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Citizens for Global Solutions
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Leaf & blossom, fish, and Water Lily Monster (Mayan vase © Justin Kerr). Before this, at the dawn of life, thinking & planning glittered in the water — “whatever there is that might be” in the murmuring pool “is simply not there: only murmurs, ripples, in the dark, in the night” — to be punctuated by “the first words, the first eloquence”.

*This is the account, here it is:
Now it still ripples, now it still murmurs, ripples, it still sighs, still hums,
and it is empty under the sky.*

Part One,
Popol Vuh,
the Quiché Mayan book of creation
(translated by Dennis Tedlock)

*By the rivers of Babylon,
there we sat down, yea,
we wept . . .*

Psalms 137 (6th century BCE)

*He who hears the rippling
of rivers in these degenerate
days will not utterly despair.*

Henry David Thoreau (1849)

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The new nuclear age has been made more chilling by a state of mutually assured incomprehension.

Peter Preston,
"An Illogical Armageddon",
Guardian, 1 October 2007

What is needed today is nothing less than a new consensus between alliances that are frayed, between wealthy nations and poor, and among peoples mired in mistrust across an apparently widening cultural abyss. The essence of that consensus is simple: we all share responsibility for each other's security.

A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility, Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threat, Challenges and Change, December 2004

Iraqi civil war, conflict with Iran, Turkish-Kurdish violence, chaos throughout the Middle East — ... We have put an explosive vest on Earth itself. And now our job is to get it off. The revelation here is that, in the new age, every bomber is a suicide bomber.

James Carroll,
Boston Globe, 22 October 2007

Minerva

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Mayan art throughout this edition:
courtesy of Justin Kerr (see page 39)

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Conviviality: Wishes & Consequences

“Be careful what you wish for, particularly when it comes to politics,” warned Edward Rothstein in April 2006, writing in the *New York Times* about a conference at Yale (“Statesmen and Demagogues: Democratic Leadership in Political Thought”). “Wish for democratic elections, and you may get duly elected tyranny and terror. Wish for democratic debate, and you may get polarized parties and a divided electorate. Wish for democratic responsiveness and you may get opinion-poll leadership. Wish for statesmanship and you may get demagoguery. One temptation might be to wish for nothing in particular, but then who knows what might happen?”

Be careful what you wish for is one of the oldest, most basic — and most complex — adages known to humankind.

When the folkloric talking fish, unhooked, offers its catcher/rescuer three wishes, one wish tends to be lost immediately by trying to suppress the thought, “I wish I knew what to wish for”.

Almost as quickly, one might think: wait, before I decide on anything else, I should wish for world peace. But simple world peace could be the sure-fire peace of human annihilation through nuclear omnicide, climate stress, unrelenting misogyny, an engineered virus, entomological sabotage, multiple other dangers that we argue over now, or even an obliterating threat we don’t see coming yet.

We’d stand a better chance of survival by wishing for — and working toward — a system of governance, that is as foolproof as possible (a key term of the wish!), for peace & justice & protection of the planet: a way of transformation that would avoid temptations described by novelist Benjamin Anastas when discussing popular fixation on predictions linked to the ancient Mayan calendar as an alleged “timing device for our salvation — whether it arrives through global catastrophe or telepathic rainbow around the earth” (“The Final Days”, *New York Times Magazine*, 1 July 2007).

Mr Anastas comments: “Judging by the sheer number of predicted end dates that have come and gone without the trumpets blowing and angels rushing in, we are a people impatient to see our world redeemed through catastrophe — and we are always wrong. ... There is a paradox built into end-time theologies in that imminent catastrophe often brings comfort ... Rumors of global crisis, the distrust of institutional authority, the ready availability of esoteric lore, the existence of individuals drawn to abstruse numerical schemes, the urge to assuage anxieties with dreams of social transformation — wherever these elements exist, apocalyptic thinking is likely to flourish.”

Minerva reader and student of Mayan iconography Martha Gottlieb comments that end of the world speculation is “a sensitive subject for Mayanists because of all the hype about the calendar ending in 2012. In their cyclical view (of everything), the early Maya saw no end to time. Time as counted by them was the permutation of several cycles running concurrently: solar, lunar, the periods of Venus, perhaps Jupiter as well; plus various subdivisions similar to weeks and months. On December 21, 2012, a large subset of these cycles will be reset at zero for the first time since August 13, 3113 BC. Cataclysm is a possibility, in their view, but not termination.”



Water bird and fish (in beak)
as headdress of a Mayan god
4400J © Justin Kerr

Anthropologist Dennis Tedlock, translator of the Quiché Mayan *Popol Vuh*, comments: “The difference between a fully mythistorical sense of narrative time and the European quest for pure history is not reducible to a simple contrast between cyclical and linear time. Mayans are always alert to the reassertion of the patterns of the past in present events, but they do not expect the past to repeat itself exactly. Each time the gods of the *Popol Vuh* attempt to make human beings they get a different result, and except for the solitary person made of mud, each attempt has a lasting result rather than completely disappearing into the folds of cyclical time.”

The third wish mentioned above as possibly the last opportunity in a traditional folkloric formula — the wish focused on improving our ways of governing ourselves — sees both the eclipse and the rainbow on the horizon, but means not indulging in excitements of catastrophism, while duly recognizing gathering storms, and not taking refuge in rapturous fantasies — either of universal love spontaneously triumphing or of an orgy of selective self-salvation plus smiting of enemies. It requires the difficult but spirit-engaging rationality of imagining worthwhile futures but not waiting for a perfect concept to occur to us for spontaneous acclaim and enactment or to be decreed and enforced; instead, it involves experimenting with and integrating various collaborative measures (peacebuilding, transnational jurisprudence, poverty reduction & resource-sharing, disaster management, and so forth) into a system that can serve the earth’s inhabitants far better than perpetual warfare.

Even the wisest women & men who might be working on this challenge tend to be distracted by exigencies of daily life, however, and by accumulating civic crises that seem intractable.

And forward-looking questers continue to be daunted by ominous glimpses of the withered realm of the ailing Fisher King, craving and angling for redemption in the confluence of Persian, Jewish, Christian, and Brahmanic thematic streams of grail lore that seeks healing of defiled nature in reunion with better articulated conscious-

ness. This age-old goal is reminiscent of Professor Tedlock's description of the human preoccupation, in Mayan thought, with the "difficult task of finding the traces of divine movements in their own deeds" — balancing the equally difficult godly task of creating human beings.

That aspiration requires humility, though. If we don't improve our behavior and curtail our proliferation, the rest of nature will relentlessly and efficiently dispose of us, posits Alan Weisman (*The World Without Us*, July 2007). Life — "incredibly resilient and powerful" — "will go on in this planet," he said in an October talk at Mount Holyoke College; "the question is, will our life go on, and the answer to that, I think, is still pretty much our decision...."

Rebecca Solnit (author of *Hope in the Dark* and *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*), writing a satirical year-end review last season as though looking back on 25 years of the 21st century ("The Age of Mammals", TomDispatch.com), describes a developing "age of the small" that might mesh with an expanded planetary outlook. She sees "decentralization policies by dissident locales" in North American states during a particularly "bullying" and "mismanaged" administration contributing to the dissolution of a prominent republic that has become "a largely symbolic entity" (still celebrated with fireworks on the Fourth of July) and links that to insurgent South American "horizontalism", along with proliferating "indigenous autonomous zones across the hemisphere", and, on another continent, to the eventual end of "bloody squabbles ... generally considered to have been marked by the election in 2020 of Chancellor Amira Goldblatt Al-Hamid by what was then only a loosely federated association of German-speaking bioregional principalities". (The bloodletting of reorganization in Africa and Asia receives less piquant treatment.)

Using dinosaurs to exemplify doomed inadequacy, she comments: "In hindsight, we all see that the left-right divide so harped upon in that era was but another dinosaur binary. After all, small government had long been (at least theoretically) a conservative mantra as was (at least theoretically) left-wing support for the most localized forms of 'people power' — and yet neither group

ever pictured government or people power truly getting small enough to exist as it does today, at its most gigantic in bioregional groups about the size of the former states of Oregon or Georgia — but, of course, deeply enmeshed in complex global webs of alliances. All this was unimagined in, for instance, the dismal year of 2006."

The dangers of such faith in webs of alliances are not examined, and the Solnit pasquinade romanticizes "decentralization" without dealing with less salubrious aspects such as medieval-style punishments by village councils, maulings of miscellaneous paramilitaries, unchecked powers of provincial warlords, and the capacity of a few terrorists to get more attention than hundreds of thousands of peaceful demonstrators. But the perspective is provocative.

"[O]ne great blow against nationalism," continues Ms Solnit reminiscently and wishfully, "proved to be the British seizure of the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in 1998 for crimes against humanity and his in-absentia trial in Spain, a saga that dragged on until the blood-drenched dictator's heart failed at the end of 2006. The new world is both more transnational and more local than the one it eclipsed, and nobody will ever be so beyond the reach of justice again. ...

"The World Court and related human rights, environmental rights, and criminal courts became more powerful presences as the sun set on the era of nation-state. Multiple changes often combined into scenarios impossible to foresee: for example, the belated US recognition in 2011 that the International Criminal Court did indeed have war-crimes jurisdiction over Americans coincided with the worldwide anti-incarceration movement."

(At this point, Ms Solnit enjoys imagining the fate of Mr Bush, extradited from Paraguay in 2013, along with spoils of war profiteers turned over to "the Vietnamese Buddhist Commission for the Iraqi Transition" and a major reform led by the Women's Alliance of Islamic Feminists" — "surprisingly peaceful when it finally came".)

More soberly, Ms Solnit notes that "in 1996, the Pentagon prepared imaginary

scenarios describing five potential futures by 2025. Most of them were based on the belief that a better world was one dominated by American military power — which is to say, by the threat of state violence. That they came up with five possible futures demonstrated, at least, how wide-open the next two decades seemed, even to a Tyrannosaurus-Rex bureaucracy that thought it was soon to own the planet. Some of their technological, corporate, and militaristic futures could have come to pass. Had people not come to believe strongly enough in their own power ... and in a planet-wide ability to work with the environmental changes the Industrial Age had loosed on us, we might be living in a very different, unimaginably catastrophic world — one in which the mammals ... might even have breathed their last.... The ideas that made our era and pulled us back from the brink, the stakes that went through the hearts of the dinosaurs and the more incremental forces that rendered them extinct were all at work in the 1990s. They just didn't look very impressive yet, and people were intimidated by the heft of those dinosaurs....

Quoting science-fiction novelist William Gibson ("As I've said many times, the future is already here. It's just not very evenly distributed"), Ms Solnit continues her preview:

"In retrospect, the arrival of the Age of Mammals should have been easy to foresee. On every front — family structure and marriage, transportation, energy and food economies, localized power structures — everyday life was being reinvented in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. From India to Indiana an interlocking set of new ideas began to emerge and coalesce, becoming in the end the new common sense that new generations of thinkers and activists were guided by. Who now thinks it's radical to advocate that decentralization is better than consolidated power, ... that the public matters as much or more than the private, that enforced homogeneity is not a virtue either on a farm or in a society?

"The basic tools were already in place long before our era; here and there, a few at a time, people picked them up and started building a better future. Some new inventions mattered, ... but much of the march toward a more environmentally

sane future didn't require scientific breakthroughs & technologies, just modesty."

While Rebecca Solnit deploys dinosaurs as stand-ins for ignorant humans, their direct evolutionary successors, birds, with a clustered brain anatomy rather than the layered anatomy of primates, are providing researchers with insights into "a different anatomical solution to the same evolutionary problem of how to live as a social species", reports Jonah Lehrer, editor of *Seed* magazine ("Eggheads", *Boston Globe*, 16 September 2006). "This suggests that some rarefied aspects of human intelligence, such as tool use and the ability to imagine what other minds are thinking, have actually evolved independently in birds. In the history of life, the primate brain and bird brain diverged hundreds of millions of years ago ... Yet the unfolding research into avian intelligence shows that humans have much to learn from birds. Among the lessons: that we, like birds, are smart because we have to deal with each other."

The end times are upon us for certain only if our mental evolution has ended (without our knowing it). But they do seem to be closing in, especially when we shut down our capacities in denial & fear.

Common resistance to engaging constructively with change because of fear of forfeiting personal prerogatives is self-defeating as well, as Václav Havel points out ("Our Moral Footprint", *New York Times*, 27 September 2007): "The end of the world has been anticipated many times and has never come, of course. ... But that doesn't mean that the human race is not at serious risk. As a result of our endeavors and our irresponsibility our climate might leave no place for us. If we drag our feet, the scope for decision-making — and hence for our individual freedom — could be considerably reduced."

Our capacity for living together, which defines us no matter how strenuously we defy it, depends on accepting some responsibility for one another, as individuals and as cultures. It also requires recognizing obligations to the whole community, and "that means ultimately not only the hu-

man community of the present moment, but also the community of our remotest ancestors and our distant descendants as well", asserts nuclear disarmament policy analyst (and WFI Fellow) Tad Daley, who therefore advocates caring about "human destiny in space" as well as on this planet (for more on this spin of thought, watch for *Minerva* #32). He quotes Teddy Roosevelt: "The greatest good for the greatest number applies to the number within the womb of time, compared to which those now alive form but an insignificant fraction."

As of this year, the majority of that fraction lives in cities, according to UN habitat studies. The 2012 fascination is a diversion in the midst of American urban warfare planning reportedly focused on anticipating technological invincibility by 2045 or sooner, heedless of the eerie absence of previous invincible armies.

In *Planet of Slums*, urbanologist Mike Davis comments, "The Pentagon's best minds have dared to venture where most United Nations, World Bank or Department of State types fear to go. [T]hey now assert that the feral, failed cities of the Third World — especially their slum outskirts — will be the distinctive battlespace of the twenty-first century." Pentagon war-fighting doctrine, he states, "is being reshaped accordingly to support a low-intensity world war of unlimited duration against criminalized segments of the urban poor."

After attending "Joint Urban Operations 2007", a September conference in Washington DC, Nick Turse reports (at TomDispatch.com) that the assembled "Pentagon power-brokers, active duty and retired US military personnel, foreign coalition partners, representatives of big and small defense contractors, and academics who support their work" are planning the next 100 years of warfare, and "there were few imaginable technologies, even ones that not so long ago inhabited the wildest frontiers of science fiction, that weren't being considered.... The only thing not evidently open to discussion was the basic wisdom of planning to occupy foreign cities for a century to come." Although they speculated as to which cities would be targeted next,

such details "seemed beside the point", according to Turse.

Control of American cities was on the conference agenda as well, he reports. "When it came to the 'homeland', conference participants were particularly focused on moving beyond weaponry aimed at individuals.... Needed in the future, they generally agreed, were technologies that could target whole crowds at once — not just rioters but even those simply attending 'demonstrations that could go violent'."

They reportedly touted the alleged discriminatory finesse of new weaponry, but "discrimination, it turned out, didn't mean legal constraint. Speakers and conference-goers alike repeatedly lamented the way international law and similar hindrances stood in the way of unleashing chemical agents and emerging technologies", referring with scorn to the Chemical Weapons Convention. A RAND senior policy researcher "brought up the possibility of reassessing such international conventions and overcoming fears that chemical weapons might fall into the 'wrong hands'.... All of these [Urban Operations] experts are preparing for an endless struggle that history suggests they can't win, but that is guaranteed to lead to large-scale destruction, destabilization, and death."

With that kind of planning underway, and with deserts spreading over continents and seawaters rising over coastlines and people dithering — endlessly? — about selfish choices, social competitions, and idle wishes, the magic fish is gasping.

Flocking together, the fisherfolk must pull up old sectarian lines, while not merely widening nets but strengthening them in pooled governmental sovereignties, and move to higher ground in a spirit of authentic — not just wishful — conviviality. After all, "there were countless peoples, but there was just one dawn for all tribes" (*Popol Vuh*).

For inherently bonded but hostility-stained humankind, neither pessimistic nor titillated dwelling on the end can end well.

Beyond Disasters: Creating Opportunities for Peace

Michael Renner and Zoë Chafe

Recorded disasters nearly doubled between 1987 and 2006, while the number of people affected by these disasters increased more than 10 percent. Here are the summary & recommendations of a June 2007 Worldwatch report that studies recent experiences of Indonesia's Aceh province, Sri Lanka, and Kashmir, among others, and suggests better ways to integrate disaster and conflict responses. The report concludes that the intersection of disasters, conflict, and peacemaking requires interdisciplinary responses from governments, international donors, and civil society.

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The Worldwatch Institute
<www.worldwatch.org>.

Michael Renner is a senior researcher at the Worldwatch Institute, where his work “focuses on new concepts of security and the ways in which environmental degradation and competition over resources can generate conflict and human insecurity”. He directs the Global Security Project.

Zoë Chafe, a Research Associate at the Institute, is a frequent contributor to Worldwatch publications. Her recent work focuses on natural disaster trends, urbanization, and strategies for confronting climate change. She coordinates Worldwatch University, the Institute's youth outreach initiative.

Two recent tragedies, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir, gave rise to hopes that three longstanding Asian conflicts could finally be brought to an end: the separatist uprising in Indonesia's Aceh Province, the civil war in Sri Lanka, and the territorial dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. Amid terrible loss of life, these disasters presented residents and policymakers alike with a host of new challenges, but also with unique opportunities to address their ongoing troubles.

Earthquakes, floods, droughts, and other natural disasters exact a heavy human and economic toll. On average, 231 million people were affected by natural disasters each year over the past decade—equivalent to every person in Indonesia, the fourth most populous country in the world.

As climate change and ecosystem destruction intensify, the stage is being set for more frequent, more powerful, and more destructive disaster events. Communities that are already disempowered as a result of economic and ecological marginalization are exceptionally vulnerable to disasters, which exacerbate problems of poverty, indebtedness, and food insecurity. Many of the world's poorest residents are forced to live on unstable hillsides or in areas prone to drought or flooding. Women, children, and the elderly are among those most affected by disasters.

Disasters can trigger conflicts by straining the social and economic fabric of affected communities. Recriminations may occur over such post-disaster realities as unequal relief efforts, inadequate compensation, contentious aid distribution, unwelcome resettlement, or lack of consultation with those who are most affected. In extreme cases, the seeds of violent conflict may be sown.

Areas of recent or current armed conflict are particularly at risk. But when disasters occur in conflict zones, they can produce an unexpected silver lining: the opportunity for peace. By jolting the political landscape, disasters hold the potential to quickly transform conflict dynamics and generate opportunities to bring long-running disputes to an end. Hardship that cuts across existing divides can prompt acts of goodwill and create common relief needs. Joint emergency aid efforts and rebuilding activities can be a catalyst for building mutual trust among adversaries. In some cases, the destruction wrought by a disaster may be so great that reconstruction in conflict-afflicted regions is able to proceed only with a ceasefire or peace agreement.

Aceh, Sri Lanka, and Kashmir have each taken dramatically different paths in the aftermath of disaster. In Aceh, the tsunami served as a catalyzing shock that decisively shifted the political dynamics of the region and cemented a collective interest in peace. Sri Lanka had a ceasefire in place, but struggles over control of reconstruction aid reinforced the island's divides and contributed to renewed warfare. And in Kashmir, despite substantial post-disaster goodwill, India and Pakistan ultimately missed a unique opportunity to reinvigorate the stalled reconciliation process.

The differing experiences of these three disaster- and conflict-affected regions offer important lessons:

- Compassion alone is unlikely to carry warring factions through the complexities of a peace process. It must lead to political change that addresses the root causes of the conflict.

Beyond Disasters: Creating Opportunities for Peace (56pp) can be found at <www.worldwatch.org/node/5111> and ordered or downloaded.

- Solutions must be indigenous, supported by the affected forces and communities rather than engineered by outside actors.

- The international community has an important role to play in facilitating fledgling peace processes, reinforcing shared interests, and creating maneuvering space for civil society. This includes donor governments, United Nations agencies, private aid groups, and others.

- Environmental protection and restoration measures are important for reducing future disaster vulnerability as well as the potential for associated hardship and conflict. These measures are especially critical as post-disaster reconstruction puts enormous pressure on natural resources and the environment.

How can we identify and harness unique opportunities for peacemaking in post-disaster situations? Policymakers must exhibit courage and use skilled leadership. The intersection of disaster, conflict, and peacemaking requires creative interdisciplinary responses from governments, international donors, and civil society. Relief groups, development agencies, economists, environmentalists, human rights advocates, and conflict mediators must work together more proactively, building on one another's expertise.

Because aid is inevitably political, relief and development groups need to integrate conflict-sensitive strategies into their work. Aid is not an easy lever for peace, and unless carefully designed, aid policies can exacerbate conflicts. Sincere consultations with communities and civil society leaders, which ensure that local needs and interests are taken into account, are a critical prerequisite for successful aid projects. Great care must be taken to avoid inequities in assistance to disaster- and conflict-affected populations.

Recommendations

For donor governments and disaster relief agencies:

- Integrate conflict-sensitive strategies into disaster relief plans, and implement the lessons of the Do No Harm Project.
- Promote ongoing collaboration among aid organizations to avoid “turf wars” and duplication of effort.
- Minimize relief inequities between disaster- and conflict-affected communities, and ensure that both are adequately represented in all decision-making.
- Conduct assessments of the opportunities and problems associated with using aid to encourage peacemaking.

For conflict resolution groups:

- Use post-disaster relief as an opportunity for conflict resolution; analyze and learn from previous cases.
- Raise awareness among diplomats of unconventional factors that can trigger or worsen conflicts, such as livelihood loss, environmental degradation, and climate change.
- Ensure strong international support for mediation and monitoring efforts, and create multi-disciplinary training programs.

For environmental organizations:

- Conduct proactive assessments of natural disaster risk in conflict zones.
- Integrate environmental protection and restoration into disaster-mitigation efforts.
- Work with governments to plan sustainable reconstruction efforts (including laws mandating careful use of natural resources during reconstruction).

For concerned citizens:

- Encourage elected officials to quickly and fully fund disaster and conflict relief efforts.
- Get to know the types of projects supported by the organizations you donate to.
- Press government leaders to make themselves available as international mediators.

Opportunities for collaboration:

- Undertake a comprehensive study of lessons emerging from disaster-conflict interfaces; generate recommendations for all actors concerned (akin to the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition reports).
- Establish a forum where these recommendations and their implementation can be discussed, bringing together the perspectives and expertise of various fields (including disaster mitigation, development, environment, and conflict resolution).
- Create plans for aid-sharing scenarios in advance of disaster.

*Civilisation is just a russeting
on the skin of the biosphere,
never immune from being rubbed
against the sleeve of
environmental change.*

George Monbiot

Mayan water
birds, with head-
dresses, standing
on cryptic symbols
with shell and
bone elements

Rollout photogra-
phy © Justin Kerr



Water Summit

For more information:
Asia-Pacific Water Forum Secretariat
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See also *Minerva* #28 (February 2005):
Elizabeth Burleson, “Equitable and
Responsible Use of Water Within the
Euphrates-Tigris River Basin”;
Marquita K. Hill, “The Globalization
of Pollution”; and *Minerva* #24 (Novem-
ber 2002), Sandra L. Postel & Aaron
T. Wolf, “Dehydrating Conflict”.

The Global Water Partnership was es-
tablished by the World Bank, the United
Nations, and the Swedish Ministry of De-
velopment Cooperation with the aim of
“achieving integrated water management
by turning international environmental
agreements into concrete programmes
and projects”.

In early October 2007, at the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit, in Kyoto, Japan, Dr Frank R. Rijsberman, former director of the International Water Management Institute, commented: “Most people think about climate change leading to warmer climates and that is an important issue, but [it] also leads to increased floods and droughts — more variability in climates. ... Science & technology promise to be very helpful, whether it is in providing information platforms that give people access to data, or whether it is seasonal weather forecast, drought early-warning systems, or maps of water uses — there are a lot of very promising technologies. And those people that say we cannot live by technology alone and that institutions and governments are the key, that is right, but even some of the most intractable governance issues, like corruption, stand to be solved by things like transparency.”

Japan summit steering committee member Margaret Catley-Carlson, a Canadian re-
source management authority, said: “With 60% of the world’s population and 60% of
the irrigated land, Asia also has some of the most difficult water management problems
in terms of disaster events (600,000 deaths since 1980), and in terms of unmet needs in
water and sanitation. If you turn that coin over, Asia has had some of the most impres-
sive and stunning growths in economic development, has had huge gains in education,
in health status, in GNP growth. If for no other reason, the argument to press on with
the remaining water problems is that the solution to these problems will also acceler-
ate economic growth.” Continuation of that, she said, will depend on “solving water
problems”, including developing a sense of “hydro-solidarity”.

A month earlier (1 September 2007), preparing to step down as chair of the Global Wa-
ter Partnership, Ms Catley-Carlson delivered a detailed address at the United Nations.
A few excerpts follow.

Sustainable Water Supply in the 21st Century

Margaret Catley-Carlson

Chair of the Global Water Partnership, of the Crop Diversity Trust Board, and of the International Advisory Committee for Group Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux, **Margaret Catley-Carlson** is a member of the UN Secretary General's Advisory Board, Rosenberg Forum, and Council of Advisors of the World Food Prize. She is Board Chair of the International Center on Agriculture in Dry Areas (ICARDA), Aleppo, Syria, and serves on the boards of the Biblioteca Alexandrina, IMWI (International Center for Water Resource Management), the IFDC (Fertilizer Management), and IIED (International Institute for Environment and Development). She has chaired the Sanitation Collaborative Council, and has been a commissioner of Water for the 21st Century. She was President of the Canadian International Development Agency, 1983-89; Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, 1981-1983; President of the Population Council in New York, 1993-98; and Deputy Minister of the Department of Health and Welfare of Canada, 1989-92. Ms Catley-Carlson is an Officer of the Order of Canada.

She has given permission for printing of these selections. The full speech is at <www.MaximsNews.com>.

The UN Secretary General asks, in a year-end broadcast, if the next wars will be water wars. "Water is the 21st Century Gold," avers a Middle Eastern research group. We see [television] images of drought where rains fail, water tables drop and then crops wither, roots die, lands erode and soil blows away. Many countries experience unprecedented flooding. We know that more and more rivers — major rivers — dry up before they reach the sea, and fertile lands are ruined by salt. And we know that somehow connected to this is the daily reality of 6 thousand water-related deaths, and of 2 ½ billion people suffering the indignities of being without sanitation facilities, and fully half that number suffering the health and livelihood effects of not having access to clean water. What is going on?...

The world is mostly made of water. But within this watery world, only 2.5% of world's water is fresh water, with less than 1% available for use. We draw down about fully 56% of that 1% of water that is actually accessible to us. Water use sextupled when population doubled since the 1960's (i.e. added 3 billion); what will be the situation in 2050 when we add the next 2-3 billion? Sextupling isn't possible — we're already over the half way mark (Shiklomanov, *Assessment of water resources and water availability in the World*, Stockholm Environment Institute, 1997).

Water resources are managed — or should be — by public policy ... trying to integrate the various uses made of water by various parts of society. Determinants of who gets what relate to the relative political power of the [various sectors].

Most of the Millennium Development Goals — reduced malnutrition, decreasing the number of those in poverty, improving the environment — will not be reached without improved water resource management. The Johannesburg Earth Summit (2002) passed a specific directive calling for all countries rich and poor, water scarce and water plentiful, to develop integrated water resources management (IWRM) and water efficiency plans by 2005. IWRM is an approach "which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without comprising sustainability of vital ecosystems" (Global Water Partnership, 2000).

The aspect of water that is most immediate to everyone ... is water supply — or drinking water supply — that takes but a small part of water use, generally about 7 or 8%. ... The decisions about who gets water supply or who gets sanitation are primarily about financial and policy priority decisions [rather than] simple water availability. This is logical. In an increasingly urban world, water supply is related to costly urban infrastructure which must be financed. ...

The impact on people's lives and livelihoods depends on who they are and where they are. Poor people suffer most when water is unavailable, they suffer in particular from the absence or poor working of municipal services and poor people suffer disproportionately from the health impacts of dangerous or low water quality and quantity. It would in fact be difficult to exaggerate the impact that the lack of clean drinking water has on the lives of the poor... [In addition to the drastic toll of disease,] about 73 million working days are lost in India to problems associated with poor water quality.... A staggering 40 billion working hours in Africa are lost to carrying water — women's work that draws their daughters out of school ... (UN Millennium Project, 2005).

[continued]

If we look at one of the most unstable areas of the world, we see a truly disquieting water picture. In the Middle East and North Africa region the population doubled from 1970 to 2001. In 1960 there were 3,500 cubic meters of water per capita available to be used for all purposes — food, industry, personal use — for all residents; by 2025 that will be down to 600 cubic meters per person, or a six fold decrease. Irrigated agriculture uses a hefty 85% of the water in the region. This part of the world is now 60% urban. ... The Arabian Peninsula, Jordan, Palestine, Israel and Libya consume more water than annual renewable supply, with Egypt, Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia and Syria close behind. ... How will prosperity — or peace — come in these circumstances?

... Water-related violence very much exists in the world of today but the most intense conflicts are intrastate, intercommunity, and intervillage. ...

It is absolutely the case that two Middle Eastern cities armed themselves and went to war directly over water (Aaron Wolf, *Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Water Systems*, UK, 2002). But it was 4500 years ago, and, in the years since, the participants have often been edgy, but ... generally and amazingly, nations have found more to cooperate about with water than to fight over. The reality is a fairly rich tradition of transboundary cooperation, [for example] with India continuing to pay Pakistan for the costs of building and operating dams which Pakistan continued to build and operate — right through several periods of Indo-Pakistan hostilities. The Mekong River treaty held, with some difficulties, right through the Vietnam War. The Jordan River treaty is more observed than it is violated, though it is violated.

A study of the last 50 years shows that 2/3 of all events involving water issues between two or more states have in fact been cooperative, with acute violence being rare. Where there is violence, the water issue is usually as subset of other difficult issues. USA intelligence reports suggest that shortages have often stimulated cooperative arrangements for sharing scarcity (US National Intelligence Council, 2000). As countries come up against tighter and tighter limits, conflict may increase. Wolf's Axiom says that "the likelihood of conflict rises as the rate of change within the basin exceeds the institutional capacity to change" (Wolf et al., 2003). In other words, the strong linkages, history, technical capacity and managerial competence of the Canada/USA International Joint Commission suggest that it will help [the] two countries to find solutions to new challenges such as deformed fish, zebra mussels, declining Great Lakes Water levels. In the Aral Sea, given the weak linkages between the regional countries, it is much less likely that solutions will emerge easily.

FOOTNOTE: Wolf, Aaron T., Kersti Stahl, and Marcia F. Macomber, *Conflict and cooperation within international river basins: The importance of institutional capacity*, Water Resources Update, Volume 125, Universities Council on Water Resources, 2003

The international community [has] tried to forestall tensions over shared waters. The Nile River Treaty tries to create a win-win situation through finding agreement on and financing for an impressive range of development projects for all of the countries in the region. The price tag is very steep but wars would undoubtedly cost more on all measurement scales.

The new transboundary issues will be complex. They are unlikely to be about water availability alone. There are rich mixes of issues that will plague the 260 shared river basin countries: water dumping in times of flood risk; existence of toxic dumps near water sources; inadequate industrial protection; salinity and agricultural wastes in the stream; building dams and infrastructure without consultation. Climate variability will add to the complexity of this mix.

[Following a survey of specific challenges and of techniques & technologies that may be brought to bear, Ms Catley-Carlson considers] Can the world manage better? ... If, by common consent, there is enough water — just enough in many areas, but probably enough, can't we just improve management? A brief glimpse at traditional water management precepts will signal some of the issues. How do we manage water now, or, how did we get into these difficulties?

- There is usually no Ministry of Water, and there is no single UN water organization to set global standards for water management. There are sectoral standards, of course.
- Governments see their principal role as delivering water to their citizens
- Far too many people insist that “water should be no cost/low cost”. Many who advocate that water is a human right insist that it must be free. The relevant UN resolution says it should be ‘affordable’ (ECOSOC, 2002). While subsidy is essential to protect the poor, paying enough to keep the pipes and reservoirs of the system going is essential in countries with no tax base, few government revenues and other priorities for aid Euros.
- Water governance/expertise is organized sectorally.
- Jurisdiction: rivers, lakes, groundwater do not respect national boundaries.

Things are changing and there are new ways of looking at water governance. More rather than less governance is needed for this ultimate public good. The following water management functions must therefore stay in public hands:

- Allocating water
- Deciding on protecting the environmental share
- Establishing water law
- Setting regulatory framework
- Managing inspection functions
- Ensuring data collection, retention and distribution
- Managing public debate on issues
- Managing communication on water issues
- Getting some of the corruption out of the water sector (Transparency International, 2004)
- Ensuring subsidy for poorest population.

Agriculture is the biggest water using activity and is responsible for 70 to 80% of a country’s water consumption. It warrants careful attention. Billions are spent in subsidies to farmers throughout the world but they are allocated without any consideration to water problems, thus creating artificially a water crisis, which will manifest itself as a food security crisis

The water problem is as much a financial problem as a water problem. There is no solution to the water problem without some overhaul of the way agriculture is subsidized, water as an industrial or agricultural input is priced, local authorities are vested with the responsibility to provide water to their inhabitants and good managers and sustainable financial resources are allocated to them.

It is not simple. Moving to a conscious, transparent, publicly announced allocation of available water is a fraught process almost guaranteed to generate more enemies than friends for the party doing the allocating. The move toward charging for water services offers opposition parties an instant election issue. Managing across boundaries and agreeing to share the benefits of water, often between neighbors with centuries old traditions of mistrust is not easy. Current arrangements favor the powerful; who will speak for the weak? Who speaks for the environment? Irrigated-land agriculturalists in many countries have much more power than either the rural or urban poor. There are taboos against waste water re-use.

All of this changes every day. Every day, the population grows and the amount of water available per person decreases. Every week, somewhere in the world there are manifestations of climate variability which will have marked impact on water resources. Every month, pollution increases. Meetings are held to assess how best to intervene. We must rethink our use of water — there is no other option



Mayan fishing birds
(carved vase rollout photography
© Justin Kerr)

There are expected to be roughly 9 billion people by 2050, needing a doubling of world food production if the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of hungry people is to be met. According to the latest UN report on the state of the planet, merely meeting that hunger goal “will require doubling of water use by crops by 2050. ... Water scarcity is already acute in many regions, and farming already takes the lion’s share of water withdrawn from streams and groundwater. ... If present trends continue, by 2025 ... two-thirds of the world population could be subject to water stress.”

The combination of population growth, pollution, and increasing per-person water use means that there are about 450 million people in 29 countries facing water shortage, and by 2025 about 2.7 billion or 1/3 of the expected world population will live in regions facing severe water scarcity.

- M.W. Rosegrant, Ximing Cai, and Sarah A. Cline (2002), *Global Water Outlook to 2025: Averting an Impending Crisis*, IWMI – International Water Management Institute, Colombo, Sri Lanka