

THE URGENT PROBLEM OF WATER STRESS



During my recent trip to Europe, I had the opportunity to visit new places, spend time with my family and friends, and discuss transcendental issues for our well-being. One of them is the subject of water, about which we had a long talk with our friends Michel and Brigitte Camdessus. This was not an unusual conversation, considering that **Michel served as a member of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation** (José Ángel Gurría also served on that same board), so he has in-depth knowledge of the subject.

I start with some revealing data: only 2.5% of the world's water is fresh; **approximately 2 billion people lack access to potable water services**; and 446 thousand children under 5 years of age die annually due to diarrheal diseases related to the lack of adequate water services. In Mexico, 10% of the population does not have access to drinking water (around 13 million Mexicans), and 30% do not have sufficient quantity and quality of water.



Concerned about this problem, in the Corporate Social Responsibility Committee of the Mexican Chamber of the Construction Industry, **we organized a meeting where we discussed Water Management in our country.** We invited Sandro Cusi, General Director of *Fondo Procuena*; César Herrera Toledo, Technical Director of the Civil Association 2050; and Ana Victoria Chávez, responsible for water issues at the Embassy of Israel.

During the meeting, very interesting topics were discussed. For example, **Israel recycles 80% of its water** and has what they call the National Water Authority, where specialist technicians make decisions instead of politicians. On the other hand, it was highlighted that in Mexico 70% of the water is used for agricultural purposes, which makes it essential to reduce the subsidy to the electricity rate for wells for agricultural use (estimated at 15 billion pesos per year) to discourage overexploitation; likewise, **only in Mexico City, 40% of potable water is lost in leaks and illegal connections.** The conservation of soils and forests, sustainable agricultural practices and the distribution of ecological stoves are practical measures that contribute to the conservation of our water.

Michel Camdessus commented that **the budget for water assistance should be increased** and carefully focused on those most in need. I totally agree. Let's remember that just a hundred years ago, virtually no one in the world had access to clean water and all the sanitation services associated with it. We have come a long way, but there is still a long way to go.