

Foreword

The global water crisis is one of the most important challenges of this century, as demand for freshwater dramatically increases. With the world's freshwater resources under mounting pressure, we have to respond to a challenge that presents a magnitude and pace that are unique in the history of our sector. Some of the issues to face are population growth, migration, urbanization, water pollution, climate change, land-use changes and economic alterations that impact directly on water resources, water services and ecosystems services. These issues increase the difficulty of water management within a watershed, particularly in transboundary river basins.

The global water crisis is multiform. Its expression is the dwindling of water availability per capita (on this aspect an enormous effort has to be made to tackle the inefficiency of water use in agriculture). The water crisis is also qualitative: in developing countries, 80 percent of waste water and solid waste go directly into the environment without treatment, and sanitation is now a fundamental part of water management. The 1 billion people without access to drinking water and the 2.6 billion without access to basic sanitation are also part of this global water crisis. On this particular aspect, the recognition by the UN General Assembly that water and access to sanitation is a human right is a historical step forward. It constitutes a fundamental change and progress compared with the Millennium Development Goals. The challenge now is to translate this into reality in the field. This human rights recognition gives a particular status and priority within water management to drinking water. At the same time, human rights address the questions of inequity, vulnerability, and marginality.

Freshwater demand continues to be on the rise, while overall water quality is deteriorating. There is enough water worldwide to respond to these challenges but we need to mobilize the whole water sector of our society (public, private, academia and, of course, civil society). This requires the mobilization of all the tools we have, particularly international law.

I am very grateful to the Faculty of Law of the University of Geneva and its Platform for International Water Law for the work the latter has

undertaken to stress the contribution of international law to the protection and sustainable management of freshwater resources. The present volume constitutes a milestone in this endeavor.

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