promote service to poorer rural communities. The international donor community has justifiably supported their efforts.

Finally, we know that there are a few countries in Africa whose GNP will not support levels of taxation that will be adequate to finance the minimum services that are needed to meet the Millennium Development Goals, including the water related ones. In my mind, leaving aside the moral obligation, self-interest dictates that to achieve peace and security the international community must support those countries who put forward programs of action to meet the needs of their people.

There are increasing signs of the partnerships with Africa by the international community. UN Water in its new form will be working closely with government and international partners. This pattern is being reflected by the capacity building activities of UN Water Africa and its partners.

President Kabbaj, Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen. I call on all here at the first African Water Week, and all who are following our progress, to demonstrate your solidarity with those Africans who continue to live in poverty, without access to water services and water infrastructure that can change their lives.

Thank you.