

## HIGH LEVEL PANEL on HYDRO-DIPLOMACY

On the Side of the UN-Water Summit on Groundwater 2022, coordinated by UNESCO

*Under the High Patronage of*

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Commission on Science Missions for Sustainability*

*Former Director General, UNESCO*

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*"Rethinking Hydro-diplomacy: International Rivers as Instruments for Peace*

*Shared experiences, solutions, and sustainable resources management"*

followed by the launch of the

## WORLD WATER for PEACE CONFERENCE

December 6th, 2022, Paris & hybrid

## CONFERENCE VERBATIM REPORT

### SESSION 2: WATER & DEVELOPMENT

*11h45-13h; each speakers' intervention: 5-6 minutes & 2 rounds of discussion*

*Objectives: This second session on water and development will turn to international aid and development actors. Their concrete experiences and field knowledge will create a dynamic dialogue around their existing initiatives, and the challenges and hurdles faced as part of their activities on water-related topics.*

Moderator: **VERCAMBRE Marie-Laure** (Ms.), General Director, French Water Partnership

- **LIPPONEN Annukka** (Dr. Ms.), Chief Specialist on Water Resources Management, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland
- **SORENSEN Claus** (Mr.), Former Director General, European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO) (on Zoom)
- **LUNDE Lars Andreas** (Mr.), leader of Norad's Section for Nature and Climate, The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) (on Zoom)
- **KARLSSON Mats** (Mr.), Former World Bank Vice President & Former State Secretary for development, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden
- **DELISLE Pascal** (Mr.), Head, Economic, Development, Environment and Digital Issues, European External Action Service (EAES), Geneva (on Zoom)
- **GOUJON Lionel** (Mr.), Head of division, Water and Sanitation Division, French Development Agency (AFD)
- **KUINDERSMA Eric** (Mr.), Senior Policy Advisor Water Governance, Waterschap Rivierenland, The Netherlands

#### **Introductory words by the Moderator:**

- Marie-Laure Vercambre started by introducing the members of panel, noting that many key countries were represented, e.g. Finland, where one of the two conventions on transboundary water comes from, i.e. the one which has been ratified the most; the Netherlands, who are co-presiding the UN 2023 Conference; Sweden, which is hosting the World Water Week; France, an importance country in the field of water; the European Union, with very important water directives; and finally Norway, a key player as well. She then turned to the first speaker on the panel, Ms Annukka Lipponen, asking her to introduce the importance of transboundary waters when it comes to discussing development.

**LIPPONEN Annukka** (Dr. Ms.), Chief Specialist on Water Resources Management, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland

- Annukka Lipponen started her address by stating that her intervention would be that of a practitioner, former UN civil servant, and scientist. For the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and for Finland overall, cooperation on transboundary waters is an important part of the ministry's international water strategy. It is also one of the key elements of water diplomacy, working for a water-secure world. Fair and well-governed management of water resources serves as a platform for peacebuilding and development, Ms Lipponen stated. Finland puts an emphasis on prevention, which is why the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and the New York Convention are important instruments of water diplomacy. Finland is bringing together transboundary water experience, technical water knowledge, and diplomatic efforts to respond to the needs. Partnerships are essential for that, the Convention provides a platform for the exchange of experiences but also a legal and institutional framework.
- Ms Lipponen shared a concrete example of a contribution to the Water Convention, building on and supporting regional efforts. Finland recently supported programmes in Kazakhstan with a regional workshop on water allocation. This provided dialogue between countries, raising questions about intersectoral issues; key conflicts there arising between agricultural water use and hydropower usage, which are poorly compatible, Ms Lipponen noted. The cooperation situation has improved, despite there still being tensions and gaps in the regional cooperation framework. From Ms Lipponen's practical experience, you cannot always solve water issues with water since economic sectors and their policies, their plans, and the investments that are made have huge impacts on water resources across borders. Water diplomacy should not be seen in a narrow sense, being only about water, Ms Lipponen stated, the most effective water diplomacy might be energy diplomacy or climate diplomacy. Where to put the emphasis must be carefully considered.
- The Underwater Convention and particularly conventions from the Balkans are also coordinating transboundary dialogues with the energy sector for example. It is already an achievement to get the hydropower operators and ministries in a room to talk about plans going years ahead. Power companies should therefore be engaged. Another Water Convention and the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus have looked at different cross-sectoral solutions and gathered experience as well as investments. The following week would see the next meeting of the Task Force Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystem Nexus, Ms Lipponen shared. These points might give some inspiration for diplomatic efforts for creating solutions across sectors.

**Transition and introductory question by the Moderator:**

- Looking at the food crisis we are experiencing right now, what does that tell us about water?

**SORENSEN Claus** (Mr.), Former Director General, European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO) (*on Zoom*)

- Claus Sorensen came to the water issue through his work on the food security challenge the world is currently facing as a repercussion of COVID-19, the climate, and the Kremlin's actions. Mr Sorensen started by sharing a personal story from his great-grandfather, who was the first to create a water plan at village level in Denmark. This was in the 1920s and created a snowball effect in neighbouring villages, convincing them that every village had to take ownership and develop their water supply. Mr Sorensen's great-grandfather's success in the village led to the opening of the first public swimming pool. This story illustrated the idea that it is possible to push things at the local level if people take ownership, be it in Denmark or in other countries around the world, which then puts pressure on the political system.
- A second point made by Mr Sorensen originated from a different personal experience, based on a visit in China in the 1990s, where he presented the European legislation on integrated river basin management. While the concept was alien to China, as there was no legal framework for rivers, from springs to deltas, Mr Sorensen's Chinese counterparts asked him for a Chinese copy of this legislation and for a hundred engineers and water experts from Europe to come to China the following week. From this, Mr Sorensen learnt that what was needed was both community action from the bottom, and support from those who set the framework: "If we can link the bottom with the top, then I think we are onto something very important," Mr Sorensen said. Using the examples of the European Union, the Rhine Convention, and the Danube, Claus Sorensen noted the huge experience that exists in Europe, one which is there to be copied, as it has been done for example with the Senegal River or the Mano River. The bottom and the top have however to be linked up.
- Echoing what was previously mentioned by Runa Khan, the importance of solidarity of action and soft skills was also underlined by Mr Sorensen. Water is an entry point which will never exist in isolation, as it is crucially dependent on what goes on in the other Sustainable Development Goals. The handicap and the risk that exists is to work on an issue by isolating it. Every issue is linked to other issues, trade systems, allocation to national budget coming from the ministry of finance, innovation policy, justice, etc. Referencing Ms Khan, Mr Sorensen stressed the need to have the openness of mind required when working on a specific subject matter to be open and communicate with the experts from other subject matters in other sectors in order to create an integrated approach. One will not go very far working on water without making sure that the legal system, transport system, and health system are all integrated.
- In his final comment, Mr Sorensen noted that the human being has a tendency to become tribal, hooked up on its expertise, making it handicapped when it comes to the crucial need of working

horizontally, across the borders. The more we can work locally, act globally, across borders, the more we can connect across the SDGs, the more we can mobilize the soft skills and leadership mentioned by Ms Khan, the higher our chance of making a real difference will be.

**LUNDE Lars Andreas** (Mr.), Head of Norad's Section for Nature and Climate, The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) (*on Zoom*)

- Sharing a presentation on NORAD's activities with the people in attendance, Lars Andreas Lunde started his contribution by reminding everyone that climate change is already upon us and that adaptation is necessary. The IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report provides a sobering assessment of the climate change situation. Water and climate risk are closely related and will continue to be so in the future. Water scarcity, food security, flood risk are important sources of climate risk but also potential sources of conflict. Mr Lunde noted the difference between some places getting too much water, e.g. Pakistan over the summer 2022, while others, like Nigeria, experience too little. The areas most vulnerable to water scarcity today are in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the Sahel and the Southern Part, as well as Australia and parts of South America and North America. Other regions are experiencing too much water or too much water at the same time, e.g. the Congo Basin in Africa, South Asia with Pakistan, or South East Asia.
- Water holds many of the solutions when it comes to the challenges of climate change, especially with climate adaptation, so Mr Lunde. Because of the inevitably changing climate, even were we to reach the 1.5°C goal set by the Paris Agreement, there is real need for more adaptation. Norway therefore announced it would double its global climate finance by 2026, including a trebling of climate adaptation finance to better balance climate mitigation and adaptation. Though climate mitigation is still very important, Mr Lunde said there was a need for a stronger focus on climate adaptation.
- Norway thus released a strategy on how to adapt to climate change. Mr Lunde used his contribution to present this strategy to the panel, a strategy which notably includes 5 areas of priority, which are closely related to water. The first such priority is found in early warning systems and climate services. This includes prediction of future precipitation patterns and warning system of both droughts and floods. The second priority bets on nature based solutions, of which water management is an important part. The third priority is climate-resilient food production, with water a crucial component of food production. The fourth priority is centred on infrastructure, which includes climate resilient water supply. Finally, the fifth priority is concerned with innovative financial mechanisms in order to mobilize more finance, especially from the private sector into climate adaptation.

- Focussing on the second priority, namely nature based solutions, Mr Lunde argued that nature is our first-line defence against catastrophes and other consequences of climate change. We thus need to use the existing ecosystems and work towards, for example, the restauration of wetlands to avoid flooding. There is a need to prioritize nature based solutions instead of man-made solutions. Mr Lunde stressed that several man-made constructions along rivers to stop flooding only move the problem further downstream, moving it to a neighbouring country or other areas, thereby increasing conflicts. Using nature based solutions like the wetlands, mangroves, forests, and agroforestry are important alternatives. These are crucial services that nature is providing for free to adapt to climate change. Mr Lunde went on to say that while what happened at COP 27 in Sharm el-Sheikh was important, the COP 15 on biodiversity is just as important for climate adaptation.
- Water management is important for food production, for irrigation, for rainwater forests, and for drinking water. The Norwegian government is also focussing on climate resilient food production, its third priority, with a new strategy discussing new production methods for food, adapted seed grain, and most importantly water resource management to use the smallest amount of water possible and ensure higher efficiency.
- Mr Lunde then discussed Norway's fourth priority, namely resilient infrastructure, in order to be able to handle larger amounts of water in a shorter time. This is particularly relevant for Asia and its main rivers, which are particularly vulnerable and exposed to floods. This is for example the case for Bangladesh and Pakistan, who are experiencing floods, and in Africa because of the rapid urbanisation making the population more vulnerable to flooding and other forms of climate change.
- Concluding his presentation, Mr Lunde gave an overview of Norad's work and approach. Norad works with its partners to meet the challenges of climate adaptation. Most of Norad's financing has gone through large multilateral funds, e.g. GCF, GEF, Adaptation Fund. Norad is also working with large multilateral organisations, including multiple UN organisations, the World Bank, and regional multilateral development banks in Africa for example. Norad is also working directly with governments, with partner countries on knowledge programs using the expertise of Norwegian partner institutions to build capacity in recipient countries, as well as directly with civil society actors.

**Comment and transition by the Moderator:**

- Ms Vercambre thanked Mr Lunde for highlighting the importance of adaptation through water and made mention of a group of organisations and countries who are trying to promote the fresh water agenda within the climate negotiations. Hearing Norway's positioning and leadership on that matter was therefore a welcome contribution.

**KARLSSON Mats** (Mr.), Former World Bank Vice President & Former State Secretary for development, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden

- Mats Karlsson built his intervention around three points: science, social contract, and governance. These are three areas that do require the panel's attention. Starting with science and saluting what had previously been said by Brice Lalonde and Irina Bokova, Mr Karlsson started by sharing an anecdote from his time as a state secretary for development in 1994. One scientist impacted him in particular, who taught him about the circularity of safe water within us. This is something that has stayed with Mr Karlsson ever since; the emphasis on science is primarily one on education, as "science without education goes nowhere." There is a real need to do more on the front of education in order to teach people about the simplicity of what water is. Going for curricula and popularising what water is, according to Mr Karlsson, is very important.
- The second point, i.e. the social contract, is closely connected to the first point, as it is impossible to have a quality and qualified social contract without education. With the acknowledgement that social contracts come in good and bad forms and after expressing his concern over social contracts fraying everywhere, Mr Karlsson stated that within countries, social contracts must be renewed. In Europe, the existing welfare states are challenged from many angles and while Mr Karlsson expressed his belief that this is the strongest model in the world for the future, he acknowledged that this system is threatened at home. As strongman rise around the world, they manipulate facts for their own interest. The social contract must thus be moved towards something that feels like "this is us" and "this is now," Mr Karlsson described. Referring to Claus Sorensen's previous comments, Mr Karlsson noted that there was a social contract in the past around water. There is no issue where old contracts around water actually apply but these old contracts have to be adapted to the modern world. We are however not there yet, Mr Karlsson commented. This has to be developed in linkage with truth, with democracy, with community development. It is easy to say this, Mr Karlsson said, but unless we have that in mind we will not get there.
- One element in all of this is early childhood development. There is no more important element in early childhood development than clean water. Without it, there is no early childhood development and there are no young people growing up. There is no investment that has greater long term impact than investment in early childhood development, Mr Karlsson highlighted. Clean water is at the core of it.
- Moving on to governance, Mr Karlsson stated that without multilateralism, one cannot solve these problems. Mr Karlsson then turned to the issue of corruption. Water is a natural resource that requires its governance systems. Mr Karlsson said he wished to introduce the term corruption into the dialogue, which needs to be exposed. There are many action agendas on what to do but

corruption also surrounds water. One has to use those instruments in dealing with that. Mr Karlsson ended by emphasising strategic policy planning in governments, something he described as not actually being done. We could discuss how to define strategy and capacity, long term vs. short term, and what it is one needs to do, he added. Mr Karlsson shared his experience of one year and a half looking at the Swedish Government and how it works in international and strategic policy planning. While one might think of Sweden always ranking highly in scores, Mr Karlsson came away of this experience frightened by what he had seen because of departments within the government not working with each other, not doing the simplest thing in linking plans and networks. Mr Karlsson concluded by saying that we needed to be better in all of government strategic policy planning. Water is one element of it, one part of a lot of different things that need to be linked.

- Mentioning his experience working with the Mano River and the Senegal River, Mr Karlsson noted that they were all integrated, which is a perfect metaphor of social life as well, as all things are integrated. This makes strategic policy planning difficult but some elements on how to solve it are not actually difficult, they just need to be done.

**DELISLE Pascal** (Mr.), Head, Economic, Development, Environment and Digital Issues, European External Action Service (EAES), Geneva (*on Zoom*)

- Talking from Geneva, from the EU delegation to the UN, Pascal Delisle started by placing the high-level panel in its context, ahead of the March 2023 UN Conference in New York and in the aftermath of the Bonn 2021 Water Dialogue, which came up with the idea of a UN special envoy on water, and other conferences in Dakar, Dushanbe, and UNESCO's event that week. This was a busy time for water-related issues, especially as one permanent member of the security council was currently weaponizing water infrastructure, Mr Delisle noted. Mr Delisle reminded the participants of the importance of Geneva when talking about water, referencing Claus Sorensen's mention of food security and the DG ECHO's involvement in Geneva's humanitarian dimension, as well as Irina Bokova's mention of the right to water being recognized by the Human Rights Council in 2010, followed by a UNGA resolution, which underlined the human rights dimension of this.
- Using all of the examples above, Mr Delisle stressed the interest of looking at water not only from a water specialist perspective but from a broader point of view, outside of the water silo. "When we speak of food security, of disaster risk reduction, of the nexus with energy, we of course need to look beyond the water silo," Mr Delisle said, adding that everything is linked and water defines our interdependence. Rebounding on Mats Karlsson's contribution, Mr Delisle shared an anecdote about why Switzerland is so interesting when talking about water, as Nobel Prize Winner Elinor Ostrom, who theorized the concept of common pool resource, did so through her observations of how



people were managing water collectively in the Swiss mountains. This is where the social contract and local governance are extremely important.

- Climate change is adding pressure to an already very tense situation, as other participants mentioned, Mr Delisle noted. This is why the European External Action Service, EU capitals, and the delegation in New York are pushing the question of transboundary water at the front. Mr Delisle shared with the panellists that it had not been easy to ensure that transboundary water would be on the agenda at the 2023 UN Water Conference due to its sensitive nature. Even Tajikistan was a little reluctant in the beginning to have this concept in the interactive dialogues. According to Mr Delisle, this is why it is important for the European External Action Service (EEAS) to be pushing politically for transboundary water to be a priority topic in 2023. Transboundary water management is not only important from an environmental perspective but also from a perspective of economic development, flood management, or fisheries. There is a very virtuous circle that emerges between trust building and economic development, the example of the Senegal River is an eloquent one. That is why, from a more political perspective, the EEAS is strongly pushing for this transboundary aspect at the 2023 UN Water Conference and this is part of Council conclusions from the Foreign Affairs Council of November 2021 on water in external action.
- Pushing this issue to the front is not only done theoretically, Mr Delisle said before sharing an anecdote from his time in Brussels a few years back, when he was dealing with climate issues. At the time, the EU was already working to support the UNECE secretariat in this phase of globalisation of the Convention to reach out to countries around the world, with many of those in Africa. This led to many African countries joining the Convention and with more to come in the future. One week before the present high-level panel, a workshop took place in Tanzania with the UNECE secretariat because Tanzania would be joining the Convention soon, Mr Delisle added. It is thus very important for the EEAS that this Convention and the 1997 Convention are ratified. This is a clear deliverable for the UN 2023 Water Conference, as the Netherlands and Tajikistan have put this forward on the action agenda, the Conference being very action oriented according to Mr Delisle. He then reminded the participants that there would be no negotiated outcome but an action agenda at the UN 2023 Conference. Rebounding on a previous mention of the UN Special Envoy for Water, Mr Delisle noted that its role, responsibilities, and mandate still needed to be refined but that it indicated the presence of a political will to move forward on the topic. At the last PGA consultations a few weeks back, over 150 countries supported the concept of the UN Water Envoy.
- To address one last point, Mr Delisle stated that beyond political support, the EEAS is supporting the Secretariat of the Water Convention financially to work on a much bigger scale than in the past. In July, the EEAS confirmed a three-year support for the Convention for both economic development and peace building, which are two sides of the same coin. Behind all of that, there are also the more

traditional EU instruments of INTPA (Directorate-General for International Partnerships), who the EEAS is working with in close to 60 countries on national water plans but also on what is called in EU jargon “Team Europe Approach,” where the EU and 8 member states are supporting a programme on transboundary water in Africa, which they announced in Dakar. The EU is already working with quite a few of the basins in Africa, e.g. the Mauritania and Senegal aquifer.

- Mr Delisle ended his intervention by stating that the EU put a lot of hope in the coming UN 2023 Conference, 46 years after the first and only one, and was ready to be at the rendez-vous.

**Comment and transition by the Moderator, Marie-Laure Vercambre:**

- 150 countries signed a letter sent to the UN Secretary General to call for the creation of a Special Envoy for Water.

**GOUJON Lionel (Mr.), Head of division, Water and Sanitation Division, French Development Agency (AFD)**

- Mr Goujon started his address by indicating that while it was centred on hydro-diplomacy, the topic represented a comparatively small part of the AFD’s financial support. While the AFD mobilises €1 billion a year in the water sector, Mr Goujon assessed the support of the AFD to transboundary rivers as being close to €50 million in the last 15 years. Mr Goujon acknowledged that the word “support” was appropriate to describe the AFD’s activity, as it cannot steer or initiate international river cooperation. This takes local political will, as underlined by Mr Semega. While it is of course useful to be able to rely on an international legal framework, the example of the OMVS shows that the OMVS did not wait for a convention to be set up. The Convention did not really help solve conflicts so far, Mr Delisle stated, before repeating the importance of local political will. Once there is this political will, the AFD can provide support at a more technical level, a support articulated around 4 main topics, which Mr Delisle went on to present to the panel.
- The first topic is knowledge of the resource. As it happens, knowledge of the resource has decreased in many regions, especially in Africa, over the past 50 to 60 years. “We know less today,” Mr Delisle said. That situation is not due for example to the unpredictability of water resources because of climate change, it is the result of a lack of maintenance of equipment, or misorganisation of actors. Supporting transboundary river organisations at that level is thus a key topic for the AFD. Innovation is also helping in this area, e.g. wireless communication, which has allowed to set up hydro-meteorology stations in the Fouta Djallon, a region difficult to reach during the rainy season, as well as satellite technologies, bringing new support. Mr Delisle mentioned the launch of the SWOT satellite planned the following week, a satellite which will improve satellite altimetry for the basins in order to know how high water is, how fast it is flowing, and evaluate the runoff. This will help

politicians to make decisions and the AFD will be working with the OMVS and others to help them prepare themselves to deal with this data.

- Building on knowledge of the resource in terms of quantity and quality, the second topic of the AFD's support is planning. Mr Delisle acknowledged that this is not an easy topic. It is sometimes called a shared vision, like in the case of the Niger River, or water management master plan, like in the case of the Senegal River. This takes both time and a collaborative approach amongst the countries and in terms of participation, so Mr Delisle. It is however not that easy to get to hear the voices of all the actors benefiting from water. Mr Delisle recalled the example of the master plan of the Senegal River 10 years ago, where a collaborative approach was wished for but was made difficult by the fact that some of the people the AFD wanted to talk to could not read. The AFD thus developed a large network of social facilitators with drawings explaining the use of water and trying, in return, to understand the needs and priorities of the people they were talking with.
- The third aspect of the AFD's support is governance. As a technical partner, the AFD's support for governance is at the level of transboundary basin organisations. Mr Delisle said he believed that once there is political will, in most cases you have to set up a transboundary basin organisation. Looking at the Nile River, Mr Delisle noted that the absence of a transboundary basin organisation was due to the lack of present political will. Once there is such an organisation, it requires support and reinforcement at the institutional level. This requires understanding the organisation's mandate: does it have a word to say on quantity? on quality? does it have a mandate on groundwater? There is also a need to support the organisation itself, which means for example knowing what the different departments are, its management organisation, or how to set up an IT team. Finally, there is also a need for support at the people's level, e.g. training within the countries, or within international spheres, Mr Delisle concluded.
- The fourth and final topic of the AFD's support is the financial topic and financial sustainability. If organisations want to be autonomous, they need financial autonomy, something most of them do not have as they need support from member states or international donors. There is a need to support more autonomy, raising fees and taxes that are sustainable and predictable for the organisations to work.
- To conclude, Mr Delisle noted that one might think that one of those topics might seem easier or more important than the others but this is not actually the case. Looking at the partners the AFD works with, Mr Goujon assessed that not one of them was the best in all topics or areas. He added that on the topic of resource knowledge, the Mekong River Commission is probably the most advanced. In terms of planification, the Niger River was a good model 10, 15 years ago, the OMVS being a good example as well. In terms of governance, OMVS remains the only example where there

is shared property of infrastructures for shared operations. In terms of financial sustainability, the CICOS from the Congo River organisation is the more advanced, Mr Goujon concluded.

### **Transition and introduction of the next speaker by the Moderator, Marie-Laure Vercambre**

**KUINDERSMA Eric** (Mr.), Senior Policy Advisor Water Governance, Waterschap Rivierenland, The Netherlands

- Eric Kuindersma started his intervention with a disclaimer that the position he would present was a personal one, based on his personal experience as a policy advisor for one of the Netherlands twenty-one Water Authorities, not the position of the Dutch government, nor that of Dutch Water Authorities.
- Setting the scene, Mr Kuindersma introduced the specificities of Dutch water management, as the Netherlands are often known for their water management. The Dutch Water Authorities are part of the Dutch Constitution. While there is a political government on the national level, regional, and local level, as there is in every country, the Netherlands have a special organisation, a special government dealing only with surface water management. At the moment, there are twenty-one such Water Authorities in the Netherlands, as opposed to the 2,500 there were 70 years ago. The tasks carried out by the Water Authorities include safety against flooding, water quantity management, water quality management, and wastewater treatment. All the issues of water quality and water quantity are thereby covered by one organisation. The Water Authorities are thus a government within the Dutch constitution, with an own elected board, and with the right to raise taxes and collect their own money, giving the Authorities near financial independence.
- Mr Kuindersma then discussed the special status of the Netherlands, which are known all over the world as special water champions. Apologizing for the very direct nature of his words, Mr Kuindersma referred to a sentence he had often heard: “when you have a problem with water, bring in the Dutch.” The Netherlands are in the delta of 4 rivers, i.e. the Rhine River, the Meuse River, the Ems and the Scheldt. Without dikes, a big part of the country would be flooded. The Netherlands have made big water management infrastructures known all over the world, innovations in water management, as well as big investments. The Water Authorities have become specialists in Operation and Maintenance. Through a map shown to the panel, Mr Kuindersma pointed to a part of the Netherlands’ territory which is 7 meters below sea level. A new housing area is currently being built in that area, Mr Kuindersma added. With the sea level rise of one, two, three, or five meters, maybe the Netherlands will be the first climate refugees, Mr Kuindersma conjectured, stressing that this was his personal point of view. At the moment, the Netherlands are therefore making big

investments and many around the world see this and want to copy it. Mr Kuindersma however stressed that while you cannot copy infrastructure, the preparation is also part of the investment. This preparation requires time, consensus and consent, as well as possibilities to invest. In the Netherlands, there is a special word to express this idea, namely “Polderen,” which starts with the notion of agreeing to disagree. From there, talking starts in order to reach a consensus, before starting to work and investing.

- When it comes to innovations in water management, the Dutch are experienced and willing to share their knowledge to support others. Mr Kuindersma stated that in his view, innovation is more than technical investments and buying “state of the art” solutions. Instead, the most unknown innovative solution in water management is organising and executing operation and maintenance. Mr Kuindersma candidly noted that this was not a sexy solution but that it was a very effective measure in dealing with water management challenges. Operation and maintenance brings high return on investments, it is an extension of the technical lifetime of installations, creating a better water management in rural areas through the availability of water and water safety. It is also creating and increasing agricultural use and perspectives for better living circumstances. Operation and management is creating a perspective for people, which might lead to less migration. The Dutch Water Authorities are also helping to organise that in the Senegal delta.
- Mr Kuindersma concluded by stating that organising and executing operation and maintenance is key to creating a perspective. He added that he hoped major donors would invest in operation and maintenance. While it is not easy and takes time, in the end, operation and maintenance makes the best progress in the perspective of the big challenges we have.

### **Round of takeaways by the speakers**

#### **Comment by Mats Karlsson:**

- After Johannesburg 2002, the UN finally had got a mandate to work on energy, which had been previously forbidden because of all the geopolitical and geoeconomic reasons. “How far have we come?” Mr Karlsson asked. Not very far, but Mr Karlsson recalled that he negotiated UN Energy. He also took part in negotiations on water and oceans. These elements of multilateral cooperation are only the beginning. We need to tell ourselves that this is only the beginning of a very big task, Mr Karlsson noted.

#### **Comment by Marie-Laure Vercambre :**

- Ms Vercambre noted that Csaba Kőrösi, President of the UN General Assembly, who was instrumental in the development of the SDGs, said himself he could sense that the international community is really ready for change when it comes to water.

**Comment by Eric Kuindersma :**

- Mr Kuindersma focussed his final remark on the idea of an “action agenda,” by getting to know each other and getting to know the challenges. This would be the Dutch approach, Mr Kuindersma concluded.

**Comment by Claus Sorensen :**

- Building on what was said with regard to the social contract, Mr Sorensen stressed that it comes from the bottom, but has to link up to the top. One essential element that goes for both food security and water is that one needs to get under the skin of the ministry of finance and the ministry of plan. If you are not in the central command system, you can forget about it, it will not work. All the very good ideas like for example maintenance need support.

**Comment by Pascal Delisle :**

- To build on what Mr Sorensen said with regard to finance, Mr Delisle put forward two statistics he considered as quite telling. In the last ten to eleven years, the percentage of aid dedicated to water remained at five percent; on energy, it went from five to eleven. In addition to that, on energy, there is a lot of non-concessional and private sector funding. Agreeing with Mr Sorensen, Mr Delisle stressed that we needed a lot of investment from the financial side of it. Water is a topic for which it is not so easy to attract private sector funding but blended and other new ways of funding are very promising in that regard. To open for further discussions in the future, it will be important to watch the space of human rights. We mentioned the human right to safe drinking water from 2010, and the process of the human right to a healthy environment is also an interesting to follow, as it went from Geneva to the UNGA in July. Other things have also arisen recently, like Vanuatu asking the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion on the climate crisis. These are some of the many things emerging, basically challenging the current policies on water and climate on the basis of human rights. It is complex and it can reshuffle what are called duty bearers and right holders, but it is very important to watch.

**Comment by Lionel Goujon :**

- Addressing the challenge for the New York meeting, Mr Goujon mentioned the tension that exists in the development world at the moment in the field of water between a high return on investments and being driven by the SDGs, trying to measure the impact of new infrastructure. How can one deal with that, as the figures are not improving, the situation is even getting worse in some regions. How do we manage to evaluate the impact of maintenance in our strategies as donors, as countries

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towards the SDGs even though we cannot measure it properly? Maybe this can be done within the  
Water Action Plan, Mr Goujon concluded.

**Conclusion by the Moderator, Marie-Laure Vercambre :**

- Ms Vercambre concluded by thanking all the participants of this second session.

**END OF SESSION 2.**