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“Real Water Divides have been bridged” 5th World Water Forum concludes with significant progress on waste water, economics and role of operators

The Istanbul World Water Forum concluded on World Water Day with a landmark Ministerial Declaration. Country governments met in Istanbul for three days, reviewing the forum's outcomes and building upon a UN-type preparatory process with open participation from all 'major groups', including NGOs, business, youth representatives, trade unions, etc.

Jack Moss, AquaFed's Senior Water Advisor and spokesperson for "Business Action for Water" declared in the closing ceremony: *"We have been delighted to participate alongside the other major groups, like NGOs, woman's groups and the youth, in all the participatory meetings in a process that fully mirrors the UN process, such as the Commission for Sustainable Development."*

The International Water Community was not able to make progress on all the numerous topics that were discussed. However, **this 5th World Water Forum has achieved significant progress by building shared visions on many important water-related challenges.** These include:

- The need to address all sanitation challenges by targeting not only the current MDG but also by managing waste water better.
- A better understanding of the fundamentals of water economics and of key financial bottlenecks. This will help mobilising additional funds to the water sector.
- A better understanding of the complementary roles of public and private sectors. This enables public and private operators to work together to remove the obstacles they both face and to focus energies on providing universal access to safe water and sanitation.
- The need to make the right to access to safe water and sanitation effective to individuals. This right has been supported in WWF5 by many stakeholders and governments.

1. Wastewater management, a key component of sanitation

The role of waste water collection and treatment to protect public health and economic development in addition to ecosystems has been widely recognized by Forum participants. For the first time in a declaration of all governments, the Istanbul Ministerial Statement aims at developing wastewater collection, treatment and reuse. This complements the sanitation MDG that targets access to toilets only.

"Talking Shit" is clearly no longer a taboo. People need to be protected from contamination by themselves and by others. Access to clean, private and safe toilets addresses the first challenge. Wastewater management and treatment is necessary to face the second one by protecting people against pollution by neighbours or by upstream activities. Inclusion of wastewater management in the Ministerial Statement is a breakthrough." said Gerard Payen, president of AquaFed.

2. Better understanding of the fundamentals of sustainable water financing

AquaFed worked together with a multi-stakeholder consortium to organize the WWF5 sessions on water finance. These sessions attracted far more people than in previous fora and resulted in shared vision on many topics. This was helped significantly by a new simplified approach to financing issues based on the 3 Ts (Tariffs, Taxes and Transfers) and Sustainable Cost-Recovery. These two concepts are included in the Ministerial Statement that is more detailed on financial matters than ever before. They are key tools on the road to attract more funds to the water and sanitation sector.

3. Public and private sectors to work together

In Istanbul some continued to advocate for water systems being compulsorily operated by the public sector and, as such, opposed to the Local authorities that claim their freedom to choose between all

management options on a case-by-case basis. However, in the Forum sessions on management and governance, it has become better understood that the challenges in the water sector have nothing to do with ownership of operators, but rather with the efficient management of utilities. The 10-hour multi-stakeholder sessions on optimising roles of public and private sectors allowed for serious discussions in a working atmosphere. Unnecessary polemics were avoided. This resulted in a broad consensus on the need for public and private operators to work together to remove the numerous obstacles they all face and to focus their respective energies on solving water challenges better.

“Since the Mexico Forum in 2006, there has been real progress in the understanding of how public-private partnerships can help governments in achieving the MDGs. New research shows that the presence of private operators in a country is a catalyst for better performance for all actors across the sector”, said Payen.

4. **Implementing the Right to safe water and sanitation**

Forum participants discussed progress on the Right to Safe Water and Sanitation in several sessions. Some interest groups unsuccessfully tried to take advantage of the discussions on the right to water to pursue other political goals.

A Ministerial Roundtable was specifically dedicated to this matter. It highlighted progress in the world where rights-based approaches have gained a high degree of support since the Mexico World Water Forum. More and more countries are supporting this right and some have started to focus on its implementation. This fits with AquaFed’s call in March 2006 for targeting implementation of the Right to Water and Sanitation. The Ministerial Statement, adopted unanimously, does not reflect this growing support from countries and stakeholders.

“There is no contradiction between private sector participation in the delivery of an efficient public service and the implementation of the human right to water and sanitation. Governments acknowledge that all energies must be mobilized to make access to water and sanitation a reality for all people”, said Payen.

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AquaFed is the International Federation of Private Water Operators. Open to companies and associations of companies of all sizes and from all countries, it aims to contribute to solving water challenges by making Private Sector know-how and experience available to the international community. It brings together more than 300 water companies that serve hundreds of millions of people in 40 countries.

In Istanbul WWF5 AquaFed participated to the Ministerial UN-type process through Business Action for Water, a business coalition with other international organisations and their Turkish counterparts that represented the ‘major group’ Business & Industry

AquaFed and its members contributed actively to numerous thematic discussions in the multi-stakeholder sessions open to all participants, including on topics as diverse as supporting the implementation of the human Right to Water and Sanitation; addressing all sanitation challenges; multiple use systems; energy for water; anti-corruption drive; building a common understanding on sustainable finance and economics; etc. AquaFed contributed also to the successful Parliamentarian and Local Authorities political processes. Local Authorities agreed on the important Istanbul Water Consensus.

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