
par La Rédaction

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Elementary, the first of the barrier gestures requires water and drinking water! The President of the Mediterranean Water Institute, Alain Meyssonnier, recalls, in this open editorial (*) for Gomet', that 20% of humanity does not have access to drinking water and pleads that the developed world should not only focus on the pandemic that is hitting it, but also take into account the deadly pandemics that are killing hundreds of thousands of people, especially children, in the South.

Originally from Marseilles and its working-class neighbourhoods, such as La Belle de mai, Alain Meyssonnier went to the Jean Perrin high school, then to the Essec. His service in the
cooperation in Santo Domingo will make him a globetrotter. He joined SEM, the Société des eaux de Marseille, and developed the Marseille business in Latin America for 20 years.

As a salesman in a world of engineers and hydraulic engineers, he was entrusted with the operation of Marseilles at the time, in 2003, when the urban community was born.

In 2014, he takes back his international hat and since 2017 is in charge of the international and new partnerships of the group. Advisor on France's foreign trade, founder of the Africalink network, he is President of the Mediterranean Water Institute, a professional network of influence and action in the Mediterranean.

Drinking water, which has long been rare in Marseilles, celebrated above at the Palais Longchamp, is a recognized know-how of our territory. Marseilles plays a role of exchange, alert and mobilization on the management of this rare and vital resource.

The first barrier gesture recalled at every moment by health officials and the media around the world is: "Wash your hands regularly"! Except that today 20% of the world's population still has no access to safe drinking water and more than 30% to a sanitation system worthy of the name.
Covid-19 kills thousands of people in the World every day and it is a great misfortune for the families affected by the pandemic, but waterborne diseases also kill every day, by thousands and mainly children.

The big difference with Covid-19 is that it kills in China and Asia from where it originated, but also and above all in Europe and America mainly elderly people, and we are all affected, rich or poor, in one way or another by this new pandemic.

At the global level, the number of deaths due to malaria has been estimated by WHO at 405,000 in 2018, including 272,000 children under 5 years of age. Alain Meyssonnier

Some people speak of a before and after Covid-19, while no one speaks of a before and after malaria, which continues to kill by the thousands every day in Africa, Asia and Latin America along with other water-borne diseases. At the global level, the number of deaths due to malaria has been estimated by WHO at 405,000 in 2018. 272,000 children under the age of 5 years, the most vulnerable children in the world died of malaria that year. The WHO African Region accounted for 94% of global malaria deaths. According to the World Malaria Report 2019, "nearly 85% of global malaria deaths in 2018 were concentrated in 20 countries in the WHO African Region and India. Nigeria alone accounted for nearly 24% of these deaths, followed by the Democratic Republic of Congo (11%), the United Republic of Tanzania (5%), and Angola, Mozambique and Niger (4% each).

When will there be access to safe water and sanitation for all? We do not yet know the full impact of this new pandemic, not only in terms of public health, but also in terms of economic development in OECD countries and of course in developing countries with its consequences in terms of survival. But let us hope that it will mobilise civil societies throughout the world beyond the experts on the urgent need to provide access to drinking water and sanitation for all and that the world's leaders will finally consider this issue as their first duty.

To refocus on the Mediterranean "Global Hot Spot", if we look at the situation in terms of water stress, freshwater availability could decrease by another 10 to 15% over the next 20 years as the population continues to grow and economic and tourism development throughout the region also has the prospect of continued growth outside the Covid-19 parenthesis. This will inevitably impose new constraints on agriculture, which accounts for between 70 and 80
% of uses in the region. This year, next June, the Maghreb countries are expecting a drop of around 50% in their cereal production.

The Mediterranean coastline will experience an increase in water stress

With more than 250 million inhabitants by 2040, the Mediterranean coastline will experience an increase in water stress and only the use of so-called non-conventional resources, such as mainly desalination and the reuse of wastewater associated with environmentally friendly energy production, will enable us to meet ever-increasing needs. The fight against waste and other misuse of the resource must be permanently associated with this. The Kingdom of Morocco, which is in a new period of drought, has made no mistake in maintaining, in spite of the containment and curfew imposed by Covid-19, programmes to combat leaks in drinking water and irrigation networks and industries such as the Office chérifien des phosphate.

The issue of wastewater reuse, a major challenge for the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries for two reasons: on the one hand, to cope with the shortage, especially in agriculture, with an enormous potential (95 to 98% of wastewater is reused in Israel and southern Spain against less than 20 to 30% in most of the other countries); on the other hand, to meet the shortage, especially in agriculture, with an enormous potential (95 to 98% of wastewater is reused in Israel and southern Spain against less than 20 to 30% in most of the other countries). But when we talk about reusing waste water, we mean treating it completely with a view to reusing it and, as a result, fully protecting our Mediterranean, surface water and groundwater.

The World Water Council (**) made no mistake in asking the Mediterranean Water Institute to set up a Global Observatory on Non-Conventional Waters and Energy, starting with the Mediterranean. So, let’s commit ourselves so that access to drinking water and sanitation for all becomes the No. 1 priority for the planet! If the Covid-19 contributes to this awareness, the victims of this pandemic will not have died in vain! And as Jean Jalbert, Director General of the Tour du Vallat, an organisation in charge of preserving ecosystems in the Camargue, a partner of the EMI, recently said: "The Covid-19 pandemic has put a clear stop to the unbridled race of our human societies. But, however dramatic and distressing it may be, this rupture is a unique opportunity to analyse its foundations, to think about the world afterwards and to implement it". For the planet, with our sister Emmanuelle: "Yalla! Let's go forward! »

Alain Meyssonnier,
Président de l’Institut méditerranéen de l’eau.
Le 20 avril 2020
The Mediterranean Water Institute: for the good use of water resources in the Mediterranean region

The Mediterranean Water Institute, created in 1982, is a network of Mediterranean experts for the development of multilateral cooperation, an international NGO based in Marseilles. The MWI works for the preservation and good use of water resources in the Mediterranean, both at the level of the large cycle and the small cycle, ecosystems and their biodiversity as well as
the associated energy. It provides a platform for exchanges and regional cooperation between professionals and decision-makers in the field of water. As an association under the 1901 law, the IME is composed of three colleges: the college of institutions which gathers the ministries in charge of water and Mediterranean local authorities, the college of companies and water operators in the broad sense and the college of Mediterranean water experts.

It develops for its members, in collaboration with its partners and national and international donors, general studies in the form of project ownership assistance, pilot projects related to the good use of the resource and associated technologies and finally, it organizes national or international workshops, conferences and thematic seminars, all of which converge towards the Mediterranean Water Forum (Malta 2020) which takes place every three years on the road to the World Water Forum (Dakar 2021).

(*) Gomet' Media, committed to the vitality of local debate, regularly publishes forums of external contributors. These views are not binding on the editorial staff.

(**) Gomet' is a partner of the World Water Council with which it has been publishing a column [Au fil de l'eau] since December 2019. The last publication was devoted to the importance of water (and soap) as the first means of acting as a barrier in the face of the Covid-19 epidemic.