



**Speech by Federal Councillor Didier
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**Water, Peace and Security
Ministerial Roundtable**

***“ Blue diplomacy – a high priority for
Switzerland “***

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Dear colleagues

Water is everywhere. Water is everything.

70% of our Earth's surface is water-covered. And 65% of the human body consists of water. Water drops from above, it flows, it fills up every gap, touching everything around. Water does not only touch everything on earth, it also touches everything on our political agenda. Water stands at the centre of nearly every global challenge: climate change, health, nutrition, environment, transportation, political conflicts all this and much more is directly linked to water.

This is why I would like to thank the State Department, the EU Commission and UN Water for convening this roundtable on a topic that is particularly important to all of us and particularly dear to Switzerland – the water tower of Europe.

The global water crisis is one of the most pressing political, environmental and social issues of the 21st century.

This crisis is multifaceted. One of its expressions is the decrease of water availability per capita. The challenge is also qualitative - globally, 80% of waste water goes directly into the environment without treatment.

Sanitation is a fundamental part of water management. Due to inefficiencies of the irrigation systems worldwide, 40% of the water used in the agricultural sector is lost due to leakages.

In various transboundary basins, we experience strong differences between various stakeholders and countries – all too often these are fragile states that are often extremely poor and beset by internal conflict.

For all these reasons, the issue of access to water resources will impact the way political relations and alliances are framed. New political behavioural norms and processes are emerging in various river basins. There is an urgent need to better understand such trends.

As I stated in the beginning, water flows everywhere and touches everything: So fighting against the water crisis is a matter of national security, economic growth, public health, environmental services, social development, urban planning, science and technology.

The water crisis requires the mobilisation of all stakeholders – governments, International Organizations but in particular also the private sector. Scientists have a crucial role to play as well. And last but not least the voice of the poor has to be strongly represented in the process.

Switzerland has a well-recognized record of international solidarity and active peace efforts. As the water tower of Europe, Switzerland tries to be an exemplary upstream country. We invest a lot to deliver good water quality to our neighbours and we sometimes also absorb part of floods to avoid major disasters downstream.

Switzerland is supporting efforts for the improvement of water security and its related peace, human rights, economic growth and environment protection aspects at various levels.

We propose the following:

First: problems arising from water imbalances in many places of the world are weakening the establishment and implementation of transboundary basin arrangements. We should push for the enforcement of national and international cooperative management mechanisms.

Moreover, water resource management, policy decisions and negotiations need to be evidence-based and rely on high-quality weather, water and land information.

Switzerland can, for example, share its successful experience in the Rhine river basin. This was the place where, after World War II, transboundary integrated water management has contributed to the transformation of a former disputed region into one of the most peaceful places on Earth.

Switzerland supports the development of new and influential vehicles for policy negotiation and coordination, through hydro diplomacy, high level contacts and co-financing of concrete projects, in key hot spots or regions with high potential for water conflict.

For instance, Switzerland is financing the Blue Peace initiatives. In the Middle East and the Nile regions, we contribute to the examination of present and future water security issues.

Published in February 2011, the report entitled: “The Blue Peace – Rethinking Middle East Water” focused on innovative short, medium and long term actions to improve water management.

The Blue Peace is an innovative approach to engage political leaders, diplomats and populations in harnessing and

managing collaborative solutions for sustainable water management.

The centrepiece is to agree on the socio-economic, environmental and political benefits derived from using water. The Blue Peace approach aims to create frameworks, mechanisms and institutions of transboundary cooperation in order to allow political leaders to make tradeoffs between water and other development needs to create stakes in common security.

Switzerland developed the Blue Peace approach in partnership with think tanks from emerging countries.

Second: 1 billion people without access to drinking water and 2.6 billion without access to basic sanitation are also part of this global water crisis. In this regard, the recognition by the UN General Assembly that water and sanitation constitute a human right is a historical step forward and a fundamental paradigm change. The challenge now is to translate this into reality.

The definition of water and sanitation as a human right also gives a particular status and priority to drinking water within water management. Human rights address also the question of inequalities, vulnerability and marginality and are a priority for Switzerland.

Water is essential for human development and hence must become a post 2015 sustainable development goal!

Third: 2013 will be the International Year of Water Cooperation. It is critical to treat water as an essential element in the human security agenda and not merely in

terms of its economic and health value. In that context, Switzerland is engaged in bringing water and security to the UN global agenda. We support UN Water in this effort, not just for 2013 but also beyond.

Dear colleagues, we are facing a major challenge.

There is enough water worldwide to respond to this challenge, but we need to mobilise the whole of society: public, private sector, research and, of course, civil society.

Through our initiatives we hope to foster trust between stakeholders and to establish a sound basis for good relations between them thus preventing future conflicts related to water management.

The concept of Blue Peace can help us craft a new future and “Blue diplomacy” is the way to go about it.

Je vous remercie.