

## **The Fortaleza Manifesto: Conclusions of the 1st Water Meeting Held in Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil, November 1997**

Water is essential for human survival, for socioeconomic development and for the preservation of ecosystems.

All the available indicators point to a crisis of great concern. Several spots in Latin America and the Caribbean might suffer from an evil not felt by preceding generations: the shortage of water.

In order to attenuate that crisis, radical changes in the practices and attitudes regarding the management and development of water resources are necessary, including creativity and the development of a new water culture, not only among users, but also, and mainly, among the opinion makers and those who formulate the political agendas in countries and world forums.

The 1st Water Meeting represents the continuity of a process begun in the UNCED conference at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which aimed at an integrated approach for the management of economic development and of the environment, as emphasized in the statements, principles and premises of several meetings, seminars and dialogues on water resources. Therefore, the following must be taken into consideration: Dublin principles, Agenda 21 (Chapter 18), the Interamerican Dialogues of Florida and Buenos Aires, San José's Declaration, Costa Rica, 1996, the Cumbre of Santa Cruz de La Sierra, Bolivia, 1996, and other initiatives which orientate the theme.

In concert, the 445 participants of the 1st Water Meeting, including ministers, vice-ministers, representatives of ministers, technicians, researchers, directors and water resources administrators of the countries here present, express their recognition to the Ministry for the Environment, Water Resources and Legal Amazon, to its Office for Water Resources, to the Interamerican Institute for Agricultural Cooperation, to its Technical Cooperation Agency in Brazil, and to the Office for Water Resources of Ceará State Government, for the organization of the event and for managing to gather such an impressive number of technicians, researchers, teachers and professionals from the most diverse sectors of governments, universities, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, political and managerial leaderships and the press, in amount and quality, without compare in recent times. They also assure their support for the implementation of Action Plans for Sustainable Development of Water Resources in Latin American countries and the Caribbean, emphasizing the following considerations:

- (1) It is of extreme importance to guide the planning, the execution and the sustainable development of water resources in the Americas and the Caribbean towards integrated management, in a wide and holistic sense, both in urban and rural areas. Within this context, the development of technical, legal, administrative and institutional training, together with expressive organization and social mobilization, is fundamental for harmony in the interests of users' sectors, preventing future conflicts and solving the existing ones.

- (2) The availability of natural resources should be evaluated in a systematic way, be it through conventional means, or through the use of high technology, so that biohydrological and climatological information can be monitored, processed and made available for the definition of operational strategies for: sustainable development, attenuating measures, structural or not, in cases involving critical or extreme events (contamination of waters, droughts, floods, short- and long-term climatic variations, cyclical phenomena, etc). In all the processes of management and use of water resources, it is necessary to consider the life forms which have their habitat in the water, with the purpose of harmonizing development with the balance of biodiversity.
- (3) Community participation is of fundamental importance in all the subjects related to the rational, efficient and effective use of water, including effective performance in the conception and planning phases, up to decision making. In the same way, special attention should be paid to the improvement of user system efficiency and to the development, validation and adoption of appropriate technologies. The use of rivers as navigable roads which can give vent to wealth and integrate regions should be considered, keeping in mind the necessary care for the preservation of regional ecosystems. Enlightenment of the population should receive special attention from policy and opinion makers. Cultural transformation should begin with education programmes, involving the media, which is to receive constant inputs on the vulnerability, economic value and other information devised to make them understand the vital and unique importance of the subject. Water will have to be a subject of major concern among the peoples of the world.
- (4) The planning, management, utilization and conservation of natural resources, in general, and of water, in particular, are largely affected by the unsustainable situation of growing poverty in most countries, mainly in the urban centres. Thus, the rational use of water resources implies the need for concrete and urgent action on the part of governments and of society as a whole, to reverse this impoverishment process. It also implies a broadening of the traditional approach to the administration of water taking into consideration the new demographic reality. This demands that international organizations consider the allocation of financial resources, access to appropriate technology and training of human resources as paramount.
- (5) Special attention has to be devoted to the formation of the new generation of specialists in water resources. Academic institutions' curricula will have to be adapted to current needs and to the 21st century setting, considering several alternatives for hydric production and innovative approaches to integrated management, for example, an emphasis on subject-matter which covers the reuse and recycling of waters served and of all the techniques that can contribute to the formation of a professional fully qualified to exercise his/her functions as an active participant in the processes of water resources management.
- (6) For that new water culture to be disseminated, it is necessary that the practice of experience exchange be given priority above all the legal aspects pertinent to the subject: laws, regulations, etc. Technology transfers, from those who have more to those who have less, should be a road paved with the solidarity which should reign among countries.
- (7) The participants of the 1st Water Meeting urge the IICA to give continuity to these 'water meetings' as well as keeping up with the actions here outlined, preserving the philosophy now developed.