



**RESEAU INTERNATIONAL DES ORGANISMES DE BASSIN
INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF BASIN ORGANIZATIONS
RED INTERNACIONAL DE ORGANISMOS DE CUENCA**

Jean- François DONZIER – INBO General Secretary and IOWater General Director

Your Excellency, Vice Premier,
Dear colleagues,

It is a great honour for me to have been chosen this year to receive the "friendship award of the state administration for foreign experts affairs" and i would like, first of all, to thank you for it.

I would like to share this award with all the Chinese and French colleagues who have worked with me since 2009, seven years already, on the design and pragmatic implementation of the project for the management of the Hai river basin and its tributaries, because, without the strong involvement of all of them, we would not have got so fast the positive results we have achieved: on the Chinese side in particular, the Ministry of Water Resources, the Hai River Basin Conservancy Commission and the Water Boards of the Hebei province and Tianjin city; on the French side, the Ministry of the Environment, the Seine Normandy Water Agency, the Embassy of France in China, the Public Sanitation Utility of Greater Paris, the Institution of the Seine Great Lakes and the International Office for Water that i manage.

For seven years we have gradually learned to know each other, on both sides, appreciate each other, and this has created a close-knit working team, gathering all the necessary skills in a spirit of mutual trust and true friendship.

This integrated management project of the Hai river is certainly one of the most successful we have implemented in recent years and we are very proud of it: we wish it to continue for a long time because there is still a lot of work to be done jointly.

Some actions that i have accomplished during my career have been presented, therefore i will not do so again and i will just insist on some points which are particularly important to me.

- **First**, we are all aware that today freshwater is a time bomb for humanity and the planet, and that it suffers from increasingly strong pressures, both in quality and quantity, caused by global population growth and increasing water consumption for agriculture, energy, domestic uses, fish farming, waterways transport, in particular, but also by pollution of all kinds.

Floods, water-borne diseases, shortages, pollution, wastage and destruction of ecosystems: the seriousness of the situation encountered in many countries requires that comprehensive, integrated and consistent management of water resources be implemented to preserve the future and the human heritage.

The difficulties that are already appearing in many regions will still be aggravated by the effects of climate change, which altered the water cycles and the balance of aquifers.

Climate change will result in an increased frequency and intensity of extreme phenomena of floods and droughts, as well as erosion and evapotranspiration of forests and crops: we must prepare for it and adapt quickly.

“If the greenhouse-effect gases are responsible for climate change, freshwater is one of the first victim”!

It is necessary to react quickly, before it is too late.

It is thus essential to adapt water resources management policies and mechanisms to face these changes.

Quick action will allow reducing costs and damage.

In particular, in a context of increased pressure on water resources and lands, the importance of the agricultural component should be stressed, as continuing the “business as usual” scenario would be irresponsible.

- **Then**, sound management of resources is only possible through an integrated approach considering both surface and ground water as a unique resource and, this, on the relevant scale of the catchment areas of national or transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers.
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Groundwater management remains a problem because many countries have a poor knowledge of this resource, and, above all, have insufficient or even no suitable institutional framework for them to monitor, protect, soundly manage or rehabilitate this resource, to control over-exploitation and pollution, especially the one caused by fertilizers and pesticides that is becoming a major risk of deterioration in many countries, including in the developed countries!

The importance of aquatic environments in water policies is to be also underlined: they are a natural infrastructure playing a key role in seasonal regulation of water resources and pollution control. We have to protect and rehabilitate them.

Is it necessary to repeat the obvious?

The basins of rivers, lakes and aquifers are the natural geographic areas where water flows on the soil or in the ground, from upstream to downstream, whatever are the administrative boundaries or limits crossed.

As you know, there are 276 (two hundred and seventy six) transboundary rivers all over the world, but, thanks to the very new ISARM programme of UNESCO, of which i would like to emphasize the importance here, almost 600 (six hundred) transboundary aquifers have been identified, and their joint management by riparian countries is needed.

We must promote the quick signing of agreements for their good joint management by the riparian countries;

- **Finally, we must improve knowledge of the resource to ensure its integrated management and quickly adapt to the major global challenges that threaten it.**

However, the available data are now too often incomplete, scattered, of poor quality or even, in some cases, have been diminishing over the past decades.

It is absolutely necessary to strengthen or establish water information systems and all the tools for interpreting and modelling their data to facilitate decision making, follow up the effectiveness of actions and inform the populations.

[We can only manage what we can measure!](#)

However, such water information systems are still not really considered as a priority and have not the necessary resources for investment and especially for their lasting operation: this is one of the major challenges of the next few years...

[Dear colleagues and friends,](#)

Soon we will have a great meeting at the cop22 in Marrakech, in which we look forward to see freshwater been recognized as one of the first priorities of the adaptation measures to be included into the new global climate action agenda, initiated last year in the cop21 in paris.

The International Network of Basin Organizations, of which i am the secretary-general, has had the very great honour to be officially designated to facilitate the organization of the official events on water and climate to be held on 9 November, all day long.

Of course, we count on the participation of as many of you, who will be accredited to the cop, to underline the importance of freshwater in the debates that we will organize.

[Dear colleagues,](#)

We are at the forefront of the water battle.

Let's get mobilized to leave abundant freshwater of quality to our children and future generations, as it is essential to economic and social development and also to biodiversity.

Our French-Chinese project in the Hai river basin undoubtedly contributes to a better future.

I thank you again for having honoured me this year and for your attention.