



World Water Council

# 5th World Water Forum

## Highlights from Istanbul

16-22 March 2009





On the road towards the 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum, the international water community worked together according to a precept of “Bridging Divides for Water.” Those who actively participated in its preparation and in the event, itself, soon realized, however, that there is more that unites us than divides us, above all, our fervor to provide water to those most in need. In Istanbul, we improved our common understanding of many issues by accepting to discuss “other” points of views.



We planned new ways forward to ensure that, together, progress can continue to be made. In some cases, the bridges that were built may still be fragile, in need of reinforcement, but important connections were established. A few major highlights are described below, but let’s not overlook the thousands of individual experiences that contributed to the Forum, each of which add a drop to the river.

## Political Processes



The Ministers and Heads of Delegations assembled in Istanbul on 20-22 March 2009 on the occasion of the 5th World Water Forum adopted a Ministerial Statement and accompanying Water Guide, which addressed the global challenges related to water within the context of sustainable development and global changes. The Ministerial Statement includes many commitments, for example to intensify efforts to achieve MDG targets, implement IWRM and information sharing at the river-basin level and prevent and respond to water-related disasters. In addition, it also encourages better scientific research, education, technologies and use of financial resources, while emphasizing the need to share experiences and best practices.

For the first time in the Forum’s history, the Ministerial documents were based on thematic input and structured according to the same framework. They were, then, further developed through a series of four PrepCom meetings in which Thematic and Regional Coordinators and representatives of Major Groups actively participated, alongside approximately 100 delegations from national Governments. Moreover, eight ministerial roundtable discussions were organized on 21 March 2009 in Istanbul, the outcomes of which independently mirrored those of the thematic process.

Despite the difficulty for a very small number of countries to agree in principle to the inclusion of the Right to Water in the Ministerial Statement, 32 countries have already included it in their legal frameworks. The main debate actually concerned the distinction between water as a human right or as a social and economic right, the latter concept already widely accepted. A thorough evaluation of the implications of water as a human right by the UN Committee on Human Rights is forthcoming and will aid further reflection on the matter.

### 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum Facts and Figures

- Approximately 16 000 engaged participants and over 30 000 total participants including the Fair/Expo: Representatives of national and local Governments, UN Agencies, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, academia, water operators, business & industry, indigenous groups, youth, media
- 182 countries represented
- 1 300 political process participants: 165 delegations, 90 ministers and 19 undersecretaries, over 250 parliamentarians, over 300 mayors and local officials
- 106 sessions prepared by more than 400 organizations
- 5 high level panels
- 7 regional processes
- 1000 press representatives producing 2000 international articles/features



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## City Compact Help Authorities Adapt to Water Challenges

Two hundred and fifty Local and Regional Authorities from forty-three countries were represented in Istanbul. The Local and Regional Authorities' political process produced the Istanbul Water Consensus (IWC), a new compact for Local and Regional Authorities willing to commit to adapting their water infrastructure and services to the emerging challenges they are facing, such as climate change, rapid urban growth, depletion and pollution of water resources or aging infrastructure. The 58 signatories of the IWC committed to prepare

action plans to analyse these challenges and cope with them, to set up a series of indicators and to report on the progress at the next World Water Forum. In addition, 10 major cities, including Vienna, Lausanne, Incheon, Paris and Buenos Aires, will continue to build on the momentum generated thus far on specific issues in their special role as "champion cities" for the IWC.



## Parliamentarians Launch International Helpdesk

The 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum gathered an unprecedented assembly of 263 Parliamentarians from 57 countries, ranging from Argentina, Angola, South Korea and Yemen. The Parliamentarians were encouraged to anticipate, prepare, empower, and act on diverse challenges, such as decentralisation authority, global changes, governance and transboundary cooperation. They specifically

requested the World Water Council to establish a permanent international Parliamentary "Helpdesk" to aid political cooperation on water legislation and its implementation. It will serve to:

- *Coordinate*: Guide responsibility for enacting water and sanitation laws;
- *Showcase*: Share best global practices and water-related legislation;
- *Respond*: Quickly answer urgent questions;
- *Link*: Unite all parties in a globally cooperative inter-Parliamentarian network.



## Heads of State Put Water Security at Centre Stage

For the first time in the Forum's history, Heads of State from a number of selected countries met and launched a broad-based Appeal for Action, an appeal that seeks water security, climate adaptability and international solidarity through a more strategic use of the world's most precious resource, water. In a telecast to Forum participants, each Head of State shared his or her views on why water has become a top priority. This was followed by a private meeting in which they discussed water resource management in the global context of the

financial crisis, climate change and fluctuating food and energy prices.

## Panels



## Ministers Join Forces to Adapting to Climate Change

Environment Ministers and representatives from France, Turkey, the Netherlands, South Africa, Czech Republic, met together with leaders from intergovernmental organisations, local government and civil society, representing different perspectives to bridge the political divide between water and climate. The panel expressed its desire for the climate and water families to work more closely together. Jean-Louis Borloo, Minister of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and Territorial Development of France, highlighted the link between climate

change, water and energy, and under the authority of the Czech presidency of the EU called for immediate and concrete action on at least 10 major water and energy projects. A Ministerial Action Plan will carry the Forum's messages on water and climate change into the UNFCCC process and COP-15 discussions.





## Water to be Picked up in Financial Crisis

In light of the recent financial crisis, the High Level Panel on Finance provided an opportunity for decision-makers to discuss how to increase the overall funding for the water sector, at a time of increasing social, economic and environmental challenges. Amidst voices from the floor contesting the legitimacy of the panel, international water and financial experts called upon governmental leaders and private institutions to make bigger and more strategic investments in water. The panel recommended that investment in water infrastructure be included in the fiscal stimulus packages currently being developed to address the economic crisis. In fact, the panel optimistically suggested that the water sector can actually benefit from the financial crisis, because it can force greater efficiency and innovation in resource management, stimulate growth, generate jobs and yield high returns against relatively low risk.



## Action Plan to Reduce the Number of Victims of Water-related Disasters

In 2008 alone, 321 disasters killed 235,816 people, affected 211 million others and cost US\$181 billion. In response, the High-Level Expert Panel on Water and Disaster identified six specific priorities and forty actions guidelines to prevent, prepare for, manage and recover from water-related disasters. These are presented in its publication: Prevention and Action to Minimize Death and Destruction: Building Resilience Toward Sustainable Development. It called on Governments of all nations to endorse and adopt those measures immediately.



## Harmonizing Strategies for Water, Food and Energy

In a unique opportunity for exchange, representatives from the water, agriculture and energy sectors debated for the first time how humankind's rising demands for food and energy can lead to greater cooperation among the sectors, rather than competition. In view of impending population growth, urbanisation and climate change, it is urgent to create harmonized strategies. Recognising the underdeveloped understanding of this nexus, panellists expressed their desire to continue to work with the World Water Council to develop further guidance for more coordinated management in this domain.



## Rising to Diverse Sanitation Challenges

The UN Water Development Report, released during the Forum week, made clear that while access to water in much of the world has improved, access to safe sanitation has not. Benefitting from a wide range regional representation, this panel discussed the impact that the International Year of Sanitation had on gaining greater political momentum for sanitation issues. It went on to discuss some of the daunting challenges of megacities and pollution in industrialized areas and coastal zones. Indeed, experts are urging development agencies to move beyond the traditional paradigm of water-borne sewage and flush toilets to explore creative approaches that employ diverse, appropriate technology and policies. It was also evidenced that small investments in preventative measures bear massive returns in health and prosperity.



## Thematic Programme

During the scores of discussions in over one hundred sessions, including special focus sessions and sessions on cross-cutting issues, some overall messages emerged:

- Water is a common denominator for many development issues and the key to successfully resolving those challenges.
- Because of the interrelatedness of water issues across so many different sectors, progress can only be achieved through an interdisciplinary approach, both at the international and national levels. There is therefore a need to reinforce the preliminary linkages made at the 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum and continue to think “out of the box.”
- Global changes were a recurrent theme found throughout many of the Forum’s session.
- Education, capacity development and financial support need to be enhanced in virtually every domain to support further progress.
- Solutions must be sustainable and flexibly adapted to specific local or regional circumstances: no “one size fits all” approach can be applied to water management.
- Stakeholders need to be engaged through participatory processes in the earliest stages of water resource development strategies.
- The 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum enabled greater focus and synergies to move forward on today’s water-related challenges and to create more political will. Action is urgent!



### Climate Change, Disasters and Migration

While climate change, disasters and migration are distinct in scope and challenges, joint reflection on these issues at the 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum concluded that good adaptation measures implemented for climate change and disasters will, in fact, assist in mitigating migration. One billion slum dwellers worldwide demonstrate that unsolved rural problems lead to urban problems. Therefore, more work is needed to continue to dovetail efforts before crises arise, despite disparities among these domains. In addition, the message that water is the medium through which climate change acts and the work on “hotspots” and recommendations formulated at the 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum will be channeled into the UNFCCC CoP15 processes, as well as to other international processes.



### Advancing Human Development and the MDG’s

Regardless of whether or not the MDG’s are achieved, after 2015, the remaining half of the population will still need to be served. At the 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum, the main impediments to reaching the MDGs were identified as a lack of effective management, investment, institutional capacity and political priority. One suggested instrument to ensure coverage for all school-aged children was the creation of a global convention to implement WASH in schools.

However, the necessity was also made clear to move away from increasing crisis management toward a process steered by more long-term development objectives, in which the challenges are recognized as all being interconnected. This will be especially important in harmonizing water use between energy production, food production and other uses, so that these needs complement each other rather than compete against one another. The fundamental baseline associated with all development and environmental challenges is that by 2050, the world’s population will rise to over 9 billion people, and all will need water and sanitation.



## Managing and Protecting Water Resources

This theme perhaps offered the most fertile terrain for building bridges between polarized viewpoints: on transboundary issues, on storage issues, on infrastructure and environment, and between policy and implementation. Generally, it was agreed that river basin organizations offer a vehicle through which a range of partners can work together. In addition, a “Handbook on Integrated Water Resources Management in Basins” was presented, providing useful advice on how to improve governance of freshwater resources in basins. It was also

recommended that IWRM needs to be practiced at different scales in order for it to be helpful in enabling Governments and all stakeholders to determine how to allocate water appropriately and which global solutions are most appropriate for any given situation. But most of all, these recommendations must lead to action.



## Governance and Management

A wide majority of stakeholders reaffirmed support for the right to water and sanitation, already extensively recognized by many States, and supported further efforts for its implementation. In addition, a better understanding of the complementary roles of public and private sectors was achieved, recognizing that specific circumstances call for specific solutions. Moreover, 10 priority issues for catalyzing institutional change and policies were identified. In an effort to address corruption issues, participants called for the creation of an international

tribunal to address violations and launched an appeal to incorporate anti-corruption safeguards into project designs. The need for public participation as an essential component of good governance was also emphasized.



## Finance

Through a series of panels, sessions and side events throughout the week, financing issues received much greater attention than ever before from Forum participants. Despite recognition that financing needs for the water sector are still enormous and remain a major constraint for further development, the discussions enabled a much better understanding of the fundamentals of water economics. It was agreed that funds need to be allocated where they can have the biggest impact and require support from both public and private sectors. By flexibly balancing “The 3 Ts: Tariffs, Taxes and Transfers”, the sector is consciously shifting its operational paradigm from “full cost recovery” to “sustainable cost recovery.” Although higher priority for water should still be requested in national budgets, increased efficiency and greater

innovation can actually reduce financing needs.



## Education, Knowledge and Capacity Development

With a view to strengthening science and education, participants called for:

- Enhancing knowledge and capacity development within the water sector;
- Improving data gathering, sharing and dissemination mechanisms;
- Promoting knowledge-based integrated approaches and informed decision making in water resources management;
- Actively engaging professional associations and all stakeholders.

To accomplish these objectives, guiding principles for education, knowledge and capacity development were drafted. Both youth and network associations were recognized as powerful agents for change in this domain, especially in the advent of new technologies that will improve interconnectedness in future water management strategies. Partners also committed to improve the organization and availability of water-related data, building upon existing systems.





## Regional Processes

### Focusing on Regional Specificities

Seven Regional Preparatory Processes, culminating in panel presentations and other activities at the 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum, provided rich contributions to both the political and thematic outcomes of the Forum. Some key messages can be found below. These processes were important catalysts for mobilizing stakeholders, promoting cooperation and impacting political decision-making in their regions. Many of the regional Fora will again be organized in the future to support continued progress on water issues in local contexts.



### Financing is a priority for Africa

There is currently a clear vision for achieving water security in Africa, and commitments at Africa's highest political level are in place. A major scaling up of finance for expansion of Africa's water infrastructure (up to US\$50 billion per annum with a gap estimate of US\$30 billion per annum) is needed and this must begin soon in ways that deliver economic growth. While a lot is known about financing of drinking water and sanitation, there is still a need to extend knowledge

to other water-related sectors, notably agriculture and energy. A comprehensive integrated approach should be pursued on infrastructure development to optimize multi-purpose use with the acknowledgement of country and regional specificities. Moreover, Governments must play the central role in pulling financing actions together. Finally, there is a need for strong cooperation on transboundary water resources development, as well, in order to cement regional integration.



### Concerted efforts on multiple uses for the Americas

As a result of the Americas regional process, 250 stakeholders from 35 countries who had gathered in Foz do Iguacu, Brazil, on 24-25 November 2008 for the Water Forum of the Americas drafted a concise and consensual document that contains twelve main recommendations for the region, including:

- The promotion of social inclusion and eradication of poverty through universal access to water supply and sanitation as well as through the productive use of water, by means of the usage of hydroelectric power, irrigation for food production, transportation, tourism and recreation, within a sustainable development context;
- The institutional strengthening of management bodies and promotion of internal and external integration of water resources policies with other sectoral policies;
- Within the specificities of each region, the consideration of the multiple use of water on an efficient and rational basis, incorporating environmental conservation, protection and reclamation as necessary actions toward the improvement of water availability.



### Disasters and food shortages affect Asia-Pacific the most

From 1980 to 2006, approximately half of the world's recorded fatalities due to water-related disasters were in Asia. Of the 4.7 billion people affected by those disasters, Asia accounted for 90% of them. Likewise, two-thirds of the world's hungry people live in Asia. One in seven in this region lacks access to water and half of the population lacks access to basic sanitation.

Despite cause for alarm, water problems of the Asia-Pacific region are manageable with strong political will, leadership, and commitment. The Asia-Pacific region has taken on water security challenges head on and has provided a model for other regional processes to follow, notably through the successful organization of the 1<sup>st</sup> Asia Pacific Water Summit convened in Beppu, Japan in December 2007.



## Europe needs greater cooperation at all levels

Dozens of stakeholders in Europe designed together a “Water Vision for Europe” that will be, together with the feedback from discussions at the 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum, incorporated into a guidance document and presented to the incoming European Commission in autumn of 2009. It stresses the need for cooperation between sectors, stakeholders, countries and regions in Europe to support further progress through a new, more holistic approach. Part of the challenge lies in raising public awareness: people need to understand why and how they should contribute. Another part lies in targeted financial incentives, such as appropriate taxes and tariffs. And a third part, in well defined legal and regulatory instruments. Moreover, better information is needed to support decision-making at all levels—from the policy maker to the

person turning on the kitchen tap. Water research and data needs to be accessible, understandable and relevant to the needs and concerns of its users.



## Turkey connects to its neighbours on water

As the host country of the 5th World Water Forum, Turkey organised over 20 preparatory meetings inside and around its borders in 2008, covering the entire scope of the Forum’s 6 themes. Turkey also held the First Istanbul Water Forum in February of 2009, to converge and prepare regional participation for the 5th World Water Forum. Through this

regional process, Turkey, itself, served as a “bridge” in fostering cooperation with its neighbours. By working together on the challenges that divide the countries around Turkey, partners were able to identify problems, needs, weaknesses and abilities regarding water issues, thus, enabling the convergence of joint and sustainable solutions. Another important component of that exchange was a three-way dialogue session between those involved in the regional processes for in and around Turkey, the Arab/MENA region and the Mediterranean. Indeed, the activities of this regional process illustrate how water can be used as a powerful tool for achieving peace and security, for everyone’s benefit.



## Arab/MENA Region seeks to reform current policies and practices

Following an extensive preparation, the 1<sup>st</sup> Arab Water Forum was held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in November of 2008 and discussed the contribution of Arab States to the 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum. The reflection centered on bridging divides between and inside countries, between the poor and the rich, between the present and the future and between science and technology. To bridge the divides that result from the major challenges within nations to water resources management, a

multi-sectoral, multistakeholder, multi-governance-level set of approaches is needed in the Arab world. The greatest need is not in new engineering schemes, but in the reform of current policies and practices that will meet these challenges over the next decades. Bridging those gaps and moving beyond engineering to an understanding of water through multiple lenses will ensure a bright new era in Arab water. Solutions to water scarcity problems require the consideration of cultural, educational, communication and scientific aspects. Given the increasing political recognition of the importance of water, it is in the area of sustainable freshwater management that a major contribution can be found to avoid or solve water-related problems, including future changes.



## Ministers agree to create a Mediterranean strategy for water

Just prior to the 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum, ministers assembled at the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Water in Jordan adopted a final declaration stating that regional cooperation would be an essential and indispensable tool in creating a Mediterranean Strategy for Water. The regional process for the Mediterranean went on to produce its own message in which a number of priority issues for the Mediterranean were identified. These included the need for





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adaptation to climate change and water demand management, the strengthening of renewed water policies, and the implementation of realistic cost recovery mechanisms. Indeed, coastal areas suffer compounded effects due to higher population density, future growth perspectives, consequences of tourism, territorial imbalance, greater resource scarcity, coastal wetlands and increased risk of extreme phenomena. Ways to improve capacities, information exchange, public awareness, stakeholder participation and education, and new water culture must also be addressed.

## Other Activities



### Water in the Spotlight

With over 800 media representatives in Istanbul and thousands of published articles and features, “water” became, more than ever, a buzzword in international media. Through their on-site work, journalists and editors from all over the world highlighted many popular subjects, including climate change and water, the water crisis and conflicts over water, but also covered emerging issues, such as transboundary cooperation and the water, food and energy nexus. Access to information was made easy for journalists through the World Water

Council’s Water Media Center, ([www.watermediacenter.org](http://www.watermediacenter.org)) which included contacts for spokespersons, sources, photos, press releases and background material.



### Bridging the Divide between Generations

The Children’s Forum and the Youth Forum, which united representatives from 25 countries, succeeded in bridging the divide between generations. Young people have a vital role to play in solving water-related challenges for the future, and the World Water Forum encourages youth to become vectors of that much needed change for the better. The Youth Declaration and the “wave” were two major highlights from the Youth Forum activities.



### And lots more...

The 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum also offered over 125 side events, a Learning Centre training nearly 600 participants through 35 classes, Poster Presentations, an NGO Fair and Citizen’s House, a World Water Expo with nearly 200 pavilions, many offering additional debates and events. A Global Water Education Village, a series of Water and Film Encounters, Partnership Events, a Speakers’ Corner,

and a great deal of cultural entertainment complemented the fascinating and dynamic landscape that was the 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum.