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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
at the Parliament of Italy**

*L'ONU e la gestione delle risorse idriche mondiali:
la collaborazione Italia – Unesco*

Roma, 3 October 2014

Honourable Minister, Gianluca Galetti,
Honourable Vice President Marina Sereni,
Under-Secretary Mario Giro,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests and Friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I wish to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for organizing this special event during my presence in Italy to attend the World Forum on Culture and Cultural Industries, held in Florence.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to pay tribute to Italy's commitment to UNESCO and the United Nations in general, to improve the management of world water resources through stronger international cooperation.

This resonates strongly with the core message of UNESCO.

This is that there is enough freshwater in the world – our challenge is to share it, to better assess risks and uncertainties, to link science more tightly with policy.

No country can stand alone here.

Water pays no heed to borders -- in a world where 300 trans-boundary lakes and river basins cover nearly half the land surface on the planet, cooperation is not a matter of choice, it is an imperative.

I feel encouraged Italy has decided to put this issue at the heart of the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

This is important because the stakes are high.

Almost one billion women and men still lack safe drinking water.

On the eve of 2015, the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals, over 2.5 billion people still lack access to improved sanitation facilities.

The rate of global groundwater extraction has tripled over the past 50 years, leading to a dramatic decline of groundwater levels.

These trends go far beyond technical or scientific issues.

This is about fighting poverty and saving children from disease.

It is about allowing girls to go to school instead of walking kilometres to fetch water.

When I went to Chad to advocate for girls' education, the President stresses that the need for water prevent girls from going to school.

Water cooperation is about human dignity as much as it is about development – the two cannot be separated.

This idea guides all of UNESCO's work for water cooperation, including the vital mission of the *World Water Assessment Programme*, supported so strongly by Italy.

Italy is, indeed, a leading champion for water cooperation and UNESCO's work to take this forward, and I wish to express my deep gratitude for its political and financial support, for funding and hosting the *World Water Assessment Programme* in the beautiful premises of Villa Colombella, offered by Umbria Region, which also

hosts the *UNESCO Chair in Water Resources Management*, at the University for Foreigners of Perugia.

This event today testifies to the strength of our cooperation, and our determination to take it even further.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Across the world, we have seen progress in many countries, awareness is rising, and investments in better governance are paying off -- but we are still falling short of our goal of water security for all.

By 2050, the world's water demand is projected to increase by around 55 percent.

Tackling the rapidly growing water crisis requires action at several levels.

First, we must reach decision-makers outside the "water box", to provide them with tools to understand the consequences of their decisions and to highlight alternative ways forward.

It is impossible to sustainably manage resources like water, food and energy if we treat them in isolation.

For better or for worse, choices made in one sector have repercussions on others.

I have seen this in Central Asia need to cooperate.

This was the core message of the latest *World Water Development Report*, produced by the *World Water Assessment Programme*, on the water-energy nexus.

Sustainability depends on our ability to understand all of these connections, and to craft policies that take an integrated approach to resources that are interconnected.

This calls for new and more inclusive forms of dialogue, new forms of governance, new ways to balance needs, and new forms of international cooperation.

I see the *World Water Assessment Programme* itself as a symbol of such dialogue, bringing together 60 UN-Water members and partners in a global effort funded by Italy, hosted and led by UNESCO.

Second, we must begin to jointly manage all water resources within a water basin, including surface and groundwater, embracing also freshwater ecosystems and fisheries.

This calls for a new paradigm of sustainable, integrated water resources management.

It calls for a stronger knowledge base and better tools to manage water in an integrated manner.

Again, the *World Water Assessment Programme* plays a critical role here -- having served as the reporting mechanism for the UN system on freshwater resources since the year 2000.

This is also the mission of the *UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission*, for ocean-related issues and ocean science.

The *Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission* shows the power of collaboration to promote the sustainable management of the ocean, to share ocean-related data, to manage ocean-related natural disasters like tsunamis.

Following long years of work, the *Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission* has enabled to effort to establish Tsunami Early Warning Systems in all ocean basins, including in the Mediterranean, which is the second most tsunami prone region in the world.

In the same spirit, UNESCO's programme, "From Potential Conflict to Cooperation Potential", works to facilitate dialogue for management of transboundary water resources, developing tools to mitigate water conflicts, making water a force of cooperation.

All of this shows that tools exist to connect water resources, and we need to make the most of them.

Lastly, we must identify the tipping points for water sustainability and pinpoint specific water targets.

This must be a core aspect of the new sustainable development agenda to follow 2015 -- and here again, I wish to commend the Government of Italy in shaping the deliberations of the United Nations Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals on water and sanitation targets.

Among such indicators and targets, the world needs more experts, more engineers, more scientists.

This is the goal of the *UNESCO IHE-Institute for Water Education* in the Netherlands, one the world's largest water education facilities, having trained since its creation over 15,000 water experts from 160 countries.

This is the objective also of the *UNESCO International Hydrological Programme*, the only intergovernmental programme of the UN system devoted to water research and capacity building.

UNESCO's 'water family' includes a global network of 22 water-related centres and 28 water-related Chairs -- these are platforms to nurture new water leaders across the world.

We need these leaders, to reinforce the capacities of all countries -- both developed and developing -- to secure access to water and energy services for all.

This is the only way for the post-2015 development agenda to be sustainable, by giving all countries equal opportunities and equal capacities to manage our most precious global public goods.

Next year, Italy will host the *Universal EXPO Milan 2015* around the theme "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life".

UNESCO will actively participate in this prestigious event, which occurs during a turning point year for global development.

We will share the findings of the *World Water Development Report* on the water and energy nexus, as well as the findings of the next Report on “Water for a Sustainable World”.

In this spirit, I thank you once again for this opportunity to present some of UNESCO’s activities, which benefit from the strength of our partnership.

Thank you for your attention.