

Interview of Loïc Fauchon, President of the World Water Council

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Translation into English

WATER, AN ESSENTIAL RESSOURCE FOR BIODIVERSITY

The President of the World Water Council, Loïc Fauchon, answered Gomet' questions on the threshold of a year 2021 during which he hopes to put the Dakar World Water Forum into orbit, postponed to March 2022. The coming months will also be marked by the preparations and the holding of the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille. Loïc Fauchon intends to make water resources one of the major issues for the planet.

Q : The World Conservation Congress, organized by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) was due to take place this January. It is finally scheduled for September. How important is this event for you?

Loïc Fauchon: **It is important for Marseille and it is important for nature. It is one of the five most important gatherings organized in the world.** Even more so this time because the event is open to the public. It's a new phenomenon that we had already experienced at the previous World Water Forum in Brasilia in 2018. **The organizers' objective is to attract 100,000 visitors in addition to the 15,000 delegates from the different countries.** This is important for Marseille and its image. The city has been chosen from among strong competitors in France and abroad. There was Bordeaux and Lyon, and internationally, Miami, Shanghai and Adelaide.

Q : Was the choice of Marseille linked to the presence of the Headquarters of the World Water Council in the Marseille?

Loïc Fauchon: Let's remain modest! And if this is the case, it's not for me to say so. This being the case, **the relations between the IUCN and the World Water Council are old and very close. IUCN has served on our Board for the maximum statutory period.** What undoubtedly played a role for the IUCN, and for the State as well, was the World Water Council's ability to organize the World Water Forum in Marseille. That went very well (*).

Q : You said it was important for nature... Why?

Loïc Fauchon: Usually this congress takes place every four years. **It's an opportunity to adapt the relationship between man and nature.** It is at the heart of many subjects and not only with regard to climate change. These issues must be brought closer to those related to demography. There are indeed two main subjects. What about the evolution of climate change? No one really knows, because we work on mathematical models. And **what is the expected evolution of demographics?** Because **the tensions observed over the last 10 to 20 years on nature are tensions caused by demography** and not by the climate: the growth of megacities, saturation in terms of pollution or agriculture. I don't think we say this enough. It's a little too easy to free oneself, by blaming the climate- for cultural or religious reasons- from the issue of demographics.

Q : How does the World Water Council intend to contribute to this rendezvous with nature?

Loïc Fauchon: The details are not yet fixed. It may not be a World Conservation Congress like the others. **What is the future relationship between man and nature?** It is important that water shows its place in the respect of biodiversity because, be careful, **the time has come for the right balance between water for man and water for nature.** I hope that for this congress, in its preparation and follow-up - it is not in one week that we change the world - water will have its right place. Indeed, **you cannot have preserved ecosystems and protected biodiversity if you do not have proper water resources in quantity and quality.** Water is also a gateway to the subject of biodiversity because everyone has an opinion on water. Greenhouse gas emissions is a more technical subject. Here around Marseilles, on the Réaltor reservoir, between Aix and Vitrolles, we have the perfect and very old example of **the cursor well placed between water for man and water for nature.** This model will be discussed at the World Water Forum in Dakar in 2021. Why is this? Because Réaltor is a biosphere reserve, for plants and animals while being at the gateway to the urban environment. And at the same time, it is a drinking water reservoir. You don't have many examples like that.

Q : So storing water can be an ecological gesture?

Loïc Fauchon: **Yes, perhaps some large dams have mutilated nature, but they have been very useful...** We must nevertheless say that we would not live here in the same conditions if we did not have the dams of Serre-Ponçon on the river Durance and Ste-Croix sur le Verdon. They are indispensable, as much for hydroelectricity as for drinking water. Today aquatic reserves can also be freshwater reserves. There is the place and the necessity of a respect for each other. **A change in awareness** has been observed over the last twenty years, thanks to environmentalists.

Q : Concerning water for nature, what subjects would you like to give priority, particularly in view of the Dakar World Forum in 2021?

Loïc Fauchon: **There are no global solutions but global methods.** The method is water security. From there, the whole water cycle can be defined: securing the resource, keeping it in quantity and knowing how to store it. Why in France, at the end of the summer, do we have more than 80 departments under prefectural decree for drought? It's nevertheless a watered country. Our modest role at the World Water Council is to make political and economic decision-makers, aware that if we **don't manage water resources, we will face serious problems.** The World Water Forums serve to maintain this awareness. They are also meetings for exchanging solutions, as it was in Marseille, or "answers", as it will be the case for the Dakar Forum. **We want to show people that concrete answers are available, both for man and nature.**

Q : Do you have emblematic examples of these answers?

Loïc Fauchon: **We can mention the desalination of sea water. It is at this stage a complement in development.** Dakar is in the process of imagining its station. Algiers already has one. We are here in "unconventional" water. "The number of countries that use it is increasing very significantly, with **about 80 States that already practice this technique.** The other way, and which will also greatly accelerate in the coming years, is **the reuse of waste water.** We are on well-mastered techniques. Some countries are very advanced, such as Singapore. There, more than half of the drinking water already comes from wastewater treatment plants. Mexico is also very advanced. Tunisia has been watering its golf courses with reused wastewater for thirty years. It can also be used for agriculture in some countries. In France there are still legal or psychological barriers. **We have before us a great potential for progress.** The additional cost is much lower than the cost of desalination, which itself has dropped considerably (under a dollar per m³ whereas we started at 10 dollars).

Q :What are the major stages leading up to the Dakar World Water Forum now set for March 2022?

Loïc Fauchon: The preparation of a Forum concerns both thematic subjects but also some more political aspects. As far as the themes are concerned, **we currently have 500 organizations involved in the working groups preparing the Forum.** I don't think that in the past we have had so many contributors. The addition of water and Africa, two priority subjects, gives a first success of esteem. **In collaboration with the Senegalese and African organizations in general, we have selected "water security", "cooperation", "rural" and "innovation" as the main issues.** From there we will come up with proposals and answers. **The other aspect is political. It is essential.** I went to Dakar a few weeks ago to work with

the Senegalese Head of State, President Macky Sall, who is passionate about water issues, to see how we can create political levers. **We decided to hold a summit of heads of state, ministers, parliamentarians, local authorities and basin authorities. We have an ambition to make these five political families make commitments in Dakar. We rely on a 3 pillars: governance, finance and knowledge. If you master all three in a water policy, you have a chance of success.**

Q :Doesn't the pandemic disrupt preparations too much?

Loïc Fauchon: Indeed, the world needs to get back on its feet and move. Because in our mechanics, **we have a dozen international preparatory events on the road to Dakar.** They must be roughly in the nine months preceding the Forum. And if we can't hold them, we run the risk of having a Forum that is closed in on itself, a meeting of the knowers that is a little too technocratic. **We have already held events in the distance, but this does not have the same impact or the same warmth and conviviality as during physical meetings.**

(*) The 6th Water Forum took place in Marseille from 12 to 17 March 2012 and brought together some 35,000 participants.