

**World Water Forum IV - Mexico - March 16, 2006
Round-Table – Plenary**

**Statements on the Right to Water and the role of Local Governments
by Gerard Payen, President of AquaFed,
the International Federation of Private Water Operators**

Verbatim

Loïc Fauchon, the President of the World Water Council, told us a moment ago that he could not yet disclose the results of the Forum.

My personal guess is that in this forum the international water community will make progress in two areas: The Right to Water and a better understanding of the role of Local Governments

The Right to Water

In the recent past, the Right to Water has been highly debated in controversial ways in international conferences. Polemics have arisen from ignorance of the real meaning of the Right to Water. The lack of consensus has mainly resulted from a lack of knowledge.

Before this forum, many people have worked a lot on the Right to Water:

- Pedro Arrojo and others have made significant research,
- The World Water Council will release an important report in the next few days. It will probably become a reference,
- In my country, in France, we could even build a consensus between all stakeholders,

So, most probably, at the end of the Forum, a consensus will be built in the international community about the content of the Right to Water. It will then be possible to work on its implementation. The implementation of the Right to Water is a challenge for which water operators, public and private, have much experience. Their duty, as instruments of public water policies is to make the Right to Water effective. And they do it by connecting millions of people to public water systems.

There is now the understanding that the implementation of the Right to Water requires that a public authority is allocated the duty and the means to make the Right effective.

Local governments

The local governments are close to the people. They are the best-placed to be the public authority that is responsible for implementing the Right to Water. They are the ones who can identify in detail the individuals that are lacking access to water. However many local governments are in difficult situation and need support from their central government and from the international community.

Much work has also been done in this domain before this Forum. I think that this forum will make a difference by providing higher visibility to the role and the needs of local governments.

A global coalition of local governments will make an important political declaration next week. This is good for water. Up to now all stakeholders were not on board of the global debate. We were missing the local governments. I hope that, from this Mexico event, they will become active members of the international water community.

We all know that water and sanitation challenges are local challenges that have to be handled locally by the local governments. I would like to insist on the huge responsibility of national Governments to make these local actions possible. Local governments need that their country governments provide them with the appropriate institutional, legal and financial frameworks.

In particular, this is essential in the financing area. The Gurria Report, the UNSG's Advisory Board are highlighting the role of national governments to enhance the access to finance of their local governments.

The Ministers will convene next week. I hope that they will understand their duty to make local governments able to perform their own duty.

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