



Caring for WATER, Caring for LIFE

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an immense honor, both for Nestlé and me, to receive this prestigious Stockholm Industry Water Award today.

I express my profound gratitude to the Stockholm Water Foundation, which more than 10 years ago, created this award in collaboration with the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences and together with WBCSD - an award which since has gained a distinguished reputation worldwide, reflected in the list of former laureates.

As a matter in fact, we are following Ek Sonn Chan, the Director General of the Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority, whose achievement has become a globally recognized example, how one of the big challenges of sustainable, urban water supply can be met.

I know that today, this prize goes to my colleagues of the Board of Directors but above all to our management and our more than 280 000 collaborators all over the world who, over the last couple of years, have relentlessly worked to achieve a better recognition of the importance of water as the most valuable natural resource and who have been striving to use it better and more efficiently in their daily endeavors to bring good nutrition from the farm to the fork.

Caring for water is intrinsically caring for life.

As a chemical compound, few can be simpler than water: two atoms of hydrogen joined to one of oxygen.

But from a human perspective water is life, “the precarious molecular edge on which we survive”, as Barbara Kingsolver said in a recent article about water.

Yes, the amount of water on earth has basically not changed. And the water that our ancestors thousands of years ago drank is the same that we drink today.

What has changed is the number of us and our daily needs. Population growth in the world has had an extraordinary development and far from stabilizing at 7 billions of today will instead keep growing and may reach 10 billion by 2100, according to the latest UN report. Every single person has what the UN defines as a human right, the need for at least 25-35 liters of water per day for hydration and minimum sanitation.

Although this fact alone will mean a substantial increase of water demand from around 77 billion liters to 110 billion, it is only a small drop on a hot stone as it accounts for around 1.5% of total water consumption.

The real underlying problems are in the areas of agriculture, industry and household consumption, all three of which are showing substantially increased water demand, albeit for different reasons. Unfortunately mankind has not yet woken up to the fact that water is a limited resource and not an infinite gift from Mother Earth.

We pump aquifers and divert rivers, neglecting that already today we over use this precious resource substantially with environmental damages being the price, as reflected in shrinking lakes, waterless rivers and dry deltas. While many governments have overdrawn their financial accounts, we all have massively overdrawn our water accounts.

Globally, water demand is expected to exceed supply by over 40% by 2030. As water sits at the nexus of so many global issues – from food security to economic growth, from energy supply to health, to mention only a few –, all sectors of human activity are and will be affected.

How is it then that we treat this unique, vital and precious resource so disdainfully?

Every other raw material – from oil to corn - is being handled and treated with respect and value.

Why are we not willing to give the slightest value to most of the water being used by our different commercial activities?

If water had even a small value, would we continue with the absurd bio-fuel policy where 9100 liter of water is needed to produce 1 liter of bio-fuel?

Would we allow swimming pools to be filled and golf courses being irrigated with subsidized drinking water, while women in developing countries walk an average of 3.7 miles daily to get water, because 46% of people on earth don't have water pipes to their homes?

If the millions of woman and even more millions of children who spend a big part of their day carrying too heavy water buckets had a faucet by their doors, what would the economic and above all sanitary and health impact look like?

What we know is that when clean water becomes available and plentiful, these communities start to grow more food, raise more animals and become part of a prospering society which enjoys a longer and healthier life.

I know too well that water is above all a local issue and that saving 1 liter of water in Northern Europe is not going to solve the problem of the thirsty "Sahel" countries; but I also know that, wherever we are in the world, we should care about our source of life, we should care about water and treat it with due respect.

If not we will run out of water long before we are running out of oil!

In this sense, your collective work, as global ambassadors of water, Ladies and Gentlemen, is extremely important and the Award that has been bestowed upon Nestlé this year, is not only a great honor but also a call for all of us to reinforce our commitment to water and an encouragement to continue our efforts to achieve the right place for water in our society.

To care for water is to care for life. Thank you.