Water action at COP22 to address climate challenges

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Wednesday, November 9 was dedicated to water action at the 2016 UN Climate Change Conference (COP22). The water cycle and climate are intimately linked; climate change is an additional challenge in the battle to achieve water security and water-related Sustainable Development Goals, such as access to water and sanitation. A high level event, organized under the framework of the Global Climate Action Agenda (GCAA), brought together government representatives and non-state actors to assess progress made since COP21 and reinforce cooperation to tackle water and climate challenges. Is was opened by the Commissioner of COP22, Abdeladim Lhlafi, together with UNESCO's Assistant Director General, Flavia Schelgel, Hakima El Haite, Morocco's Minister Delegate in charge of water, Charafat Afailal, and leaders of global organisations such as the World Water Council and the International Network of Basins Organisation. It is the first time that a whole day is dedicated to water issues at such a high level during a UN Climate Change Conference. Speakers predicted that in the future, the water dedicated day will become the most significant day of the Conference.

In the momentum towards the definition of a climate agreement, at the previous UN Climate Change Conference, three Alliances were established among non-state actors to foster commitment around water and climate. Each of them focused on a different aspect. The Alliance of Megacities for Water and Climate Change, which UNESCO is leading, brings together large urban centres from all continents, where sustainable water management is particularly challenging as are exposed to extreme risks in terms of the negative impacts of climate change on water and sanitation infrastructure and services. The Alliance allows them to exchange best practices, policies and regulations; to partner with appropriate technical, research, academic, and financial institutions; and to design and implement their individual responses to the challenges of climate change. Other flagship Alliances include the "Paris Pact" Alliance on water and climate adaptation in river basins, lakes and aquifers; the Business Alliance for Water and Climate change (BAFWAC); and the Global Clean Water Desalination Alliance (which was established between COP21 and COP22).

The high level event provided a unique opportunity to bring these Alliances together and ensure that common projects and initiatives are developed to improve synergies and cross-sectoral integration in the management of water and climate change issues. In particular, the 4 Alliances will mobilize stakeholders to secure a place for water in climate summits, negotiations and financial mechanisms and actions; exchange of lessons learned and best practices of efficient existing actions and identify and support new actions.

One of the building blocks of the Alliance of Megacities for Water and Climate Change is a portrait of 15 emblematic megacities, their unique circumstances and how they are addressing shared water governance challenges. The publication "Water, Megacities and Global Change", co-edited by UNESCO and ARCEAU-IdF, is simultaneously the result of concrete scientific presentations and a call for general mobilization to devise the sustainable urban policies the world needs. The French version of this publication was launched today. It is also available in English and Spanish. In 1970, the United Nations identified three megacities. This number rose to 10 in 1990 and 28 in 2014. According to projections, there will be 41 by 2030, many located in the world's least developed countries. Throughout history, these cities have often lacked both the time and the means to develop their urban services, including those relating to access to water, sanitation and rainwater drainage. This situation creates profound vulnerabilities and complex challenges. That is why it is crucial that megacities share their experiences, so as to develop services capable of meeting the expectations of their inhabitants, especially under the additional pressure and vulnerability that are due to climate change.Â

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