

## Preface

Under the aegis of UNESCO, 26 agencies of the United Nations worked to produce the third world report on water resources (*World Water Development Report*), published on the occasion of the Istanbul World Water Forum held in March 2009. In contrast to the previous reports, the tone of this report is much more alarming. In fact, it is stated that, in spite of the vital character of water, the sector suffers from a chronic lack of political interest, bad governance, and underinvestment, and it is necessary to act immediately to avoid a global crisis.

Nevertheless, the annual global takings with regard to the volume of easily accessible and “usable” water are estimated today at 3800 billion m<sup>3</sup>, which only represents 25% of the usable resources. But this relative abundance does not reflect the enormous disparities in the geographical distribution of this vital resource. Some regions are indeed already in a state of water stress (resources lower than 500 m<sup>3</sup> a year per capita), while others have to face disasters linked to the chronic overabundance of rainfall. These disparities lead to numerous and various difficulties.

On the demographic level, for example, world population growth increases water requirements to 64 billion m<sup>3</sup> per year. Agriculture, economic development and power production make an essential resource more important according to the strategic choices and the commitments which depend on it.

The disorders resulting from climate change also have consequences on the hydrological cycle, and the IPCC forecasts agree on longer droughts and more numerous floods. These disorders will intensify the degradation of ecosystems that are already often overexploited.

On a sanitary level, it has already been noticed that in developing countries 80% of diseases are linked to the water, the consequence of insufficient access to drinking water and to a lack of infrastructure because of a double deficit: financing and politico-strategic choices.

Reviewing this whole worrying panorama of water today, one also has to take into account the increasing appropriation of environmental issues by public opinion, as well as the internationalization and globalization of discussion around the question of the water. The “blue gold” now stands out as one of the strongest stakes of the 21st century, with the threat of “water wars” in the background.

This 6th World FRIEND Conference, entitled “*Global Change: Facing Risks and Threats to Water Resources*” aims to make a quality scientific contribution to the answers required regarding future water stakes.

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