

**Opening speech by Mr. Ron Ton, Director of Diplomatic Training,  
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Academy**

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Your Highness, your Excellencies, Dear participants, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour and privilege for me to be in your midst this week. I look forward in contributing to our common endeavour to bring the worlds of water and diplomacy together in the fascinating programme which lies ahead of us. It feels like an exciting adventure to explore the ways in which we can tie water and diplomacy together.

It was a visionary step to create the Arab Water Academy in July 2008 and to name water diplomacy as one of the key tasks of the institution. Since then, substantial steps have been made to develop and design the prestigious water diplomacy programme which starts today.

In December 2008 the founding workshop to create the water diplomacy programme took place in Abu Dhabi. I am proud to have been among the invited experts and in just two, but very long days, we drafted the basic principles of a water diplomacy course for officials in the Arab region. For one, we concluded that such a programme would only be successful if we bring water managers and diplomats together. Secondly, that the programme should be based on three dimensions: creating context, practical skills and strategic thinking in water diplomacy. Through the continuous support of important stakeholders and inspiring leadership of the Arab Water Academy an idea became reality. The Netherlands Institute of International Relations "Clingendael" gladly supports the initiative of the water diplomacy programme.

The Netherlands have a natural and historical link to water. I am born in a country which lies almost seven meters below sea level and our surface exits for 20% of water. To the Dutch, water is a friend and an enemy at the same time. It gave us a unique geographical economic position, but also many concerns for flooding's and loss of land. Nowadays, 3500 kilometres of flood defences protect our country and many new parts of land are gained from the sea. You are born in countries which could only survive by fighting water scarcity and developing technology to secure access to fresh water. We both learned that diplomacy and cooperation are essential for a better future in solving water issues.

Water and diplomacy are indeed two sides of the same coin. In the Water Ethics Monitor of December 2008 (page 3.) an article on the working methodology of the Arab Network for Water Use Ethics identifies the following elements:

- Implementing a programme to increase public awareness;
- Sharing of experiences between institutions;
- Coordination with other Arab networks;
- Creating strong partnerships between stakeholders.

In a nutshell, this is diplomacy!

Ladies and gentlemen, water managers and diplomats have to operate in a very complex international environment. I would like to touch briefly on a limited number of trends and developments in the international arena and diplomacy:

1. Water managers and diplomats have to manage a growing multi-actor policy environment. The international arena is not exclusively the domain of Ministries of Foreign Affairs and diplomats anymore. New actors have become involved: expert ministries with their expanding international policies, NGO's with globalised networks and international working media. More than ever diplomats and international working officials have to be professional managers of international networks and strategic stakeholders.

2. Today, trans boundary issues are getting intensively interrelated and connected. For example, the debate on climate change cannot be brought to a success without looking into policy issues on environment, water, deforestation, energy, economics and development cooperation. It all sets high demands for diplomats and international staff to coordinate various angles of policies and to deal with a multidisciplinary approach.

3. For sure, diplomats no longer communicate exclusively from government to government. The so called public diplomacy requires a clearly defined strategy how to promote national interests /among non-state actors and civil society in foreign countries. This requires the development of a good PD strategy and a different approach to diplomatic work.

4. Lastly, I would like to emphasize the trends towards the multilateralisation of international relations and diplomacy. For example, economic and financial issues can be on the agenda of regional organisations like the EU and the Arab League, but at the same time be issues on the agenda of global organisations like the WTO, G-8 or UN organisations. Today's diplomats have to learn how to carefully balance these multilevel interests in international relations and diplomacy.

In conclusion, the combined world of water and diplomacy is a fascinating one. As I said before, water and diplomacy are two sides of the same coin and to me, the coin is a symbol of cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen, an Italian proverb says "A drop of water breaks a stone". May this water diplomacy programme be the drop to make a change; to become our "agents of change"

Thank you.