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## World Water Day 2007: Coping with Water Scarcity

**NEW YORK, New York**, March 22, 2007 (ENS) - Water scarcity is a fact of life for 700 million people around the world, a figure that could rise to more than three billion by 2025, according to the United Nations. In a message today marking World Water Day UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for integrated cross-border water management since many of the world's rivers and aquifers are shared among countries.

"Available supplies are under great duress as a result of high population growth, unsustainable consumption patterns, poor management practices, pollution, inadequate investment in infrastructure and low efficiency in water-use," said Ban.



**UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon calls for international cooperation and water sharing.** (Photo courtesy [UN](#))

W-W: "Yet even more water will be needed in the future - to grow food, to provide clean drinking water and sanitation services, to operate industries and to support expanding cities," he said. "The water-supply-demand gap is likely to grow wider still, threatening economic and social development and environmental sustainability."

"The way forward is clear," said the secretary-general, "strengthening institutional capacity and governance at all levels, promoting more technology transfer, mobilizing more financial resources, and scaling up good practices and lessons learned."

Some 425 million of those without enough water are children under 18, said UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman, kicking off the Walk for Water Event in New York City today.

"Access to clean drinking water is critical for the health of children around the world," said Veneman at the event organized by Starbucks Coffee Company and Ethos Water. "In many parts of the world women and children walk long distances to fetch water for their families for drinking, washing and cooking."

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**UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman, far right, at the Walk for Water Event in New York City. Veneman is a former U.S. Agriculture Secretary. (Photo by Stuart Ramson © Starbucks courtesy UNICEF)**

For each bottle of Ethos water purchased in Starbucks stores, five cents is contributed to the Ethos Water Fund of the Starbucks Foundation. These funds support Starbucks' goal of contributing at least \$10 million over five years to non-profit organizations involved in water issues.

Many top restaurants in the city are asking diners to pay \$1 for tap water they normally get for free, with the funds going to UNICEF's drinking water projects around the world.

From Geneva, UN World Health Organization Director-General Margaret Chan noted that over 1.6 million people die every year because they lack access to safe water and sanitation, 90 percent of them among children under five, mostly in developing countries.

Diseases such as cholera, typhoid, malaria and dengue could rise due to climate change, which makes availability of freshwater less predictable because of more frequent flooding and droughts, Chan warned.

"For every child that dies, countless others suffer from poor health, diminished productivity, and missed opportunities for education. Much of this illness and death could be prevented using knowledge that has existed for many years," she said.

UN Environment Programme Executive Director Achim Steiner stressed the dangers of climate change and its relation to the theme of World Water Day 2007 - Coping With Water Scarcity.

"If we want to avoid water scarcity as the permanent theme for the 21st century, a big part of the solution is cuts in greenhouse gas emissions of 60 to 80 percent," he said, referring to humans' role in heating up the planet.

UN Food and Agriculture Organization Director-General Jacques Diouf pointed to the agricultural sector's role as the number one user of water worldwide and its consequent duty to take the lead in addressing rising global demand and its potential drain on the Earth's natural resources.

Speaking at the World Water Day celebration at FAO Headquarters in Rome, Dr. Diouf called coping with water scarcity the "challenge of the 21st century."

The global population is expected to reach 8.1 billion by 2030. To keep pace with the growing demand for food, 14 percent more freshwater will need to be withdrawn for agricultural purposes in the next 30 years.



**Irrigation of fields in Syria where water is scarce. Agriculture is the world's number one user of water. (Photo by M. Marzot courtesy FAO)**

"As population grows and development needs call for increased allocations of water for cities, agriculture and industries, the pressure on water resources intensifies, leading to tensions, conflicts among users, and excessive strain on the environment," said Dr. Diouf.

Climate change has raised the stakes, he said. "Global warming has been blamed for more frequent droughts. Climate change has also intensified storms and flooding, which destroy crops, contaminate freshwater and damage the facilities used to store and carry that water."

But Dr. Diouf held out hope, saying, "With the right incentives and investments to mitigate risks for individual farmers, improving water control in agriculture holds considerable potential to increase food production and reduce poverty, while ensuring the maintaining of ecosystem services."

"The potential exists to provide an adequate and sustainable supply of quality water for all, today and in the future. But there is no room for complacency," said Dr. Diouf. "It is our common responsibility to take the challenge of today's global water crisis and address it in all of its aspects and dimensions."

Businesses and financial institutions, too, are marking World Water Day 2007. In Tunis, the African Development Bank Group, AfDB, is prioritizing its water and sanitation operations to "quench Africa's thirst" for more investments to this sector.

The AfDB says one African out of every three lacks access to safe drinking water supply, and half of all Africans lack access to sanitation.

While Africa uses only about four percent of its renewable freshwater resources, water is becoming one of the most critical natural resource issues, according to the Bank Group.

"Options are limited to either long distance water transfers from the southern aquifers to the coastal areas or large scale seawater desalination technology," said the AfDB.



**A Moroccan woman mixes water with cereals and barley for her herd of goats. The water is carried by donkey from a spring more than a kilometer away. (Photo courtesy FAO)**

Currently, 14 countries in Africa are subject to water stress or water scarcity, with those in northern Africa facing the worst prospects. This situation is getting worse as a consequence of rapid population growth, expanding urbanization, and increased economic development, the AfDB said.

The World Bank today called for increased investments from private and public sources in order to enhance water security in developing countries which are projected to suffer the most because of water scarcity.

"We need the right combination of infrastructure investments, sound institutional governance, and management," said Jamal Saghir, World Bank director for energy, transport and water, "which is essential if the poorest countries are to use water resources effectively and achieve rapid economic growth to benefit vast numbers of their populations."

"When countries reach this minimum platform, water becomes a driver of economic growth rather than a negative force associated with floods and natural disasters," said Saghir.

Achieving this level of water security requires new investments, but of the right kind – there is no one size fits all solution, he said.

The World Bank is the largest external financier in the water supply and sanitation sector in developing countries. Its current water supply and sanitation project portfolio is nearly \$7 billion.

Water for All is the vision of the Asian Development Bank ADB, for the Asia and Pacific region. For 2006-2010, ADB expects to double its investments in the water sector through its new Water Financing Program, which directs funds, reforms and capacity development programs at rural communities, cities and river basins.

By 2008, ADB's new Water Financing Partnership Facility intends to raise US\$100 million for the Water Financing Program.

In London, The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management, CIWEM, is calling for adaptation of water planning "to ensure climate change factors can be fully incorporated into the decision making process."



**Stream in England. Even in countries where water is not scarce, planning is critical to ensure enough water for all uses. (Photo by Ian Britton courtesy [FreeFoto](#))**

CIWEM is an independent professional body and a registered charity, with thousands of members in more than 90 countries, advancing the science and practice of water and environmental management for a "clean, green and sustainable world."

CIWEM Executive Director Nick Reeves said, "That so many people, worldwide, are still

without access to clean and safe drinking water is a scandal that requires urgent action and the investment of resources. Water wars was once a threat. It's now a reality that must not be allowed to escalate. In the 21st century nobody should have to cope with water scarcity."

In Switzerland, IUCN-The World Conservation Union launched a new publication today entitled, "Pay – Establishing payments for watershed services."

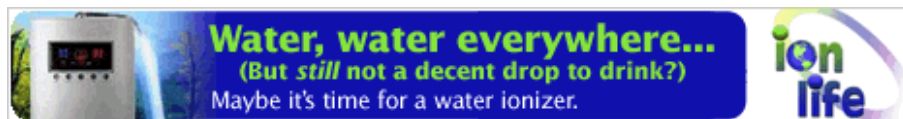
The new book lays out a range of payment schemes that are commonly used, from private trading, to cap-and-trade, to certification and public payment schemes.

"Markets can solve watershed degradation through investments in the sustainable management of ecosystems," says Ger Bergkamp, head of the IUCN Water Programme.

French Vittel, the world's largest mineral water bottling company, already invests US\$24.5 million per year to compensate farmers in France for reduced use of fertilizer. The result is a reduction in the contamination risk of the bottler's main source of water.

In Costa Rica, individual water users in the city of Heridia pay through their water bills to protect the forests and watersheds on which Heridia's healthy water supply depends. Landowners upstream receive up to US\$110 per hectare per year to safeguard downstream water quality, the IUCN explains.

"Water payment schemes require careful design and people involved need to understand the benefits and costs associated with creating such markets," said Bergkamp. "As with all natural and biological solutions, no one size fits all."



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