



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
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**Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA**

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# **Water and security**

## Lines of action of the FDFA

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Translated from the French original

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Water is a vital resource for the sustainable development of human kind. There is a real risk of water scarcity on a global scale: demand – for basic needs, agriculture and industry – continues to grow and is expected to increase by 30% worldwide by 2030. Furthermore, by 2025 half of the world's population will inhabit water stressed regions, which is to say that the demand for water will exceed available resources. This will have negative consequences for local economies and social cohesion and will also be a factor leading to forced migration on a massive scale. The less water available the greater domestic and international conflict over access and use will become.

Water is of crucial importance in the present security environment. This resource has become a key element, not only for development and to combat poverty, but also for peace and political stability. Water is a renewable but limited resource. It can be recycled but not replaced. Due to demographic growth, economic development and urbanisation, pollution and climate change, this resource, which is limited and very unevenly distributed across the globe, is under ever greater pressure.

Some of the world's population still lives without access to a minimum of water of acceptable quality or basic sanitation, due to underinvestment. According to World Bank estimates more than a billion people do not have access to clean water, 40% of the world's population lack sufficient water and three billion people are without sanitary installations. Moreover, some 80% of infectious diseases are transmitted by water, causing millions of deaths each year among children.

To date, water management efforts have above all focused on increasing the supply. But waste also needs to be reduced. According to the United Nations half of the world's treated drinking water is lost due to supply system leakage. And irrigation systems on average waste 40% of the water processed. When not wasted, water is polluted. A major increase is needed in the efficiency of water use to reduce the risk of major crises.

Today issues relating to water access are causing or contributing to heightened tensions and even conflicts in several regions. Access to water even serves as a weapon of war: control of water resources is of strategic importance in certain regions of the world, and in some cases is even a military objective. Destruction of the relevant infrastructure (dams, pumping stations, sewage plants, etc.) is not uncommon in the context of armed conflict. In certain regions affected by armed conflict, such as the Middle East, water is becoming more scarce as a consequence, difficult to access and costly, increasing the suffering and vulnerability of the populations concerned, as a report by the ICRC<sup>1</sup> has pointed out.

Water is bound to become a more important geopolitical resource in the world than oil. Without major changes in how we deal with this, water issues will undermine economies, leading to increased domestic and international instability, further aggravating tensions with regard to the interests of countries upstream as well as downstream, notably in transboundary catchments.

However, for all the challenges that water governance represents in terms of both security policy and development, it must be stressed that water is above all a major opportunity for

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<sup>1</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, "How war in the Middle East is bringing the region to the brink of a water catastrophe », March 2015

promoting cooperation and building confidence. Sustainable water management agreements can contribute to defusing potential conflicts.

It is with this positive vision in mind that Switzerland has long been committed to the cause of water. On the basis of these lines of action, focusing in particular on the interface between water and security, Switzerland wants to help meet the above-mentioned challenges, using the positive potential of water as a source of peace and stability.

## 2. POLICY BASIS

The most commonly accepted definition of the concept of water security today is that proposed by UN-Water, 2013: *Water security is defined as “The capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of and acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability.”*

Water is one aspect of a concept of human security broadly defined to include the areas of politics, health, the economy, food, the environment, human rights and energy.

Today, countries need to position themselves with regard to the risks that poor water management can have for their development strategies. If their response is to be effective they need to adapt their approach, instruments and working methods. Switzerland offers its support to enable these countries to improve their management and utilisation of water resources and defuse the tensions and conflicts that result from the need to share, whether in a national context between different users or in a regional context.

In places where resources are already limited, drought, floods or lack of access linked to armed conflict can lead to severe tensions. The building of dams and large-scale pollution can also lead to poverty, depriving inhabitants of their principal source of revenue and causing movements of social unrest. This potential for conflict is greater still when it comes to managing transboundary water resources that must be shared by several countries or regions.

Water access is a global challenge that affects all societies, North and South: in its *Global Risks Report 2015*, the World Economic Forum (WEF) ranks water-related crises as the leading global risk in terms of impact, ahead of the spread of infectious diseases and weapons of mass destruction<sup>2</sup>. Water is thus a factor of prime importance for international security.

Switzerland can make a real contribution to minimising water-related security challenges, making water an instrument of cooperation rather than a source of friction. It has expertise in the promotion of dialogue and solutions based on compromise. Switzerland is involved in peacebuilding initiatives around the world. Peace and security are at the heart of Switzerland's foreign policy and essential for sustainable development.

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<sup>2</sup> World Economic Forum, *Global Risks*, 10ème édition, 2015

Switzerland can also count on recognised expertise in relation to water, at the political and academic levels as well as in the private sector and civil society. The Swiss actors include the federal interdepartmental coordination group “IDANE Water”, the Aguasan “community of practice” and Swiss Water Partnership, an independent platform that brings together a great many NGOs, companies, universities as well as federal departments. These have all been mobilised to meet the water-related challenges facing the international community.

To this may be added synergies from the many actors involved, directly or indirectly, with water in International Geneva, making the city an important international hub for water issues, complementary to its acknowledged expertise in the areas of peace and security.

Switzerland’s water expertise reflects more than 40 years of international cooperation in this area: cooperation based on commitment and concrete support in the field, combined with political dialogue that matches words with deeds. This has contributed to Switzerland’s recognition and acceptance as an appropriate partner. It has for example made possible the development of model initiatives, be it for access to water and sanitation services, or the development of economic instruments that can help improve freshwater management. Initiatives involving cooperation and a shared vision of water management have also emerged in several regions of the Middle East.

Switzerland engages to help meet water-related challenges in a spirit of solidarity, as well as from a sense of shared responsibility: all states stand to gain from increased prosperity based on mutual development, to which adequate management of water resources can make a major contribution. Ensuring equitable and adequate access to water as an essential resource helps prevent conflicts and thus promotes international security. This is in Switzerland’s own interest and reflects a commitment to peace enshrined in the Federal Constitution<sup>3</sup>.

Safeguarding the independence and security of Switzerland, as well as its prosperity, requires active involvement in the international arena. In the present context a state’s influence and its ability to create room to manoeuvre in safeguarding its interests no longer depend solely on its military, economic or demographic importance, but also on a readiness to make a real contribution to the resolution of global problems, including the challenges of development and sustainable peace.

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<sup>3</sup> Art. 54, al.2 : « La Confédération s'attache à préserver l'indépendance et la prospérité de la Suisse; elle contribue notamment à soulager les populations dans le besoin et à lutter contre la pauvreté ainsi qu'à promouvoir le respect des droits de l'homme, la démocratie, la coexistence pacifique des peuples et la préservation des ressources naturelles ».

### 3. THE SWISS TOOLBOX

With these lines of action, Switzerland underlines the importance it accords to water and the impact it can have on security.

Switzerland was one of the first countries to launch a global programme on water<sup>4</sup> and has been concerned for many years with the question of water security, one of its dimensions being the interplay between “water and security”. The Confederation meets the current challenges with the help of various instruments of foreign policy:

- Development cooperation – by means of its programme of global initiatives on water
  - at the bilateral and regional levels with concrete projects and innovative initiatives to increase access to water and sanitation for disadvantaged populations, ensure integrated, shared and equitable management of water resources and more efficient utilisation of water by agriculture and industry
  - at the international level, through promotion and implementation of the right to water and sanitation, support for international conventions on water management and their implementation mechanisms, water diplomacy initiatives (Blue Peace), contributions to international development standards and innovative financing mechanisms
- Humanitarian aid:
  - emergency relief in times of crisis or armed conflict to meet the water needs of the affected populations, notably through financing by humanitarian organisations and the seconding of WASH experts
  - prevention through the establishment of mechanisms designed to minimise the consequences of new disasters (flooding, etc.)
- Instruments of human security and for the promotion of international law
  - mediation and the promotion of dialogue with regard to water-related conflicts, notably in the Middle East, in close collaboration with the “Blue Peace” aspect of the global water programme
  - promotion of the right to water and sanitation, notably in the framework of the Human Rights Council and its concrete efforts in relation to business and human rights
- Bilateral diplomatic relations with states: Switzerland systematically addresses such issues with countries facing major water and security related challenges

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<sup>4</sup> These different instruments are employed in a coordinated manner so as to ensure the most consistent commitment possible and achieve maximum impact. Equally essential is good collaboration and coordination with others playing an active role, in Switzerland and at the international level.

## 4. SWITZERLAND'S EFFORTS

Switzerland is active in two complementary areas:

### 4.1. Commitment at the bilateral and regional levels

Water-related tension can lead to open conflict unless dealt with appropriately. This can be within a single country or may involve several countries sharing the same catchment.

*Switzerland is committed to ensuring access to water of acceptable quality*

Switzerland supports and itself conducts a whole series of projects intended to ensure reliable and sustainable access to water of sufficient quantity and acceptable quality, to satisfy basic human needs, as well as the needs of ecosystems and the economy. The aim is to help other states, each having primary responsibility for ensuring access to drinking water to meet its obligations.

Switzerland's commitment focuses particularly on equitable access to drinking water and sanitation, and water for family farms (which account for 50% of food security worldwide), to ensure sustainable growth.

In this context Switzerland attaches special importance to integrated water resources management (IWRM) in large catchments, and promotes cooperation between water stakeholders, with the emphasis on social development and economic growth that is sustainable and equitable, based on the concept of sharing both the benefits and the problems.

One example is a project supported by Switzerland that is currently being implemented at the transboundary level in the Orontes river which passes through Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. The Orontes is one of the region's most important rivers for food security. An inventory of infrastructures and water resources is being developed by the Syrian partners of this initiative using a geographical information system. This will be followed by the preparation of recommendations for reconstruction and the reinstatement of an institutional framework for water management in this strategic catchment, looking forward to the post-conflict period in Syria.

*Water diplomacy: Switzerland promotes cooperation in the area of water management*

Competition for access to water is too often a cause of tension. And yet water can also be an element of cooperation in the regional dynamic – cooperation that contributes to social peace, access to other basic services (energy, agriculture, healthcare) and to enjoyment of the right to water, making a major contribution to growth.

According to a study carried out in 148 countries by the Strategic Foresight group there is a strong correlation between cooperation in relation to water and a low rate of conflict between countries: two countries that have engaged in active cooperation concerning water are less likely to go to war, even when there are other reasons<sup>5</sup>.

On the basis of this observation Switzerland has developed initiatives that link technical expertise with political dialogue aimed at the resolution of water-related tensions and conflicts. Water diplomacy – or the “Blue Peace” initiative – deals in particular with the water

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<sup>5</sup> Strategic Foresight Group, *Water Cooperation for a Secure World, Focus on the Middle East*, 2013, pp.2-3.

and security dimension in key regions in which Switzerland has been able to position itself as a credible actor. This is the case in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Switzerland uses political dialogue with technical support in these regions to develop new methods and rules and promote consensual solutions regarding water and security. Peacebuilding and the sustainable management of water reserves are closely linked. The aim is to promote, in a complementary manner, dialogue between actors in the political, economic and water sectors to seek solutions conflicts related to water management. This dialogue is supported by concrete data from the implementation of technical projects, for example the exchange of hydrometeorological data.

In Central Asia integrated and sustainable management of water resources is a key to development, peace and security in the region. At the request of the region's five nations Switzerland launched a water diplomacy initiative and appointed a special envoy for water. Following consultations carried out by the special envoy in the spring of 2014, and a visit by Swiss President Didier Burkhalter, a conference was held in Basel at the end of November 2014. This conference made it possible to compile a list of recommendations concerning the sustainable transboundary management of water resources.

On this basis, and considering the interest shown in pursuing the initiative, the special envoy is continuing his consultations with the medium term objective of prompting the affected countries to work together to establish joint water resource management programmes.

#### **4.2. Commitment at the multilateral level**

*Switzerland was and is actively involved in promoting a specific objective to guarantee access for all to water and sanitation and to ensure sustainable management of water resources which is included in the 2030 sustainable development agenda<sup>6</sup>.*

These efforts have enabled it to effectively influence the negotiations and to ensure water is a top priority on the global agenda.

Switzerland defends the position that the new agenda offers the occasion for a political examination of water. It considers that the 2030 sustainable development agenda is a global agenda and that the monitoring and review mechanisms should consequently also be global. This shall ensure the linkage of water-related objectives.

*Switzerland promotes the development of "best practices" and new international standards*

For years Switzerland has actively advocated the strengthening of the Global Water Agenda and its implementation instruments. It supports monitoring and analysis at the global level of progress in the availability of water and sanitation, and the relevant financing for example. Switzerland is also involved in the global task force whose role is to pass on the results of monitoring to the highest decision making level – ministers of water and finance – to speed up access for the poor.

Switzerland participates in model initiatives such as the broad consortium of NGOs focusing on the poorest nations, as well as a model for the mobilisation of local financing and the

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<sup>6</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

transfer of know-how to ensure access to water and sanitation services for the poor in emerging economies.

Switzerland is in the front ranks when it comes to the development of <sup>7</sup>norms and innovative global mechanisms through projects in the field, such as the “water footprint”<sup>7</sup> and payments for “ecosystem” services in water catchments.

*Switzerland promotes a human rights based approach to questions concerning water and sanitation<sup>8</sup>.*

Switzerland is committed to promoting, respecting, protecting and implementing human rights, including those concerning water. In this context Switzerland is actively involved in the promotion of an approach to water-related questions that focuses on the individual and his or her rights.

Switzerland supports strengthening the right to water through its participation in negotiations for relevant resolutions in the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. Furthermore, Switzerland actively supported the creation of the post of UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, supports strengthening of the relevant mandate, and continues to provide financial support.

A human rights based approach to water and sanitation related questions makes it possible to integrate the principles of equality, participation, non-discrimination and responsibility and to guarantee the implementation of access to water and sanitation for all. The human rights based approach also defines standards relating to acceptable quality, availability, affordability, sufficient quantity, and access to water. Although anchored in international human rights law, in fact they are not respected in many countries. All states are expected to meet their obligation to respect, protect and implement such rights. Switzerland promotes better inclusion of all relevant actors, including the private sector.

Furthermore, a human rights based approach to water and sanitation related questions makes it possible to promote dialogue and participative processes capable of bringing together all stakeholders for discussion of the legal obligations contained in the human rights conventions. It also makes it possible to address water-related human rights topics, such as for example food production (right to adequate food), environmental health (right to health), the utilisation of water for economic purposes and in this context the responsibilities of the companies concerned.

*Switzerland is committed to the issue of water and security within the regional organisations and in particular the OSCE.*

Since 2013 Switzerland has been strongly committed to ensuring that water is recognised as a key element for security and stability in the OSCE region. During its chairmanship of the OSCE in 2014 Switzerland put water and security on the agenda for several events, for

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<sup>7</sup> The water footprint is defined as the total volume of rainwater, surface water and groundwater required for the creation of goods and services for the use of the population, together with the wastewater released into nature following their production.

<sup>8</sup> Water is also protected by the provisions of international humanitarian law concerning the protection of the environment in general as well as more general provisions regarding the protection of civilians and humanitarian access.

example the “Security Days” organised with various international partners on the subject of water diplomacy.

Switzerland thus prepared the ground for the Serbian OSCE chairmanship, which succeeded in setting water governance as a priority on a level with economic and environmental affairs. Thus, with the agreement of 57 participating States, the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum cycle was entirely devoted to water governance in 2015. This Forum should make it possible for water-related issues to be included in the OSCE agenda in a positive and sustainable way.

Switzerland remains committed to promoting recognition by the OSCE participating States of water-related cooperation as an opportunity and a source of peace and security.

*Global water and peace initiative: Switzerland is helping to strengthen the global architecture in relation to water and security*

With the benefit of its innovative abilities and long-standing expertise Switzerland has used its regional involvement in the area of water diplomacy as a springboard for the development of a global water and peace initiative in Geneva.

The aim of this initiative, launched in conjunction with other States, is to create an independent platform to deal with water, security and peace related questions in a global manner.

This platform will take advantage of the competencies in relation to international cooperation and dialogue present in Geneva. These competencies are seen as fundamental for the resolution of water-related challenges at the national as well as the regional level.

With 173 permanent missions, 33 international organisations, 400 NGOs as well as a leading academic sector, International Geneva’s pool of expertise allows promoting synergies and internationalise the innovative “Blue Peace” approach.

This platform has a two-level structure – technical and political:

- 1) The “Geneva Water Pole” is a pole of reflection, expertise and influence on the issue of water, peace and security. It provides networking, training, research and a think tank, acting both as the “motor” of the platform and the guarantor of its functioning in synergy with existing structures. It consists notably of a technical component intended to improve the reliability of hydrological data at the global level and its free exchange.
- 2) A high-level panel on water and peace will be launched in Geneva in 2015. It will include individuals of international standing whose task will be to make recommendations for strengthening the global framework for the prevention and resolution of water-related conflicts, promoting the use of water as an instrument of cooperation and peace, placing water-related issues at the centre of government policies all over the world.

## **Conclusion**

Water is of crucial importance in the present security environment. This resource has become a key element not only for development and for combating poverty but also for peace and political stability.

Switzerland is continuing its long-standing commitment on issues relating to water. Through this commitment it seeks to meet current challenges taking advantage of water's potential as a source of peace and stability.

Switzerland's commitment is based on the instruments of the "Swiss Toolbox" implemented not only at the bilateral but also the multilateral level.

Switzerland is also developing a global water and peace initiative which will benefit from the expertise concentrated in International Geneva.