

Outline of the intervention of Joaquín de Arístegui (Permanent Mission of Spain) on the occasion of the roundtable on “The Human Right to Water and the Protocol on Water and Health: making access to water a reality” (UNECE/OHCHR/WHO Europe, Geneva, 18 January 2007)

Main idea: *Access to water as a key element for sustainable development*

- Spain is a country that knows first hand the importance of water for sustainable development and the impact of free and secure access to this basic resource on the general well being of its citizens. Scarce water resources, chronic draught, fast urban development and environmental impact of the expansion of tourism infrastructures are only some of the reasons that have urged our Government to find urgent and effective measures to guarantee access to water for all.
- Learning from its complex experience, the Spanish authorities, at all levels of administration (State, regional and local), are engaged in identifying and implementing specific and effective measures that will contribute to the rational management of water and hydric resources, the protection of the environment, and the dissemination of a new culture of co-responsibility of all citizens to solve the emerging challenges in this field.
- Internally, and at the local level, all major city halls have put in place legislation or campaigns aiming at the rationalization of the use of water, in particular in order to better manage the consumption of drinking and sanitation water (e.g. Madrid). At the regional level (autonomous governments), other important initiatives are under way, some unilateral (e.g. Región de Murcia, Gobierno de Aragón), others under the coordination of the central Government (yearly meeting of CC.AA.). Finally, the central government of Spain is also clearly committed to promote a culture of sustainable development through the adequate use of water, based on joint efforts by the Ministry of Environmental Affairs (Consejo del Agua, A.G.U.A. Programme, advertising campaigns,) and the Ministry of Health and Consumption (WG on water and environmental health, parameters for water for human consumption). The Ministry of Environment is also studying efficient financial measures to improve water quality and availability, enhance the Spanish technical approach to face water crises and study the effectiveness of water desalination in response to increased demand due to tourism.

A good example of the converging views on this topic in Spain, both from the public and private sectors, is the agenda and programme of work for the 2008 World Exposition in Zaragoza, devoted entirely to “Water and sustainable Development”. The town hall of Zaragoza, the regional government of Aragón, the central government of Spain, as well as over 100 private companies are joining hands in this initiative.

- Spain is also very active in the international fora.

In the context of the UN, Spain and Germany led the process that ended in the recent adoption by the HRC of a decision on “HR and Access to Water”, thus incorporating this important topic, from a gradual perspective, to the human rights agenda, in the context of the multilateral development of ESC rights.

At a transregional level, in the framework of the Iberoamerican Conference, Spain has actively supported the establishment of an “Iberoamerican Fund for Safe Drinking Water”, as foreseen in the Montevideo Declaration.

Finally, as a key element of its international cooperation policy, the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation/AECI of the MFA has streamlined the importance of access to water into its capacity building priorities (PACI).