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REPORT

THE COMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES ON ITS THIRD SESSION
BEIRUT, 21 TO 22 APRIL 1999

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I. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE, VENUE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SESSION

1. The second session of the Committee on Water Resources of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was held at the permanent headquarters of the Commission, in Beirut, on 21 and 22 April 1999.

2. The basic objectives of the session were as follows:

(a) Review of the progress made in the implementation of the programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999 and the achievements of the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division in the field of water resources during 1998;

(b) Review and discussion of future prospects in the field of water in the ESCWA region;

(c) Presentation of proposals for the creation of specialized working groups on various water-related subjects;

(d) Review of the activities of the ESCWA regional adviser on water resources;

(e) Presentation and discussion of an outline by the Committee on Water Resources to member States regarding the water situation in the ESCWA region;

(f) Review of activities related to the celebration of World Water Day during the third session of the Committee on Water Resources, held in 1999;

(g) Other matters, and adoption of the statement of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA region;

(h) Presentation of recommendations regarding the various topics to be presented to the Commission.

B. PARTICIPANTS

3. Representatives of the following ESCWA member States participated in the third session of the Committee on Water Resources: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. In addition, the session was attended by experts in the field of hydrology from various regional organizations (see annex I).

C. OPENING OF THE SESSION

4. The session was opened by the Executive Secretary of ESCWA (in Arabic only; see annex IV).

D. ELECTION OF THE BUREAU

5. The participants unanimously elected the following persons as members of the Bureau of the Committee's third session: Mr. Bassam Adib Jaber, head of the delegation of Lebanon, as Chairman; Mr. Bayoumi Attia, head of the delegation of Egypt, as Vice-Chairman; and Mr. Bakhtiar Abdulrahman Abdulkarim, head of the delegation of Iraq, as Rapporteur.

E. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

6. The Committee adopted the agenda contained in document E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/1 (see annex II) and the organization of work contained in document E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/2 (see annex III).

II. TOPICS OF STUDY AND DISCUSSION

A. PROGRESS MADE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 1998-1999 AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE ENERGY, NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT DIVISION IN THE FIELD OF WATER RESOURCES DURING 1998 (Agenda item 5)

7. Under agenda item 5, the Committee examined document E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/10.

8. The Committee made the following observations:

(a) The members of the Committee requested the ESCWA secretariat to provide them with more detailed information on the activities carried out in the field of water resources during 1998. The representative of ESCWA replied that the document was concise due to the fact that the programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999 had already been presented at the Committee's first session;

(b) A representative of one of the member States made the request that ESCWA should present a periodic report on follow-up to regional and international conferences on water resources in the ESCWA region and encourage the coordinators of such conferences to invite representatives of the ESCWA member States to attend them. The representative of the secretariat replied that ESCWA would be able to provide the Committee, at its next session, with a brief report on such conferences, but that it might not be possible to urge the coordinators of those conferences to invite States.

B. A VIEW OF THE FUTURE OF WATER IN THE ESCWA REGION (Agenda item 6)

9. Under this item the Committee examined document E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/6, entitled "A view of the future of water in the ESCWA region".

10. Members of the Committee made a number of observations concerning the amendment of certain expressions contained in the document, and the related amendments were subsequently adopted (see annex I).

C. DISCUSSION OF A PROPOSAL CONCERNING THE FORMATION OF SPECIALIZED WORKING GROUPS ON VARIOUS WATER-RELATED SUBJECTS (Agenda item 7)

11. The Committee examined the proposal contained in document E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/3 on the formation of specialized working groups on various water-related subjects. The representatives of the States discussed the content and purpose of the proposal and the machinery for its implementation. The ESCWA representative informed the members of the Committee that the proposal had been submitted to the Committee on Water Resources for the purpose of ascertaining the members' views regarding the definition of priorities upon the establishment of those groups and finding appropriate operating mechanisms for them. Finally, ESCWA was requested to carry out an exhaustive study of the priorities with which those groups might concern themselves and their mechanism of operation.

D. REVIEW OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ESCWA REGIONAL ADVISER ON WATER RESOURCES (Agenda item 8)

12. The regional adviser on water resources presented document E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/4, entitled "ESCWA advisory services on water".

13. The members of the Committee discussed the document, commending the services offered by ESCWA in the field of water. They stressed the importance of those services for solving current national problems and called for their continuation.

14. The participants encouraged utilization of the advisory services offered by ESCWA and of the studies being prepared by the German experts present in the Natural Resources Section of the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division.

15. The members of the Committee expressed the desire to be informed by direct correspondence of ESCWA activities in the field of water, in addition to the correspondence via official channels used at ESCWA.

E. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF A DRAFT DECLARATION OF THE COMMITTEE ON
WATER RESOURCES ON THE WATER SITUATION IN THE ESCWA REGION
(Agenda item 9)

16. Under agenda item 9 the Committee examined document E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/7, entitled "Declaration of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA region".

17. The members of the Committee adopted the Statement* of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA region in the final form found in annex VII.

F. ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE CELEBRATION OF WORLD WATER DAY, HAVING AS ITS THEME
FOR 1999 "EVERYBODY LIVES DOWNSTREAM", WITH EMPHASIS ON WATER-RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT AT THE SOURCE AND THE RIVER-BASIN LEVEL
(Agenda item 10)

18. In compliance with a proposal made by the Committee on Water Resources at its second session, the representative of Lebanon and the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic each presented a technical paper in connection with the theme of World Water Day. The first paper (E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/9) was entitled "A preliminary estimated balance-sheet for a number of Lebanese catchment areas"; the second (E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/11) dealt with the water situation in the Syrian Arab Republic from the standpoint of available surface and ground water and related demand and projects proposed for the development and protection of water resources within the framework of strategic water plans. There ensued a scientific discussion of the papers with the members of the Committee.

G. OTHER MATTERS
(Agenda item 11)

19. The members of the Committee discussed the possibility of holding the sessions of the Committee once every two years as originally provided in the resolution concerning the establishment of the Committee, particularly in view of the fact that the ESCWA secretariat had found it difficult to convene the second session of the Committee, with the result that it had to be postponed from April 1998 to December 1998. However, as a number of members of the Committee expressed reservations concerning the holding of sessions biennially, it was decided that the existing periodicity of the Committee's sessions should be maintained.

20. The members of the Committee also discussed the achievements being realized through German technical assistance in the field of water-resource development and management.

* It was decided by the Technical Committee of ESCWA, at its eleventh session, that "the term 'statement' should be used in lieu of 'declaration' in the titles of the annexes to the reports [of ESCWA subsidiary bodies], the term 'declaration' being reserved for the ministerial meeting" (paragraph 30 (a) of the Report of the Technical Committee on the Work of its Eleventh Session). Thus, while documents of the third session of the Committee on Water Resources, which were issued prior to that decision, refer to a "declaration", what was finally adopted has come to be referred to as a "statement".

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

21. The participants adopted the following recommendations:

(a) Review of ESCWA activities in the field of water resources

The programmes of international and regional conferences on topics relating to water resources should be examined regularly and a summary of them submitted to the Committee on Water Resources, in keeping with the Committee's objective of follow-up of international and regional conferences.

(b) View of the future role of ESCWA in the field of water resources

The view of the future of the field of water resources should be the basis on which ESCWA builds its future programmes, taking into account the observations made by Committee members.

(c) Proposal regarding the formation of specialized working groups on various water-related subjects

ESCWA should prepare a report containing the necessary details on the priorities of water-related topics, propose the working groups needed in order to study the question and define machineries for carrying out the work of the groups at the next session.

(d) ESCWA advisory services in the field of water-resource development

- (i) ESCWA should continue to provide technical advisory services to member States in the field of water resources;
- (ii) The regional adviser on water resources should prepare a study defining areas of common interest to the member States based on earlier studies of the water situation in the ESCWA member countries.

(e) Statement of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA region

The Committee adopted the proposed "Statement of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA region", to be issued on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

(f) Activities related to the celebration of World Water Day

In connection with the theme of the 1999 celebration of World Water Day, "Everybody lives downstream", with emphasis on water-resource management at the source and the river-basin level, ESCWA should contribute, if possible, to the transfer of climatic, hydrologic and operating data from States situated upstream on shared international watercourses to downstream States so as to assist the latter in preparing their operating plans accordingly.

(g) Other matters

- (i) ESCWA should request the Government of Germany to continue to provide the Commission with technical assistance in the field of water resources in order to complete current projects and proceed with the implementation of additional projects, especially projects relating to shared ground water;
- (ii) The concerned divisions in ESCWA should address directly to the members of the Committee on Water Resources all correspondence pertaining to ESCWA activities in the water sector, in addition to using the customary official channels;
- (iii) Specialized training courses on various water-related issues should be organized for the member States, provided that funds are available.

22. The members of the Committee agreed that the fourth session of the Committee on Water Resources would be held at ESCWA headquarters in Beirut on 18 and 19 April 2000.

Annex I

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Annex II

AGENDA

1. Opening of the session
2. Election of officers
3. Adoption of the agenda
4. Proposed organization of work
5. Review of the progress made in the implementation of the programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999 and the achievements of the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division in the field of water resources during 1998
6. A view of the future of water in the ESCWA region
7. Discussion of a proposal regarding the formation of specialized working groups on various water-related subjects
8. Review of the activities of the ESCWA regional adviser on water resources
9. Presentation and discussion of a draft declaration of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA Region
10. Activities related to the celebration of World Water Day, having as its theme for 1999 "Everybody lives downstream", with emphasis on water-resource management at the source and the river-basin level
11. Other matters, and adoption of the statement of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA region
12. Adoption of the report of the Committee on Water Resources on its third session

Annex III

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Wednesday, 21 April 1999

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 2.45 - 3.00 p.m. | Registration |
| 3.00 - 3.15 p.m. | Opening of the session
Election of officers
Adoption of the agenda
Organization of work |
| 3.15 - 3.45 p.m. | Review of the progress made in the implementation of the programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999 and the achievements of the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division in the field of water resources during 1998 |
| 3.45 - 4.15 p.m. | A view of the future of water in the ESCWA region |
| 4.15 - 4.30 p.m. | Break |
| 4.30 - 5.00 p.m. | Discussion of a proposal regarding the formation of specialized working groups on various water-related subjects |
| 5.00 - 5.30 p.m. | Advisory services provided by ESCWA in the field of water resources |

Thursday, 22 April 1999

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 2.00 - 2.15 p.m. | Discussion of a proposal regarding the formation of specialized working groups on various water-related subjects |
| 2.15 - 2.45 p.m. | Presentation and discussion of a draft declaration of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA region |
| 2.45 - 3.15 p.m. | Other matters |
| 3.15 - 3.45 p.m. | Adoption of recommendations and of the draft declaration of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA region |

Annex IV

STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF ESCWA

(Arabic only - See annex IV of the Arabic version of this report)

Annex V

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Title</u>
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/1	Agenda
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/2	Organization of work
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/3	Proposals for the formation of specialized working groups on water-related subjects (in Arabic)
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/4	ESCWA advisory services in the field of water (in Arabic)
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/5	Sustainable management of ground water in the Paleogene aquifer system in the eastern Arabian Peninsula
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/6	A view of the future of water in the ESCWA region (in Arabic)
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/7	Declaration of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA region (in Arabic)
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/8	Coordination mechanism for the development of a regional strategy for the utilization of the Nubian sandstone aquifer system
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/9	A preliminary estimated balance-sheet for a number of Lebanese catchment areas (in Arabic)
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/10	1998-1999 water resources work programme
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/11	Management and rationalization of water resources and integrated water-resource planning (in Arabic)
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/INF.1	List of participants
E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/INF.2	List of documents

Annex VI

THE COMMISSION'S VIEW OF THE FUTURE OF THE FIELD OF WATER RESOURCES*

1. In view of the water conditions prevailing in the region and the desire of the member States to put an end to wars, establish peace and move forward to the third millennium, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) can play an effective role in helping the member States to ensure sound development and rational management and exploitation of available water resources and assisting in the creation of promising new water resources that will satisfy the growing demand for water and reduce the water shortage in the ESCWA region, thus fostering economic and social development through close regional cooperation within the ESCWA member countries.

2. The participation of our Committee in the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of ESCWA, in May of this year, is a great occasion. Indeed, during this year the ESCWA secretariat has conducted a large number of studies, held many meetings and adopted numerous proposals relating to the vital water sector, one of the foundations on which social and economic development rests.

3. The Committee on Water Resources,

(a) Recalling the efforts made by ESCWA over the past 20 years, in particular the statements of the Commission, repeated on more than one occasion, concerning the extreme importance of water as a resource, its protection from pollution and rationalization of its consumption and its management so as to ensure its continued availability, in terms of both quality and quantity, in ESCWA member countries;

(b) Taking note of developments, of which it has been apprised by ESCWA, that contribute to the promotion of regional and international cooperation, the pooling of efforts and the garnering of the resources required for the development of this vital sector in the ESCWA region, known for its dearth of water and the fact that it lies in the world's arid and semi-arid geographic regions;

(c) Noting, through the expert group meetings held and studies published by ESCWA, that available water resources are not adequate to meet needs, which are growing as a result of accelerating social and economic development and an increasing population growth rate, particularly when one considers that the beginning of the first decade of the third millennium will witness an acute demand for water that it may be difficult to satisfy with traditional water resources;

(d) Valuing the provisions of the declaration issued by the Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on Water Security in the ESCWA Region, held in Damascus from 13 to 16 November 1989;

(e) In pursuance of the successive and repeated recommendations, issued by expert group meetings organized by the ESCWA secretariat, on the conservation of water resources through rationalization of their development, management and consumption;

(f) Taking into account the Mar del Plata Action Plan, which was adopted by representatives of States at the United Nations Water Conference (Mar del Plata, 14-25 March 1977) and deals with all aspects of the various activities calling for conservation, development and rational management of water resources; two ESCWA meetings on water, held respectively in Baghdad in 1976 and Riyadh in 1979; Agenda 21, which was adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) and whose chapter 18 calls for "protection of the quality and supply of freshwater resources"; and the monitoring by ESCWA on a number of occasions, through studies and meetings, of the related follow-up and implementation by the member States;

* In the agenda of the third session of the Committee on Water Resources this title appears as follows: "A view of the future of water in the ESCWA region". The participants decided to replace that title with the title appearing above.

(g) Appreciating the efforts made by the ESCWA member States, whether individually or collectively, to solve the problems arising from participation in the management, development and use of shared surface or ground water resources, taking into account the efforts exerted by regional and international organizations in the ESCWA region in their respective fields and in accordance with their respective specializations;

4. Requests the ESCWA secretariat to continue its role of assisting States in the area of development, management and conservation of water resources; for indeed, water constitutes a strategic national resource that requires the utmost attention on the part of decision-makers with a view to its optimum utilization and integrated rational management, which, in a region that lies geographically within the world's arid and semi-arid zone, must be achieved by making available technological means of alleviating the shortage of water. The continuation of that role also requires the following:

(a) That ESCWA should assist the member State in establishing water policies within national policy frameworks for economic, social and environmental development;

(b) That ESCWA should create a database for the methodical collection, preparation and publication of data in forms that serve the strategies of the member States; and that, with a view to the assessment of water resources, the question of creating an adequate database should continue to be accorded priority;

(c) That ESCWA should find ways and means of encouraging the passage and enforcement of national legislation and the conclusion of regional agreements and conventions aimed at conserving water resources and reducing the pollution of those resources;

(d) That decision-makers should review agricultural policies and strategies and the related institutional arrangements to bring them into line with each country's available water resources in keeping with country-specific characteristics, inasmuch as the agricultural sector is the biggest consumer of available water resources;

(e) That ESCWA should play a primary role in the dissemination of basic technologies for increasing water resources, such as desalination, recycling of waste water, rain harvesting and limitation of water loss;

(f) That ESCWA should play a role in coordinating the use of uniform standards, methods and measures for the monitoring of water quantity and quality, the collection of data and the classification of water according to use, wherever possible;

(g) That ESCWA should carry out exhaustive studies on the economics of water, such as the cost of services, maintenance, investment, privatization, the role of the private sector in water-resource development and the encouragement of non-governmental organizations to develop, manage and operate water enterprises;

(h) That ESCWA should assume the role of an intermediary in order to encourage cooperation between riparian countries within shared watershed areas in creating suitable legal, institutional and executive mechanisms and mutual assistance in the collection, coordination and exchange of relevant data in the case of shared resources;

(i) That steps should be taken, by agreement among the parties concerned, for the establishment of cooperation in areas such as data collection, standardization of data forms, data exchange, management of shared water resources and efforts to combat water pollution;

(j) That emergency plans ready for implementation in case of drought, which may beset the region in certain years, should be made public, drought warning systems should be established and the effects of drought on the various water-bearing strata of the earth should be ascertained.

Annex VII

APPEAL OF THE COMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES REGARDING THE WATER SITUATION IN THE ESCWA REGION

The Committee on Water Resources held its third session in Beirut on 21 and 22 April 1999, at which it discussed the Commission's view of the future of the field of water resources. On that occasion, two decades after the United Nations Water Conference (Mar del Plata, 14-25 March 1977) and more than six years after the Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro, 1-12 June 1992), the members of the Committee recalled the efforts made by international and regional organizations, and in particular those of ESCWA, considering the water situation in the region of the Arab countries of Western Asia far more acute at the start of the third millennium than at the time of either of those world conferences. Surface- and ground-water resources have declined both quantitatively and qualitatively in many parts of the region, while at the same time the population has grown, particularly in the cities, with a resulting increase in water consumption by households, industry and especially agriculture and a concomitant steady increase in the need for food security and the need to protect future generations, preserving their share of the limited resources available in the region. There has also been a decline in shared water-resource reserves and quality. All these and other factors prompted the members of the Committee on Water Resources of ESCWA to issue, on the occasion of the Commission's fiftieth anniversary, an appeal to avert the danger that is approaching at a pace faster than ever anticipated.

Therefore, the members of the Committee hereby appeal to the States of the region, along with their communities and their individual members, to continue their earnest endeavours and increase their preparedness for dealing with this threat, in particular through the following actions:

(a) Cooperation and integration with a view to developing and protecting water resources from deterioration, pollution and shortage, and rationalization of their use so as to guarantee their continued availability for life both present and future, in the view that the interests of the Arab countries of Western Asia in this regard are shared and that the food and water security of each member is contingent upon the security of the whole;

(b) Work in the area of integrated management for the development, conservation and utilization of water resources, inasmuch as water constitutes a strategic national resource that requires the utmost care on the part of decision-makers with a view to optimum use and integrated rational management; the introduction of technologies to reduce the water shortage in an arid or semi-arid region such as ours; and the application of state-of-the-art water-conservation techniques;

(c) Focussing of efforts on the establishment of water policy within the framework of national policy on social and economic development and environmental protection, and urging of decision-makers to review agricultural policy in the region, inasmuch as the agricultural sector is the major consumer of available water resources;

(d) In view of the ongoing nature of the evaluation of freshwater resources and quality, creation of a database for systematically gathering data in forms that both serve the strategies of the countries of the region and assist in the creation of plans for coping with the drought that faces the area;

(e) Joint efforts towards solving any present or future difficulties involving shared surface- and ground-water resources, including their proper management and organization, on a basis of cooperation between riparian States within shared watershed areas in the creation of suitable legal, institutional and executive mechanisms; and mutual assistance in the coordination, collection and exchange of the relevant data.