



United Cities and Local Governments
Cités et Gouvernements Locaux Unis
Ciudades y Gobiernos Locales Unidos

ISTANBUL MINUTES

The 5th World Water Forum, which was held in Istanbul from 16 to 22 March 2009 reasserts the trend initiated in Kyoto in 2003 and upheld in Mexico in 2006; the increasing participation of local and regional authorities in the assembly of actors in the area of water. The position held by local and regional authorities in this Forum is in line with a political process that is well known to parliamentarians and ministers.

More than 250 mayors and local and regional government leaders from 43 countries, convened together on 18 and 19 March in Istanbul at the initiative of UCLG, ICLEI and the World Water Council, discussed the responses to these challenges and particularly the Istanbul Water Consensus.

The Opening Session

The opening session of the local and regional authorities meeting on 18 March was chaired by the Mayor of Istanbul and the Co-President of UCLG, Mr. Kadir Topbas, and participants included Mr. Loïc Fauchon, Mr. Jean Claude Gaudin and Mr. Stephen Kabuye, President of the World Water Council, Mayor of Marseille and Mayor of Entebbe, respectively.

During his address, the Mayor of Istanbul and Co-President of UCLG declared that "Population growth, rapid urbanisation and climate change are all factors that heighten the pressure on water and sanitation resources, specifically in cities", echoing the United Nations Report on Water presented last week within the framework of the 5th World Water Forum. The other speakers in this session underlined the tangible and lasting advances made at local level thanks to the commitment of local and regional authorities in the field of water and sanitation, and also reiterated their role as a pillar of water governance.

The Mayor of Marseille underlined the efforts undertaken by his city and laid emphasis on decentralised cooperation, which could act as an important instrument for consolidating basic service provision initiatives such as water and sanitation at local level. The Mayor of Marseille also reaffirmed his city's wish to host the next Forum in three years' time.

The Mexico Water Prize

Mexico, host city to the last World Water Forum in 2006, was keen to stress its commitment towards water by initiating the "Mexico Water Prize", which fosters and rewards innovative local initiatives related to water and sanitation. The Governor of the State of Mexico, Mr. Enrique Peña Nieto, awarded three prizes: first place to Guangzhou Province (China), second place to the Water and Sewerage System of the City of León (Mexico) and third place to the National Superintendence of Sanitation Services of Lima (Peru).

The Three Thematic Sessions

The thematic sessions brought together a large number of elected representatives, local and regional officials and international experts. The debates centred on three themes: 1) the governance of water and sanitation, 2) climate change risk management, and 3) the challenges of sanitation in cities experiencing massive urban growth.

The exchange of views highlighted the need for effective and transparent management of services and particularly for public control regardless of the management approach; the great difficulties (financial, technical and in terms of infrastructure) faced by local and regional elected representatives in certain developing regions to ensure minimum service provision for their citizens; and, finally, it also pointed to the urgency of certain situations such as cities in island countries, for instance, in the face of climate change and large-scale natural disasters.

Participants also became aware of a number of significant and encouraging initiatives, especially in Turkey, France, the Netherlands, Spain, South Africa, Togo, Ecuador, China, Argentina and Colombia.

Conclusions of the Session “Governance of Water and Sanitation”

► If it falls under the States’ remit to ensure equitable access to the resource throughout national territory and to define the general organisation of the water and sanitation sector, then it is the responsibility of local authorities to come together or cooperate on the level of territories which are pertinent with regard to management and preservation of the water resource, and to bear the responsibility of organising local service delivery.

► The duty to provide universal access to water and sanitation cannot solely be based on the charge for the service and the offsetting of infrastructure costs (production and distribution, collection and treatment) on the one hand, and the cost of management and maintenance on the other. Mobilising fiscal solidarity (at the local, national and international level) and by means of intergenerational forms of solidarity (borrowing) must be organised in favour of local authorities.

► The choice of management approach is contingent upon each local situation. It should be the product of an assessment shared among the various stakeholders (State, local authorities, operators, users and inhabitants). The local authority can organise the service by either drawing on its own resources or by contracting its delivery out to private operators or to local services with powers and responsibilities from the State.

► Irrespective of the management approach, the game rules for good governance are the same. The choice, terms and conditions of participation, financing, monitoring and evaluation of the different management approaches come under the same contractual process that local authorities should be in a position to bring to fruition.

The Dialogue between Local and Regional Authorities and Parliamentarians

Said dialogue proved indispensable in the Forum as it allowed a voice to be given to two institutional levels, resulting from elections, to exchange views on legislative measures and the terms of implementation of local and national water and sanitation policies.

This session was chaired by the Mayor of Chefchaouen (Morocco), who also holds the position of Minister in Charge of Relations with the Parliament in his country. The local elected representatives participating in this dialogue were keen to underline two important aspects of their point of view, that is to say, the right to water (by the Mayor of Gaza) and decentralisation (by the President of AFCCRE). The first essentially reiterates that: “access to water is a fundamental right which must be preserved as a basis for peace”. As regards decentralisation, elected representatives reaffirmed their belief that the local level is most attentive to the needs and expectations of citizens, communities and territories, and that it constitutes the level which bears the highest degree of direct responsibility towards them. Hence, they should assume responsibility

for their basic needs, which include water and sanitation services as a matter of course. Furthermore, they pointed out to participants and parliamentarians the temptation of certain countries towards recentralisation notwithstanding the context, which is a cause for concern in the face of much global upheaval.

Parliamentarians, on their part, highlighted the convergence of views with local elected representatives because very often they constitute two sides of the same legitimate public institution, resulting from a democratic process. Moreover, said bodies have to confront the demands and expectations of their citizens and electors.

The General Assembly and Closing Session

This corresponds to the moment chosen by local and regional elected representatives to adopt, following a number of amendments, the Istanbul Water Consensus launched by the Mayor of Istanbul and the Co-President of UCLG, Mr. Kadir Topbas. The Istanbul Water Consensus is a call for action to make water an instrument for peace and development. The Consensus calls on States and international institutions, and commits local and regional governments to create local plans to improve water and sanitation management. Some sixty countries across different continents have signed said Consensus. Its originality lies in that it allows commitments to achieving concrete actions to be made, which shall then be evaluated in the next World Water Forum in 2012.

To endorse the Istanbul Water Consensus, cities have expressed their desire to work within world organisations and local and regional governments to increase the number of signatory cities, to develop decentralised cooperation in the field of water, and to ensure follow-up on commitments, which will be presented during the next World Water Forum.

In his closing speech, the Mayor of Istanbul reiterated his wholehearted commitment to lending support to the Consensus and putting it into practice. He proposed to the entire body of participants that UCLG put in place an appropriate framework for action to implement the Consensus in partnership with the ICLEI and the World Water Council.

At the end of the session, the representative from the City of Durban took the floor to briefly reiterate the initiatives undertaken by his city to ensure water and sanitation service provision for all and to underscore local capacities to host the next Forum in 2012.

The Debate between Local and Regional Elected Representatives, Parliamentarians and Ministers

Established since the Forum in Mexico, the debate between elected representatives, parliamentarians and ministers was more an exchange of points of view and particularly on the great changes facing the world and the corresponding prospects for action.

The elected representatives in attendance at the debate (the Mayor of Atakpamé in Togo, the Mayor of Beit Sahour in Palestine and the President of the PACA Region in France) highlighted the role of local and regional governments. The latter are at the front line in the event of natural disasters of great magnitude (tsunami, the earthquake in Sichuan, etc.); they are the first to undertake emergency and rehabilitation interventions; they are and will be the first to have to assume their responsibilities regarding what has not been undertaken or has been poorly undertaken to prevent the repercussions of disasters... They should find solutions to massive urban growth while continuing to shoulder their basic responsibilities: to ensure quality service provision whose volume is sufficient should said volume prove unsatisfactory.

To meet the challenge of global change, elected representatives have insisted to parliamentarians and ministers upon the need to increase the national and local budget allocation granted to water and urban social policies. However, that would not prove

sufficient, as progress would also be required as regards the funding mechanisms for cities and local governments.

The Ministerial Statement

UCLG had fervently demanded, during the preparatory ministerial conferences, that the role of local governments be acknowledged and that the Istanbul Consensus be mentioned as an appendix to the draft Ministerial Statement, and this was brought to fruition. Unfortunately, in the final version adopted in Istanbul, references to local and regional authorities disappeared. For both UCLG members and several observers, this Statement therefore falls short of expectations, particularly also because certain countries are opposed to any mention of the right to water.

After Istanbul

- The Istanbul Water Consensus, adopted by local and regional elected representatives is a call for action to make water an instrument for peace and development. Some sixty countries across different continents have signed said Consensus. Its originality lies in the fact that its signatories have pledged to carry out concrete actions, which shall then be evaluated in the next World Water Forum in 2012.
- The Mayor of Istanbul has suggested to the entire body of participants that UCLG put in place a committee or working group to ensure the implementation of the Consensus is followed up on.
- Certain members, particularly the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities, were critical of the absence of follow-up on the previous Forum Statement in Mexico and have requested that the World Secretariat ensure the follow-up of the Istanbul Consensus.
- The World Water Council, in parallel, launched an initiative known as “Champion Cities”. It seeks to mobilise cities with extensive experience in water management and sanitation to take part in international forums and to afford support to other cities in implementing the Istanbul Consensus. Several UCLG member cities (Paris, Vienna, Rotterdam, Lyon, Stuttgart, Istanbul, Zaragoza, etc.) have joined this initiative. In the future, the UCLG Water Committee should clarify the framework of this initiative with the World Water Council.