

Declaration of European Local and Regional Authorities World Water Forum - Mexico, March 2006

*Adopted by the Policy Committee of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions
in Vienna (Austria), on December 12, 2005,
under the presidency of Michael HÄUPL, Mayor of Vienna, President of CEMR
and after proposition of Louis LE PENSEC,
President of the French section of CEMR (AFCCRE)*

We, the representatives of European local and regional authorities gathered together in the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, hope to provide our contribution to the World Water Forum which will be held in Mexico from 16th to 22nd March 2006.

The Issue / Preamble

Water is essential to human life, as it is to all of humanity across the globe; access to drinking water is a fundamental right for all. This right is inseparable from the right to sanitation - the decisive element for human health and the preservation of ecosystems, especially sea ecosystems. In addition, it is an essential key to cultural and economic development.

Despite the increasingly developed awareness of the political, economic, social, cultural and environmental stakes involved in the water issue, the situation remains critical: one out of four people in the world does not have access to water in sufficient quantity or quality, and one out of two people does not have access to an adequate sanitation system. Every year, this situation costs the lives of several millions of people, victims of diseases transmitted by water.

The urgency of the need to resolve problems of water accessibility and management at the local level is increased due to the growing urbanisation to which all countries, and especially developing countries, are faced.

The water problem has become significantly more critical due to irresponsible individual and collective behaviour which impedes the sustainable management of natural resources. This situation is further aggravated by climate changes.

Responding to this extremely critical situation as well as to commitments made by the international community for the Millennium Declaration (2000), the Johannesburg Summit (2002) and the 2nd World Water Summit (2003), the Member States as well as the European Union have mobilised, investing 1.4 billion Euros every year in water-related and sanitation activities in developing countries. The Union thus holds the world's first place in terms of contributions to development, and at the European Council of 24th May 2005 pledged to reserve 0.56% of the Union's funds until 2010 for aid to developing countries.

The European Union has therefore launched "an initiative" to establish a strategic partnership on water and sanitation with the goal of contributing to achieving the related Millennium Goals.

This initiative is established to:

- ensure that every individual, and particularly those who are most disadvantaged, (...) receive, in sufficient quantity, good quality drinking water as well as adequate sanitation and hygiene services, all in the overall aim of reducing poverty and improving health, quality of life and means of existence;
- ensure sustainable and equitable management of cross-boarder water resources, taking into account all the interests concerned, integrating the various needs of the different parties and by facilitating South-South cooperation;
- ensure a broad management in such a way as to guarantee the equitable, sustainable and adequate distribution of water between the different types of users in the related sectors: agriculture, energy, industry, health, environment, etc...

Moreover, with the Union's recently adopted reforms concerning water policy (and particularly the Framework Directive in the field of water policy), the European continent as well as water-related actors have a vast and advanced experience and expertise in water management available to them.

Indeed, in most European countries local and regional authorities play an essential role in the implementation of the right to access drinking water and to satisfactory sanitation.

It is this expertise that the local and regional authorities hope to apply to their relations with their counterparts in developing countries in respect of the following principles:

- **Universality of the right of access:** access to water is a universal and enduring human right of which the concrete implementation must ensure respect of the equality in treatment and contribute to social and territorial solidarity, all while taking into account the needs and economic capacity of the populations.
- **Integrated approach:** essential in order to guarantee the integration of water and sanitation services in the context of the overall management of resources.
- **Appropriation / governance:** the drafting and implementation of water policies must seek to and allow for the participation of all actors concerned.
- **Intelligent management:** the resource of water is a common heritage, not subject to private appropriation. It is necessary to contribute to the protection of this resource (quantity and quality) by reducing excessive and non-sustainable usages, by applying an equitable, just and solidarity-enhancing pricing system, based on the principle of sustainability and the fight against abuse and waste (principles of polluter-payer and/or user-payer), but also through education and information for the populations.
- **Publicly controlled management:** management of water and sanitation services is all the more efficient when under the control of local publicly elected authorities whose mission it is to guarantee access for all to these essential services. These authorities must be able to choose freely between different management methods (government operated, government agency, management delegated to private or public operators or to an association).

- **Innovation and flexibility:** particularly concerning the financing of infrastructures related to the management of water and sanitation by the appropriate systems, projects for decentralized cooperation, training, education and institutional strengthening for water management.

The European Local and Regional Authorities hereby commit:

- to ensure on their own territory, and within their competences, a management of water and sanitation services which allows an access for all to water and sanitation in sufficient quantity and quality, and at a reasonable price in order to fulfil these most fundamental needs,
- to ensure an intelligent, sustainable and integrated management of water by combating - through efforts that are coordinated between all actors - against the pollution of subterranean and surface waters, but also against sea pollution,
- to raise awareness among the populations and all users (entrepreneurs, farmers, industries...) about the global and local stakes in the water issue and to promote an intelligent and responsible management of water through education and information campaigns for the public at large as well as students, awareness raising activities, financial incentives, all aiming at an implementation of policies for sustainable development (particularly Agenda 21),
- to develop cooperation with their counterparts in Europe and the rest of the world, taking into account the experiences of the many local authorities which have for several years now been undertaking activities of decentralized cooperation in this sector, and also in cooperation with the world organisation of local authorities, United Cities and Local Governments.
- to reserve a significant portion of the aid allocated for decentralized cooperation to the development of local public services, that these may guarantee an equitable access to water and sanitation services and thus contribute in the fight against poverty and inequality.

The European Local and Regional Authorities request that:

The governments of the Member States of the European Union:

- promote and organise, particularly in terms of the transposition of European water regulations, the effective application of the polluter-payer principle to all categories of users,

- respect their commitment to set aside at least 0.7% of their GNP for programmes of cooperation with developing countries, and to reserve a significant portion of this aid for the concrete realisation of the goals set out in the Johannesburg action plan concerning access to water and sanitation. This commitment could take the form of financial support to cooperation activities carried out by local and regional authorities,
- involve local and regional authorities and their associations in the various governmental water and sanitation programmes,
- allow the local and regional authorities wishing to do so to set aside a portion of taxes collected from users to go towards the supplying of water and sanitation services, and activities of cooperation with their partners in developing countries.

The European Union:

- recognize the specific role played by local and regional authorities in the guaranteeing of access to water and sanitation by developing specific support programmes, particularly in training the relevant actors in developing countries;
- support the promotion of good practices and the exchange of experiences based on existing partnerships and programmes (Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, etc...) or by setting up specific programmes;
- develop a European approach to North-South solidarity by supporting, through appropriate activities, multilateral cooperation projects undertaken in tandem with local and regional authorities and their partners in the local and regional authorities in developing countries.

The United Nations, intergovernmental institutions and development banks:

- adopt the World Charter for Local Self-Government;
- ensure the preservation and development of basic public services with management systems that are adapted to the respective local contexts (existence and level of activeness of local authorities, local economy, user demand, ...);
- recognise the role of local and regional authorities in the water and sanitation issue in order to promote its development in their domains, and to build financing for projects and programmes created by local authorities, particularly those that run along the lines of decentralized cooperation;
- accelerate the follow-through of the commitments made regarding access to water and sanitation and the fight against poverty;
- preserve the major ecological balances, particularly through concrete commitments from all States to apply the convention on climate change.

WE SHALL TAKE ACTION so that the **European and international associations of local and regional authorities**:

- play an active role in the preparation, carrying out and follow up of the Mexico Forum, as well as in the application of its conclusions;
- support decentralized cooperation, exchanges and partnerships between local and regional authorities, as well as the national and regional associations which are active in this domain;
- transmit this declaration to the international bodies.