



Message from Jacques CHIRAC, President of the French Republic, to the closing session of the 4th world water forum

Federal district, Mexico, wednesday 22 march 2006

Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

On this World Water Day, I would like to tell you all, ladies and gentlemen, who are gathered here in Mexico, that France shares your view that urgent action is needed, your commitment and your conviction that there are solutions to one of the most determining issues of our time, namely that of access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Year after year, we have observed that world water shortage is increasing. For more than one billion human beings, access to safe drinking water is a daily battle. Water diseases are still the chief cause of mortality in poor countries and are responsible every year for the loss of millions of human lives. The situation is compounded by climate change, the pollution of rivers and fresh water supplies, population pressure and the influx of newcomers into urban areas. This is a health crisis, as well as a political one, affecting many regions of the world where access problems exacerbate discontent, and tension over the sharing of water threatens to degenerate into conflicts.

For a long time now, the international community has been taking action. With the Millennium Development Goals, access to water and sanitation is a top priority for development whose achievement it often conditions.

France is in the forefront of this battle. It participates in all UN work. It supports the Niger Basin Partnership. It has doubled the amount of development assistance it earmarks for water-related issues in Africa. It contributes 215 million euros to the African Development Bank's Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative. It supports the EU Water Initiative.

This is first and foremost a financial issue. Given that the needs in this area have been estimated at some ten billion dollars per annum by 2015, I urge each and every one of you to show imagination in working out creative solutions, and to assess, in particular, the potential of new financing instruments, first of which is the international solidarity levy on air tickets. This is vital to development, ecological balance and peace.

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is also an issue of good governance and local democracy.



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

French local authorities have accumulated considerable expertise in this field. Shared management of watersheds or management delegated to private enterprises in charge of public-service missions, consulting users, and introducing mechanisms for solidarity towards the most disadvantaged are all forms of experience that these authorities wish to share with their counterparts worldwide.

Mankind will win the battle for water through a collective and sustainable commitment. Our success will not be measured in billions of euros, but in millions of lives saved or protected from disease, and in hundreds of millions of people for whom access to water and sanitation will no longer mean a daily battle.

This is where our responsibility lies. I thank you for contributing your commitment and support to this cause in a spirit of fraternity also aimed at seeking the common good of humanity.