

Crisis Briefing

Middle East Water Summit

The Problems:

Dry Land – Much of North Africa and southwestern Asia is covered with desert. The Sahara extends from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. From the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf lies the Rub' Al Khali Desert in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula and the Badiat-El-Sham Desert in the north of the peninsula. Part of Iran, southern Afghanistan, and southwestern Pakistan are also desert land. 80% of Turkmenistan is the Kara Kum Desert.

Drought Conditions - Severe droughts began plaguing many parts of the world in the 1990's. In eastern North America rainfall fell to 60-80% of average, and in western North America amounts fell to 30% of average rainfall. But the drought in the Middle East was even worse. Rainfall amounts fell to less than 10% of the average yearly rainfall.

Population Growth – Many countries in the Middle East have been experiencing rapid population growth. Growth rates have averaged around 2.5% per year. Egypt's population has grown by 1 million people every nine months! While the population growth and density are not as critical as in other places in the world, the available water cannot sustain the growing population. The Middle East takes up less than 20% of the world's land area, with a little more than 10% of the world's population, but the area has only about 2% of the world's fresh water!

Water Per Person – World Bank figures show that an average person in the world uses 1,700 cubic meters of water per year. In the Middle East the average usage per person was 1,436 cubic meters in 1990, and the figure is expected to fall to 667 cubic meters per person by the year 2025. Jordan's people use 180 cubic meters of water per year already! That is one of the lowest amounts in the world and well below the 1,000 cubic meters per year considered acceptable.

Agriculture – Agricultural use of water is enormous, even though agricultural products are only a small part of the countries' production. For example, agriculture is less than 10% of Jordan's GNP (Gross National Product) – the total value of goods and services - but farms there use 80% of the nation's water! Other countries have similar statistics.

Pollution – Middle East water is scarce and increasingly polluted. Poor water quality is mainly a result of development and agriculture. Septic tank leakage from homes and businesses and livestock waste are major causes of pollution of water supplies. Cattle eat the grasses that help prevent soil erosion. Soil runoff brings pesticides and animal