

# World Water Council

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## Press Release

### **Closing of the Forum in Mexico : for an increased role of local authorities and more hydro-solidarity**

March 22, 2006 - The 4th World Water Forum came to an end on Wednesday, March 22<sup>nd</sup> (World Water Day) in Mexico City, after seven days of debates and exchanges. Close to 20,000 people from throughout the world (official representatives and delegates from 140 countries, experts, NGOs, companies, journalists, civil society representatives, including youth representatives) participated in two hundred working sessions where a total of 1500 local actions were presented. (The theme of the Forum was “Local Actions for Global Challenge.”)

“A Forum of openness and of tolerance (...) Each of us has listened, each of us has spoken, each of us has thought and each of us has made suggestions”: such were the concluding words of Loïc Fauchon, who was re-elected President of the World Water Council on Sunday, March 19 in Mexico City, for a three-year term. Loïc Fauchon underlined the junction of ideas made possible by the Forum, resulting in “concurrence on the need to invent new actions of solidarity, true ‘hydro-solidarities’, and on the need to give priority to the local level (...) to replace the spiral of debt by the spiral of development, to increase the crop per drop (...) The water cause is first human and political before it is economic and financial (...) Decentralisation of responsibilities must not induce the withdrawal of the States,” concluded Loïc Fauchon.

On behalf of CONAGUA (Comision Nacional del Agua) and the Mexican authorities that co-organized the Forum, Cristóbal Jaime Jáquez concluded the Forum by calling on participants to keep alive the enthusiasm that was born from the gathering, while highlighting that “water-related problems have a solution if everyone works together.” He added that “all human beings have the right to water and sanitation” and that to implement it, countries must develop long-term road maps, while letting local authorities decide how to manage water in the way that is best adapted to the realities in the field.

In a declaration that was adopted at the conclusion of the Forum, ministers (or ministerial delegations) representing 140 countries reaffirmed their commitment in favor of increased consideration for water as a priority for the development. Reiterating their desire to reach the water- and sanitation-related MDGs, ministers called for “a substantial increase of resources” devoted to water (total financing sources, with particular emphasis on official development assistance) and reinforced implementation of “innovative practices, such as rainwater harvesting and the development of hydro-electric projects.” The ministerial declaration invites States and local governments to consider the need for increased prevention of risks

and water-related natural disasters, while reinforcing cooperation mechanisms at every level and the participation of civil society (in particular, women and youth).

Among the participants in Mexico were mayors and representatives of local governments from UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments), who adopted a declaration emphasizing “the responsibility and the competency of local public authorities in the field of water supply and sanitation”, insisting on the fact that “all human beings have the right to water in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their basic needs, as well as for sanitation, a key factor for human health and the preservation of ecosystems.” Mayors and local authority representatives called for national governments, regional and international organizations and the United Nations “to increase financing for local water and sanitation infrastructures.” The CGLU declaration also highlights the need to “accumulate, wherever possible, financial resources, including from water invoicing, to fund decentralized cooperation activities that are equitable, transparent and long-lasting, in order to reduce urban poverty and the exclusion of rural areas.”

In a videotaped address to the Forum’s participants, the French President, Jacques Chirac expressed his “feeling of urgency” relating to the challenge of water that everyone faces, and called for a collective and lasting commitment from everyone. “Our success,” he added, “will not be measured in billions of dollars, but in millions of lives saved or kept from disease, in hundreds of millions of people for whom access to water and sanitation will no longer be a daily fight.”

During the closing ceremony, the “Kyoto World Water Grand Prize” was presented by William Cosgrove, former president of the World Water Council, to Joe Madiath, Executive Director of Gram Vikas, an Indian NGO active in the state of Orissa. Rewarded for his action in favor of Orissa’s rural communities (140.000 people reached), Gram Viskas was successful in substantially lowering the incidence of water-related diseases in the region. The Prize in the amount of \$45,000 (5 million yen), is a partnership between the City of Kyoto, the International Soroptimist Association and the World Water Council and is awarded every three years at the World Water Forum.

As for the next edition of the World Water Forum, negotiations are currently underway with the Turkish authorities to hold it in Istanbul in March 2009.

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