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EURO-MEDITERRANEAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON WATER

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By
H.E. Dr. Mahmoud Abu-Zeid
Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Egypt

**Your Royal Highness Prince Hashim Hussein
Excellencies**

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure and honour to be here with you on the occasion of the Euro-Med Conference on Water. This conference comes in a timely manner to provide a platform for experts and policy-makers to identify effective mechanisms for better management of water resources. It will also help us to strengthen the regional cooperation and information exchange on water resources in the Mediterranean region.

I would like also to thank the government of Jordan and the French Government for the excellent organization and the warm hospitality.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the onset, let me in the following minutes recall some of the major water challenges that face water resources management in our region.

On Water Scarcity in the Region

Mediterranean water resources are limited, fragile and threatened. Rainfall is very irregular and erratic, and generally tends to be of very low intensity. Many countries in the Mediterranean region can be described as arid or even hyper-arid. During the dry years, natural flow can be as low as a third of average annual flow.

In many of these countries, fresh water is becoming scarcer and more unequally distributed. In 2000, 130 million people in the Mediterranean region were living in water stressed countries (where per capita is less than 1000 m³/inhabitant/year) and 45 million people were living in water scarce countries (where per capita share is less than 500 m³/inhabitant/year). According to Blue Plan (MAP/UNEP), the Southern Mediterranean and Middle East sub-regions are among the lowest per capita share of water resources in the world.

Available water resources are already intensely utilized, especially in the South and East, and they are often utilized in unsustainable manner. In some countries, exploitation indexes of renewable natural fresh water resources have reached 100%.

On Population growth and risk of social instability

Population issues are the dominant factor in economic, social and environmental changes. According to the estimation of the United Nations (UN) s, the total population of the region will rise from 420 million inhabitants in 1995 to 508 -579 million in 2025. Within one generation, the total population in the Eastern and Southern countries tripled, whilst the population in Northern countries tends to stabilize or decrease.

These changes have an important impact on employment, food supply, education and health care. They also have influence on land use, the environment and vital ecosystems and of course on water demand.

On the Increasing demands for water

In this context of scarcity, the Mediterranean demands for water is high. Today, the region uses around 300 billion cubic meters. Generally, demand has doubled since the beginning of the 20th Century and increased by 60% over the last 25 years. These changes vary according to the different countries.

The expansion of irrigated areas is expected to continue in some countries such as Morocco and Tunisia to provide food for both the internal and external markets. The increasing reliance on the world market for food supplies is growing in the region. The dependency on grain was 33 % in 1995, but it is likely that this dependency may rise to 50 % or more by the year 2025. The challenge is to grow more with less water. This requires modernizing the irrigation agriculture to be able to turn into high yield - high value crops.

On Shared Water

Some countries depend on natural surface water resources flowing from other countries. This is the case of Egypt, for nearly 100% of its water. The Nile is the second largest river in the world covering 10 riparian countries. The Euphrates and Tigris are shared among three countries. Four countries of the region share the Jordan basin. Spain and Portugal have a number of shared river Basins. Management of shared river basins has contributed to some regional tension. Today issues of water quality are also important in the management of shared water resources. Cooperation and joint development programs between riparian countries are key issues for sustainable management of shared water and for peace and stability in the region.

On the Lack of Drinking water and sanitation

The international community recognizes access to water and sanitation as human right and critical element for human development. Today, 30 million people in the region do not have access to clean water, notably in the southern and the eastern countries of the region, and 27 million people do not have access to basic sanitation.

There has been a major effort in most countries to improve drinking water supply and sanitation services. Still, providing safe water and sanitation services and achieving the MDGs to the doubling population in North Africa and the East of the Mediterranean will remain in itself a major challenge for these countries.

On water quality and the rising threat to human health and ecosystems

Currently in some Mediterranean countries, people use most of the natural resources of the environment to their full extent. The degradation of the ecological functions of water is alarming, as are the risks caused by the overuse of water resources.

Along with quantitative pressure on resources, the disposal of urban and industrial wastewater has a great impact on the quality of water resources. About 40 billion m³ per year of wastewater is discharged from the Mediterranean region, half of this in the Mediterranean sea where most of this wastewater is not or is insufficiently treated.

On the Expected Climate changes

Water resources of the Mediterranean countries can be also affected by climate change. The effects and

extent of changes are as yet uncertain and cannot be easily quantified. A recent IPCC report predicts that climate change over the next century will affect rainfall patterns, river flows and sea levels all over the world. For many parts of the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean there is an expected precipitation decrease over the next century of 20% or more.

On the other hand the North can expect the climate to become more contrasted - with more rainfall in winter and drier and less regular in summer and that could influence water production and increase water demand in summer.

This implies that we should improve our knowledge in order to allow appropriate decision making and effective and economic investments for adaptation to climate change. Recent efforts have been initiated in the southern countries to use remote sensing and

modern technologies as tools to reach these objectives. I am strongly inviting the European Countries to consider the support of these initiatives and help in transferring the know-how and building capacity within the Southern countries to use these technologies.

On Institutional aspects

A Key challenge for sustainable water management in the region is the effective functioning of the water services and the proper maintenance of water networks in urban areas. The creation or strengthening of public organizations or delegation of management to the private sector are seen as important options. These options would require, in turn, the reinforcement of the institutional and regulatory functions of government organizations and creation of enabling environment for private sector

participation associated with effective enforcement's of regulations.

The implementation of Integrated Water Resources management is on its way in most countries. Technically, there is a widespread agreement that River Basin Level type of management is the most appropriate one. Water rights in some countries are not clear and water is being used as common property which in the case of groundwater is leading to overexploitation, seawater intrusion and pollution.

Water governance is often at the weaker side of the overall governance in many countries.

We should also not underestimate the role of research and education as well as awareness raising on improving water management and conserving water resources.

Finally, I expect that one of the important outputs of our meeting is to develop the necessary mechanisms through which the proposed projects by the countries of both south and north sub-regions of the union can be screened to identify the priority ones that better serve the people of the community.

For the selection process a technical committee needs to be formed to set strategic selection criteria. The committee can screen the project proposals in order to assess which projects will be deemed the highest priorities and gain the commitment for support. The committee can also suggest the mechanisms that help seeking the necessary funding which will consequently be approved by the ministerial committee to be ready for implementation.

Excellences, Guests and Colleagues:

Let us hope that our meeting today will identify how we proceed towards the preparation for the Med. Strategy on Water and when we expect this to happen.

Thank you.