



SPEECH BY HE AMBASSADOR LÉON FABER, DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE ASIA-EUROPE FOUNDATION (ASEF) AT THE 4TH ASEM SEMINAR ON URBAN WATER MANAGEMENT AND HUNAN (CHENZHOU), 26 NOVEMBER 2020

Excellencies,

My name is Léon Faber and I am the Deputy Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) which is the only permanent institution in the ASEM Process. ASEF's mission is to promote mutual understanding between Asia and Europe by bringing the people of the two regions together.

I would like to start by thanking the ASEM Water Resources Research and Development Center for organising this timely seminar, and to thank the People's Government of Hunan Province for hosting the event, as well as the People's Government of Chenzhou City as one of the organisers of the seminar. I would like to express our deep appreciation and gratitude for giving us the opportunity to address this meeting on such an important issue.

This seminar is a welcome addition to ASEF's activities dealing with environmental matters. Water management is a crucial challenge that face all nations today. This 4th ASEM Seminar is building on the results of the 3rd ASEM Seminar on Urban Water Management held in 2018, and it is aimed at generating a fruitful dialogue among the countries of Europe and Asia in the field of integrated water management.

I understand that an Accomplishment Document will be prepared by the drafting committee to study the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Hopefully the outcome of this seminar will serve the deliberations at the level of the ASEM Ministers of Environment.

We have benefitted from this series of seminars on sustainable management of water resources. It is time we take serious steps forward. How can we do that? I would like to share my thoughts on three particular areas.

First, **multilateral cooperation is necessary**. Water does not recognise national borders. But it can be managed for the benefit of all in a productive way, be it through dams that produce electricity or navigation



that improves connectivity. We must however ensure that such actions must take into account the social and environmental impacts. This will require countries, particularly neighbours, to work together closely to find mutually beneficial solutions to such challenges. We may quote some positive examples of such regional cooperation as it has for instance been implemented in the framework of the Danube River Convention or how cooperation is promoted by the **Mekong River Commission** and other initiatives.

I would also like to draw the attention to the **UNECE Water Convention** that is open for ratification of all countries and is a unique international legal instrument and intergovernmental platform which aims to ensure the sustainable use of transboundary water resources by facilitating cooperation.

Second, **water is one of mankind's greatest gifts** and we must treat it with due respect. Less than 3 percent of the world's water is fresh and drinkable, of which 2,5 % is frozen in the Antarctica, Arctic and glacier. I am reminded of just how valuable water is by being in Singapore, a country which according to the World Resources Institute's 2015 report is classified as being water scarce and as the most water-stressed country in the world. Clean water, particularly potable water in a developed urban environment is not a given. Currently one in five people live without access to drinking water. The United Nations predicts that by 2025, 35% of the world's population could experience water shortages, and two-thirds of the world's population could be living under water stressed conditions.

Third, **water is a powerful force of Nature** – floods, coastal hurricanes, tsunamis spare no Nation and no country can hope to manage such natural disasters on its own. Sharing information, alert warnings of impending hits and timely coordinated disaster relief efforts are therefore essential. There is yet no blueprint for such cross-border sharing, but we can build upon existing bilateral and other agreements that allow for greater sharing of information and resources to deal with such disasters.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that **clean water is an essential but finite resource**, one that needs to be carefully allocated and used. According to a survey based on global urbanization trends carried out by the United Nation Environment Programme (UNEP), global infrastructure development and reconstruction needs during the next 25 years will be USD 41 trillion, and the water sector covers the 54% of it!



I would therefore like to stress **the importance of water management as a common resource of mankind**, and to highlight **the need for all of us to work together to accord water the proper respect it deserves**. Events such as this series of ASEM Seminars on Urban Water Management serve as useful and relevant platforms to bring together practical solutions to benefit all users of this scarce essential resource of humanity. **ASEF stands ready to play an active role in support of ASEM partner countries' efforts in this crucial endeavour.**

Thank you.
