

Fondazione per la Collaborazione tra i Popoli
Commissione del Bacino del Lago Tchad
Conferenza dei donatori
per la rivitalizzazione del Lago Tchad
Bologna – Rimini; Italia 4-5 aprile 2014

Intervento di Lapo Pistelli, Viceministro degli Affari Esteri

Bologna, 4 aprile 2014

H.E. President Issoufou Mahamadou, President of the Republic of Niger, Chairman of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) Summit of Heads of State,

H.E. President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Chairman of the African Union,

H.E. President Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,

Excellencies, Heads of Member States, and Observer States,

President Prodi,

Distinguished guests,

it is a great pleasure for me to participate to this conference on the Lake Chad at the presence of Head of States, international experts and a very qualified audience.

It is insightful that today's Conference started this afternoon in the beautiful venue in the city of Bologna, whose history is intertwined with that of the great names of science and literature.

I would like to address my sincere thanks to President Prodi for convening today's and tomorrow conference. His tremendous work as UN Secretary General Special Envoy for the Sahel proves his special attention to Africa that he strongly cultivated when he was the President of the EU Commission. And it is the same approach which Italy now is aiming at, by turning the spotlight back on Africa with the Africa-Italy Initiative launched last year.

In that framework, a seminar was already held last February at the Italian Parliament with the participation of President Prodi, highlighting the growing awareness by Italian institutions and civil society about the expanding opportunities of Africa, which are increasingly overcoming persisting challenges.

The environmental degradation of the conventional basin of lake Chad is indeed a matter of concern for millions of people living in this area. A long term strategy focused on development and security, envisaged in the Five Year Investment Plan 2013-2017 of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, may be the way to alleviate poverty and prevent what might be a severe crisis with critical implications on human lives and regional security. In a broader perspective, water scarcity is one of the main problems to be faced with in the twenty-first century, being a phenomenon which already regards all continents. About 1.2 billion people, or nearly a fifth of the world's population, live in areas with limited sources of supply of water and 500 million people are coming close to that condition. Another 1.6 billion people, or nearly a quarter of world's population, are facing an unavailability of water of economic level, not having the infrastructure necessary to obtain water from rivers and aquifers.

Sub-Saharan Africa is among the region of the world most seriously threatened by the lack of water security. The vulnerability is heightened by high dependence in rain-fed agriculture across the Continent. The expected increase in atmospheric temperatures is likely to exacerbate the problems associated with water scarcity and desertification, both also linked to human activity. There is enough fresh water on the planet for seven billion people, but it is unevenly distributed. Much water is wasted, polluted and not managed in a sustainable manner. Only 40% of international watercourses are regulated by agreements between the concerned governments on how to manage them.

In light of the above, the peaceful management of shared river basins is certainly one of the great challenges that the international community is going to be facing. Current events show that development issues are strictly connected with security concerns. The Sahel food crisis has been long overshadowed by a regional conflict that produced refugees and displaced people, hampering food security. In this respect, I hope that the current tensions along the Blue Nile will be overcome through a mutually satisfactory arrangement. Alike, I welcome the recent decision of the six-members of the LCBC to create a joint task force to combat arms trafficking, terrorism and cross-border attacks as tensions escalate in the region.

Excellencies, President, distinguished Guests, by raising your voices and uniting today you are demonstrating that water management can be instrumental to cooperation and security. Regional cooperation is indeed essential in order to tackle instability, violence and extremism that are currently hampering food security and development in Western and Central Africa along the Lake Chad Basin.

I consider your mobilisation a further application of the "African ownership" that mirrors a continent emancipating from poverty and dependence while gaining assertiveness and confidence in the global scenario.

In this respect, I am really glad to stress the significant participation to the conference of the chairperson of the African Union, H.E. Ould Aziz and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission H.E. Dlamini Zuma.

The AU is increasingly engaged in achieving the sustainable development of Member States across the continent. Internationally, there is raising awareness about the importance of water management, sanitation, hygiene and water related disasters' prevention as set forth in the UN recommendations regarding "Securing Sustainable Water for All" in the post-2015 development agenda and the EU-Africa Strategic Partnership on Water Affairs and Sanitation.

I am happy to underline that Italy has moved in compliance with this trend. Much attention has been devoted by the Italian Development Cooperation to issues such as water supply and the fight against desertification in Sub-Saharan Africa. Our Cooperation has been traditionally present in the Sahel region, including the Lake Chad area, mostly in Senegal, Burkina Faso and Niger and, in perspective, in Mali, focusing also in project concerning water resources management and rural development.

Furthermore, Italy actively supports interventions in favour of Lake Chad countries in the context of the European Development Fund Committee's decision making process for 2014-2020. Our contribution to the total resources allocated by the EU to Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad for the period 2007-2013 amounts respectively to about 87, 19 and 40 million Euro.

Niger, among Lake Chad countries, will constitute an established priority for the Italian development cooperation. With regard to bilateral initiatives, Niger, for example, will benefit from a 20 million Euro soft loan aimed at promoting rural development through easier access to markets and better infrastructure in the Tahoua region. This, along with other initiatives for the promotion of women empowerment and local development, are comprehensively aimed at contrasting the

effects of climate change and desertification.

Also in Mali the Italian Development Cooperation is working to finalize a 11 million Euro soft loan to the Malian authorities aimed at contributing, together with other international donors and International Financial Institutions, to the rehabilitation of the Kabala aqueduct and hydric supply. In Burkina Faso a new intervention worth 2 million Euro is currently being prepared for the dredging, rehabilitation and developments of the catchment basin of Dorì. Ouagadougou also hosts the Secretariat of CILSS (Comité Inter-Etats pour la Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel), under which an important regional program “Combating Desertification for Poverty Reduction” – operating in three other countries : Senegal, Niger and Mali – is still ongoing, with an Italian contribution of approximately 25 million Euro.

The Italian Development Cooperation has traditionally promoted programs concerning waters resources management and cross-border environmental protection also Ethiopia, Mozambique, Kenya and the SADC area. Drought and resilience, finally, constitute the main field of collaboration with the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa: in this framework, a 12 million Euro soft loan to the Ethiopian authorities is in pipeline, aimed at tackling vulnerability of arid and semiarid lands, through improved access to water resources, strengthened market and livestock infrastructure. All our projects imply a careful analysis and consideration of their feasibility and environmental impact.

In the wrapping up of this address I would like to remind the importance of dealing with all issues concerning transboundary waters and water management, that are a source of life and development while projected to be amongst the reasons of future tensions. Water can indeed facilitate cross-border cooperation, substantially improving security prospects in Western and Central Africa and along the Lake Chad Basin. I sincerely hope in international convinced support to your efforts for the sake of local populations and regional development of the Lake Chad Basin. I look forward to the conference debate and its follows-up.