

A water crisis? Not just in our back yard...

Over 33 000 people attended the fifth World Water Forum in Istanbul from 16 to 22 March. It is impossible to walk away unaffected from the world's biggest water-related event.

THE WORLD WATER FORUM

is organised every three years by the World Water Council and aims to raise the importance of water on the political agenda and to generate political commitment to solve water-related problems.

Trying to juggle between dozens of sessions, side events, forums and the expo, I found myself asking if this is all worth it. Civil society and the media were certainly not impressed by the non-committing Istanbul ministerial statement, which still does not recognise water as a human right. It stops short by stating: "We acknowledge the discussions with the UN system regarding human rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation. We recognise that access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a basic human need."

One thing that struck me throughout the duration of the fifth World Water Forum was the fact that water is a global crisis. South Africans are not the only nation using the terms such as water crisis, water scarcity, water availability, vulnerability and threat to sustainable development.

The second foreword of the third edition of the United Nations World Water Development Report, *Water in a Changing World* written by Koichiro Matsuura, director general, United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, reiterates a looming global water crisis: "It is clear that urgent action is needed if we are to avoid a global water crisis. Despite the vital importance of water to all aspects of human life, the sector has been plagued by a chronic lack of political support, poor governance and



underinvestment. As a result, hundreds of millions of people around the world remain trapped in poverty and ill health and exposed to the risks of water-related disasters, environmental degradation and even political instability and conflict. Population growth, increasing consumption and climate change are among the factors that threaten to exacerbate these problems, with grave implications for human security and development." You might recall that we invited WISA members to share ideas and views on the role that water professionals and members of WISA can play to avoid a water shortage and ensure a more effective turnaround in water service delivery and environmental management. I received some well

thought-through responses, which I have summarised in the following paragraphs below:

It is clear from the contributions that a water crisis can be avoided if action is taken now. It is clear that our risks do not lie in the legislative framework, but in the implementation. The South African water sector needs innovative, institutional renovation and urgently requires strong leadership throughout the water sector. It is the task of the manager, with good leadership skills, to combine the available scarce resources, both human and financial, and produce the desired outcomes within the prevailing policy and legislative framework. Only strong leaders can envisage and implement