

**4th Workshop on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change in  
Transboundary Basins  
Transboundary climate change adaptation serving multiple  
purposes  
Geneva, 25 June 2013**

*Opening speech Alexander Verbeek*

Thank you Chairman,

Being one of the first speakers, I would like to start with a few scene setters of the kind of issues that we, and the world, should be dealing with.

The frequency and severity of climate related water disasters is increasing. And so is the need for transboundary climate change adaptation.

The World Metrological Organisation said last year that the physical characteristics of extreme weather and climate events are being increasingly shaped by climate change. It speaks about "major heatwaves and extreme high temperatures, drought and wildfires, extreme precipitation and floods, snow and extreme cold and tropical cyclones".

Let's review the last week.

- We saw extreme flooding in Alberta and British Columbia. Calgary was under water and will be without electricity for weeks.
- The monsoon started much too early in India: 5000 people are missing and there is enormous damage in the more than 100 towns that the floods tore through
- And we saw Germany picking up the bill of 8 billion dollars of estimated damage after the terrible flooding of the week before.
- I also read this week that The World Bank estimates the cost in 2012 of extreme weather in the United States to be above 250 billion dollars.

Today, around 700 million people in 43 countries suffer from water scarcity.

And in only twelve years two-thirds of the world's population could be living under water stressed conditions. A staggering 2 billion people will be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity, which means scarcity to the extent that it will impede or even reverse economic and social progress.

The awareness is growing. The World Economic Forum ranked water scarcity as the second biggest threat to prosperity of mankind.

So far for the numbers

There are security issues as well:

The US intelligence Community Assessment concluded that: During the next 10 years, water problems (like Water shortages, poor water quality and floods) will contribute to instability in states important to US national security interests.

Then there are the development and humanitarian issues.

Every minute four people die because of the lack of safe water and adequate sanitation. Most of them are children.

And we should keep in mind that water is also an essential element for economic growth. You need water for energy. In some regions in India, groundwater tables have dropped to such a low level that the coal fired plants are no longer economically viable.

Our common future is linked to water, or the lack thereof, and the urgent need for water cooperation.

### *The Netherlands*

In the Netherlands water cooperation has always been a central part of our strategy, being Europe's soakage pit with many European rivers ending in our delta. We were forced to become skilled water managers. We take a holistic picture to water management, and we have established structures and institutions to find collective solutions – involving many stakeholders beyond our borders.

Our challenges are now 'going global'. Water does not know borders and water diplomacy and water cooperation are becoming more important every day. It is why we hosted World Water Day in the Netherlands on March 22, which marked the start of the International Year of Water Cooperation. And it is why I organised, together with Niels Vlaanderen, the Water Diplomacy Seminar in The Hague on 26 April.

The Netherlands, as a downstream country of four international rivers, is very much aware of the importance of transboundary cooperation in water management.

We must be aware that it is not only the downstream country that gains from the cooperation, also upstream countries have a lot to gain, where the most obvious examples are transport and fisheries. That is why we are very happy to co-chair this Task Force together with Switzerland as the country is at the source of the River Rhine.

With the changing climate, cooperation becomes ever more important. We have to deal with increased extremes in precipitation and river discharges, both abundance and shortage. These extremes also influence the quality of the water.

Next to that, delta-areas like The Netherlands face sea-level rise entailing increased flood risk and salt intrusion.

In the Netherlands, the so-called Deltaprogramme was started to study the impacts and vulnerabilities of climate change and possible measures to adapt to the problems. As adaptation is predominantly about water, the Deltaprogramme is rooted in water management, but it takes an integrated approach and links to all economic sectors and the different government levels.

My country is also much aware that the possible decisions on adaptation are also linked to the developments in the other countries with which we share the rivers. This is an important topic that is currently discussed in the river commissions.

Next to that, we experienced that we can learn from other countries worldwide. Therefore we developed the Global Water programme, in which we cooperate with six other delta-countries worldwide. In this respect, the Netherlands also welcomes the opening of the Water Convention into a global convention, which makes it easier to find common grounds for adaptation.

The workshops under this Task Force have brought together a wealth of experiences and good practices. The programme of pilot projects has substantially contributed to this knowledgebase. The next step that is envisaged is to put together all these lessons learned to make them more easily available. This will be discussed in detail during the Task Force meeting on Thursday, but during this workshop we will also spend some time on further developing the ideas.

This workshop focuses on adaptation that serves multiple purposes. As stated earlier, adaptation requires an integrated approach, reaching out to all sectors and government levels, where water management is at the centre. Although this is easily said, it is not easily put to practice. This workshop aims to exchange views and experiences that will help all of us to realise such an integrated approach.

Thank you