

Symposium opening ceremony

Welcome address by President of ICOLD Anton Schleiss

Distinguished Minister Mokonyane of Water and Sanitation of South Africa

Distinguished Vice Minister LIU of Water Resources of China

Distinguished Minister AFAILAL of Water of Morocco

Dear ICOLD delegates, ladies and gentlemen

On the behalf of the International Commission of Large Dams (ICOLD) I'm pleased to welcome you at the occasion of the 84th Annual Meeting here in Johannesburg. This opening ceremony is a great moment for all of us since we had to wait 22 years until we could meet again at an ICOLD event in Africa and especially here in South Africa. This moment is shared by more than 1100 participants coming from almost 80 countries all over the world.

There is another reason why this opening ceremony is a great moment.

For all the delegates who had the chance to participate 22 years ago, in 1994, at the ICOLD Congress and Annual Meeting in Durban, they will never forget the opening ceremony of this Congress in Durban, with the speech of Late Past President Nelson Mandela. Unfortunately, I was too young at that time and my company didn't delegate me to the Congress in 1994 in Durban. But many of my colleagues who were there shared with me their exiting souvenirs of that opening ceremony. Late Past President Nelson Mandela concluded his welcome address with the following message:

"I understand that many of you will stay after the Congress and take part in a number of study tours to our dams and to our other attractions. I invite you to make use of the opportunity to look around you and to observe the many problems we have to contend with. Although you will see modern infrastructures, as good as any in your countries, you will also see grossly underdeveloped rural areas and large urban settlements with barely any infrastructure. It is my earnest intention and that of my Government to bring about changes. We want to improve the lot of the poorest of our people.

Next time, when you again have a Congress or Executive Meeting in this country, you will be able to see these changes with your own eyes. That I promise."

End of citation.

All participants arriving during the last days here in Johannesburg from abroad have without doubt already noticed this extraordinary development for the welfare in South Africa. Of course I'm not only thinking on the impressive Skywalk starting here from the Convention Center, where our beloved ladies dry our bank accounts with our credit cards. But at least it is for Africa.

Nevertheless, in many other countries in Africa, there is still an urgent need for increased development of water and energy resources as a basis for the economic prosperity and cultural wealth of the societies. Today, only about 12% of the economically feasible hydropower potential of about 1100 TWh is used on the continent Africa and only some 14 GW capacity are under construction since last year. Ladies and gentlemen you have to be aware that the remaining economically feasible hydropower potential per year in Africa corresponds almost to the double of the total electricity generation in all hydropower plants in operation today in Europe. This reveals again the high potential for dams and reservoir development in Africa as a trigger for welfare. Hydropower, together with the other renewable energy sources, mainly solar but also wind energy, have a huge untapped potential in Africa.

With the development of revolutionary electricity transportation techniques based on superconductors, - this seems still a dream today but it will come true for sure- Africa can become in the second half of this century the world-leading continent in renewable electricity generation. This precious renewable electricity generation could be connected and interchanged not only with Europe but also over the Middle East to Asia. Thus it is not exaggerated to expect that in the second half of this century the development of Africa will be without doubt bright in the renewable energy sector. Nevertheless, for hydropower including dams and reservoirs this development has to be done in a sustainable way in order to protect the rich ecosystems as floodplains and wildlife reserves. Such ecological electricity generation will be a selling argument in the interconnected intercontinental electricity market.

But let's look first how the development for welfare can be triggered already today. As participant of this symposium you will have the chance to discuss today the topic of appropriate technology to ensure proper development, operation and maintenance of dams and reservoirs in developing countries.

This topic of appropriate technology will have a broad application in many countries in Africa and may contribute to the urgently needed future development. In addition, current issues will be addressed in several special workshops on Friday.

On behalf of the ICOLD, I would like to thank all members of the South African National Committee (SANCOLD) led by the chairperson Danie Badenhorst and the secretary Paul Roberts, who have contributed with a huge effort to the preparation of this 84th ICOLD Annual Meeting here in Johannesburg. They have prepared a high quality technical content for the meeting and an attractive social and accompanying person's programme to give us a taste of Africa. As in 1994 in Durban you will experience without doubt again an unforgettable ICOLD Annual Meeting in Johannesburg!

Thank you for your attention.

Anton Schleiss, President of ICOLD