

Opening speech, World Water Week 2009 08 17

Mr. Anders Berntell, Executive Director, SIWI.

Ministers, Mayor of Stockholm, Water Prize Laureates, Excellencies,
Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen, Dear Water and Sanitation
Friends.

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to welcome you all to the 19th World Water Week in Stockholm. We have more than 2400 registered participants, which again is a new record, and very happy to have you all here. In times of economic crisis, swine flu and with another big Water event earlier this year, I have to admit that we at SIWI are overwhelmed over the number of participants.

The World Water Week in Stockholm is the only annual water meeting with such broad participation from different sectors of the society, the practitioners, scientists, policy makers, private sector actors, the international organisations, NGO:s, donors. You are all here. Our meeting here in Stockholm is the leading annual platform for international discussions on water, in its broadest sense. Together we try to advance efforts related to water and sanitation, the environment, livelihoods and poverty reduction and their interlinkages. We have more than 160 organisations, who arrange different meetings by themselves or together with us at SIWI. We have now established an Advisory Committee for the World Water Week, with some of these organisations involved, we are happy for their support and involvement.

It is together with and thanks to all of you that we have been able to develop the Week to what it is today, and we are eager to continue this cooperation in the future. Thank You.

I would also like to take this opportunity to extend a very warm Thank You to all those who finance our activities. The City of Stockholm and the Swedish Government are our strongest supporters, and have been so for many, many years. A warm thank you also to the Founding companies of the Stockholm Water Prize and the different sponsoring companies and organisations of the other Prizes and of the World Water Week for your support. And finally to the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency, SIDA, and the German Ministry for Development Cooperation for the strong support we have from you.

Water is discussed in many international meetings, and i would like to thank the World Water Council, the Government of Turkey and the City of Istanbul for all the efforts they put into organising the discussions at the World Water Forum in March.

The theme of this year's World Water Week is "Accessing water for the Common Good".

The words "for the common good" indicate that we are convinced that water is something that strongly contributes to the social and economic development of people and countries. Reducing people's access to water will seriously affect the functions of our society.

But what are the main barriers for gaining access to water?

One way of structuring our discussion, is to consider some possible situations. You could for example live in a region where;

- 1) There is very little water due to the natural climatic conditions (the arid regions of our world)
- 2) The availability of water is changed due to the new effects of climate change, or
- 3) You could live in a place where the water is used by someone else
 - a. An upstream user
 - b. Another sector
 - c. Another country

You could also live in a situation where safe water is available, but not accessible due to economic barriers. It is too expensive for you.

This leads me to briefly address four issues that will be at the core of many discussions during our week; Financing, Climate change, the Water and Food nexus and Transboundary Waters

On Financing: We can provide Astronauts with a safe supply of drinking water when they travel to the moon, but we cannot provide the same service to slum dwellers in Kibera, Nairobi or Dharavi Mumbai. Very clearly, your economic situation can be a barrier to an equitable share of the resource. We need to find the solutions that enable the poorer segments of our societies access to these services, while at the same time ensures that the institutions that deliver those services are economically viable. Therefore, financial mechanisms for the water supply and sanitation sectors will be discussed in various meetings during the week.

On Climate Change: The mandate before our world is to prevent the avoidable and adapt to the unavoidable. Even with the best mitigation strategies, water related effects of climate change will come. The challenge for many nations is, how to adapt.

Climate Change is in effect Water Change, since it will be through water that the changes will be realized first and foremost. Climate adaptation is to a large extent about water resource management.

The problem is that the water and climate policy communities have traditionally operated in separate “boxes”. The UN’s own Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has concluded that water resources have not been adequately addressed in climate policy formulations.

The Climate negotiators in general have so far been unwilling to include specific references to the need to address water. The reason from their side being that “Water is a sector and we cannot at this stage discuss sector specific measures in the negotiations”.

This is however a very serious misconception. Water is not just another sector. Water is one of the elements of our planet. Water, the lakes, rivers and the groundwater is the bloodstream of our planet, as our own Senior Scientific Advisor, Professor Malin Falkenmark put it already back in the 70’s. All the other sectors of our society depend on water. When we affect the availability of water, we affect food production, we affect the energy production, we affect forestry, we affect the health status of countries and so on. All functions of our society will be affected when water is affected.

Therefore, COP 15 needs to address how we can adapt to the Water Change that will come. Many developing countries were supporting this in the negotiations in Bonn last week.

We will discuss climate change effects on water, and what to do about them during two full days this Week.

The Challenges related to the Water and Food nexus has been a part of our discussions here in Stockholm for many years, and will continue to be so. Growing populations, the need to feed them properly, and added to that the changing consumption patterns towards more water intensive food, increases the demands for water for food production dramatically.

Various aspects of linkages between water, wastewater and food will be discussed at several meetings during the week, including the very difficult but essential discussion on if and how trade in food products can be a part of the wider water resource management solution.

On Transboundary Waters: We believe that getting transboundary water resources management 'right' is not simply important. It is urgent to secure the livelihoods of billions of people and sustain the resource across the globe. I believe the international community has not yet responded well enough to this challenge. The special focus of the 2009 World Water Week in Stockholm on transboundary waters is an attempt to deal directly with the pressing development and security issues these flows bring about.

SIWI has put together a report that intends to challenge us to wrestle with some of the latest concepts and lessons learned from around the world. We hope that the articles will provoke appropriate concern and inspire action.

When I say that the international community has not paid enough attention to the issue of transboundary waters I do not say that only increased funding would solve the issue. Far from it. The issue at hand is a complex web of interplay between the natural and environmental aspects, moving on to socio-economic and political.

The sometimes heated debates about transboundary waters witnessed at many international meetings reflect the political reality seen in the basins themselves. Whether we like it or not transboundary waters are immensely political. On top of the political challenges we will face the effects of climate change that might exacerbate the already tense situation.

Nearly half of the global available surface water is found in 263 international river basins. In Africa 90 percent of surface water is shared between two or more countries.

WWF urges the world's governments to join and implement the UN Convention on International Watercourses, which requires 18 additional ratifications out of the 35 that are necessary for its entry into force. As an individual, or as a representative for your country, you can join their campaign for bringing the convention into force by 2011, by signing the postcard. Many already have.

During our week we have a number of Water Prize winners, who will receive their Awards at different Prize ceremonies. This is an important component of our week since we with these awards highlight the good examples, the leaders

- Trojan Technologies, a Canadian developer and proponent of large-scale ultraviolet (UV) water disinfection systems used worldwide, will receive the

2009 Stockholm Industry Water Award. They have changed the way the world looks at disinfection of water.

- The Winner of this year's Swedish Baltic Sea Water Award will be announced on Thursday, so it's still a well kept secret. Congratulations in advance to the winner.

And all the 60 Stockholm Junior Water Prize finalists are here, representing 29 countries, all of them already winners of their national competition, and now participating in the International Competition here in Stockholm.

Let me at last express a very warm welcome to this year's recipient of the Stockholm Water Prize. The Nominating Committee for the Prize stated that "The results of Dr. Pathak's endeavours constitute one of the most amazing examples of how one person can impact the well being of millions. Dr. Pathak's leadership in attaining these remarkable socio-environmental results has been universally recognized, and not least by those who have secured the freedom of human dignity as a consequence of his efforts." I am sure that we all agree.

Let me also express a warm welcome to all earlier Laureates and Award Winners present here today. We are grateful for your continued involvement.

Through the various events we organise here during our week, we try to seek solutions to some of the most pressing challenges for humanity. None of us has the solution, but together we can start to identify not only the direction we should take, but also what the next steps should be.

So, once more, Welcome to Stockholm, I hope you enjoy the different social events i hope you take time to look at the different exhibitions.

But most important, Your active participation in all discussions during this week determines whether it will make a difference or not. So work hard, be active, be involved, and at the same time, do not forget to enjoy the nice summer in Stockholm and all the water that surrounds us.

Welcome.