

Middle East Water Commission

In February 1993, the Committee on International Waters of the International Water Resources Association (IWRA) and the United Nations University convened a Middle East Water Forum in Cairo, Egypt. The Forum was supported by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation of Japan and the United Nations Environment Programme. It was a 'closed' event, participation being strictly by invitation, though its attractiveness was evident from the fact that all the 27 experts invited in their personal capacities attended the event. The background papers especially commissioned for the Forum have just been published as a book by Oxford University Press (Biswas, 1994). Through the generosity of our sponsors, this book is being made available to 1,000 key figures in the field of Middle East water issues.

Following the Forum, and in order to address the need identified by many of the Forum participants for a group of independent and objective, internationally recognized experts who could work parallel to the current negotiations on the water resources of the region, a Middle East Water Commission was established. Membership of this multidisciplinary Commission consists of the undersigned A.K.B. as Chairman, Dr John F. Kolars (University of Michigan), Dr Masahiro Murakami (Nippon Koei, Japan), Dr John Waterbury (Princeton University), and Dr Aaron T. Wolf (University of Alabama). The work of the Commission is supported by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation.

Main Objectives Outlined

The Commission, as established, has three primary objectives, namely to:

- i) examine fully the key issues related to water for peace in the Middle East;
- ii) identify and analyse possible scenarios in terms of their potential, technical, political, economic, social, and environmental, implications; and
- iii) make a special attempt to familiarize the Middle Eastern countries and the main bilateral and multilateral funding agencies (which might provide substantial investment funds) with the overall situation, to plan and implement water development projects in the region, and to supply the mass and technical media with the contents of their forthcoming Report.

The first meeting of the Commission was in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, in October 1993. Members felt that, while there exists much research in the area of Middle East water, some constraints often restrict its direct applicability to current negotiations. For example:

- Many research projects are unidisciplinary in nature and, while they may answer one aspect of a crucial question, answers to large-scale, broadly-based issues, which by nature are multidisciplinary, are vital to the political decision-making process.
- In the same vein, some ongoing research is too abstract or theoretical to be directly pertinent to current negotiations.
- Too often in the negotiating process, the two critical and mutually dependent aspects of water resources issues — the technical and the political — are relegated to separate realms where, by virtue of their isolation, they languish.
- Many of the actors involved in the negotiation process

are restricted by their national and/or institutional affiliations from examining some creative solutions which might deviate from their stated bargaining positions.

- Many assignments are performed in a static environment, and do not provide planning freedom in conjunction with policy or technical recommendations.

The Commission examined these constraints and dealt with them explicitly in formulating an agenda for AD 1993–4 and beyond. The assessment of current negotiating issues which is taking place is therefore multidisciplinary by nature, where, it is hoped, by embracing both the technical *and* the political aspects of Middle East water resources, and by retaining autonomy from any of the governments and agencies participating in the multilateral negotiations, particularly useful and relevant conclusions might be arrived at and set within a dynamic planning framework for the negotiators to consider.

Schedule and Product

It is expected that, within one year, a Report will have been prepared which considers the following main subjects:

- An examination of the multilateral negotiation process thus far, and a comparison with other water negotiations — both those which were successful and those which were less so.
- A preliminary assessment of technical options from a 'techno-political' perspective. Thus incorporating each party's political concerns may offer better technical planning than hitherto, while particularly viable technical options may offer greater incentive for political cooperation.
- A suggested 'timeline' for both the technical and political steps which will be necessary to reach specific goals in reducing water demand and increasing supply in the watersheds which are now subject to contention. By incorporating both technical and political stages within a planning process which is dynamic in both time and space, policymakers should have a useful tool in determining what is needed now to help solve the inevitable problems of the coming decades.

When a text examining each of these issues is completed (hopefully by September 1994), distribution and discussion of the results can take a variety of forms:

- A complete text can be published by Oxford University Press shortly after its completion. The possibility of an Arabic translation of the text is being considered.
- A summary volume with conclusions and critical timelines can be published and distributed to water policymakers throughout the world.
- Workshops discussing the results can be held for participants of the multilateral negotiations and their advisers in a number of locations, including possibly Israel, Jordan, and Washington, DC.
- Offshoot articles can be submitted to academic journals and presented at relevant conferences.
- Media sources can be contacted as appropriate to help to disseminate pertinent results.

Although current planning only extends through to December 1994, it is hoped that interest can be generated

meanwhile to engender sufficient support for a more extensive and detailed study in the future.

The Commission members would welcome ideas and suggestions on the Middle East water issues from anyone interested. These should be sent either to the Chairman (undersigned) or to any other member of the Commission.

REFERENCE

- BISWAS, ASIT K. (1994). *International Waters of the Middle East: From Euphrates-Tigris to Nile*. Oxford University Press, Oxford & New Delhi: xvii + 221 pp., illustr.

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Regina Amendments to Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Come Into Force

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat, adopted in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, was the first of the modern global Nature treaties and remains the only such agreement to cover the conservation of a particular habitat-type. The text of the treaty contained deficiencies, however, which long impeded its proper functioning: for instance, no provisions were made for financing of the Convention or a secretariat, for decision-making authority, for languages other than English, or for any mechanism for amendment. In consequence, the Convention's membership grew slowly for several years, and its activities were limited, whilst the legal basis was being proposed for revision of the treaty.

At the Third Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, held in Regina, Canada, in 1987, the member States adopted amendments to the Convention which were intended to remedy these weaknesses in the original text. Although these 'Regina amendments', establishing the Conference of the Contracting Parties as the decision-



FIG. 1. A wetland activity: collecting Melalacca wood in the Mekong Delta, Viet Nam. Photo: H. Lethier/Ramsar Bureau.



FIG. 2. Another wetland activity portrayed: fisherman in the Danube Delta, Romania, where fishing is an important aspect of the local economy. Photo: Elizabeth Hopkins/IUCN.

making authority and providing a stable financial regime for the Convention and the work of its secretariat, have been applied provisionally since 1987, they required formal governmental acceptance by two-thirds of the States which were Contracting Parties at that time. Figs 1 and 2 illustrate two of the innumerable wetland activities of which the sustainability may be dependent on the Ramsar Convention.

It is with great satisfaction that the Ramsar Convention Bureau announces that, with the recent action by Denmark, the Regina amendments came officially into force on 1 May 1994.

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Eco-clubs: A Role for Children in Environmental Conservation

It is often said that children 'own' the future. If this is accepted, then there should be mechanisms not just to permit, but to encourage and mobilize, the efforts of children in shaping their futures.

One such mechanism has recently come into being. On 5 June 1993 — World Environment Day — the Government of India announced an initiative to provide a role for schoolchildren in managing, preserving, and conserving, their environments. The student response in schools that I visited in Bangalore and Mysore in December, 1993, was unanimously enthusiastic. Extension of this Indian initiative to other parts of the world could provide a global

basis for much-improved attention to long-term human and environmental interests.

The full text of the Indian 'Eco-club' initiative is given above on pages 69–70, following a Foreword by the Indian Minister of Environment. *

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* H.E. Kamal Nath, who has sanctioned our publication of that account. — Ed.