



# PRESS RELEASE

## **Water Security, an urgent development imperative in the Arab States Region**

*UNDP launches its “Water Governance Programme for Arab States” from the Arab League*

**Cairo, 12 October 2009** – Key water issues including socio-economic and environmental concerns, uncertainty due to climate change as well as conflicts related to shared water resources were at the forefront of discussions of the High-level Partners Meeting on Water Governance, which the League of Arab States hosted today. The meeting brings together key stakeholders in the water sector, including Arab Water Ministers, high level officials as well as regional and international development partners to deliberate over two days the main challenges facing the water sector and the need for joint action to complement and strengthen ongoing work in the sector.

The Regional Bureau for Arab States of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP-RBAS) together with the League of Arab States organized the meeting to mark the official launch of its newest regional initiative, the “Water Governance Programme for Arab States (WGP-AS).” The programme—initiated in January of this year, in Cairo—aims to support regional efforts to improve the effective management and use of scarce water resources in Arab States by addressing socio-economic and environmental dimensions of water governance within the integrated water resources management context.

“The water challenge in the Arab States is on top of the League’s list of priorities,” asserted Amre Moussa, Secretary General of the League of Arab States in his address to the meeting. “The newly established Council of Arab Water Ministers will be instrumental in enhancing inter-Arab cooperation on vital water issues and in formulating a united Arab vision on how to deal with the challenges we face on this front. We welcome the launch of UNDP’s initiative to provide technical and policy support to Arab efforts in water governance through this new programme (WGP-AS),” he added.

Water stress is accelerating due to increasing demand for water from an ever growing Arab population, and climate change is compounding the problem. The Millennium Development Goals set a target to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water by 2015. According to the UNDP global Human Development report of 2006, some of the Arab States will miss this target by 27 years.

“The Arab Human Development report 2009, which we have launched recently, presents compelling evidence that the burgeoning water scarcity problem in the Arab region presents a serious threat to Human security,” commented Ms. Amat Al Alim Alsoswa, Regional Director of UNDP-RBAS, who added “This region has 5% of the world’s population and only 1% its fresh water resources. It is the most water-stressed region in the world. By 2025, the per capita share of renewable water resources in the region will be lower than the world-agreed extreme water poverty levels. The WGP-AS, presents a unique opportunity to address such vital developmental issues and to optimize coordination and partnerships in this crucial sector”

The preparatory phase of WGP-AS, supported by the Government of Japan, worked closely with relevant decision-making bodies in the region to promote the adoption of an integrated water resources management approach and conducted a comprehensive mapping of related needs. The programme is designed to address regional water challenges resulting from geographic and climatic conditions; lack of peace and security; population growth and increasing water demand; inadequate access to clean water and sanitation; insufficient capacity and limited resources; in addition to deficiencies in data and monitoring tools. WGP-AS will provide support in the form of technical and policy advice; capacity strengthening, knowledge management and catalytic funding for project development and implementation.

Hosny Khordagui, Director of WGP-AS emphasized that, “establishing innovative partnerships and platforms of collaborative work on water issue in the region rank high on the agenda of WGP-AS. The importance of this meeting lies in providing a platform for greater coordination among the existing network of key partners active in the water sector in the region.” He further elaborated, “Not only does the meeting provide an opportunity to enhance communication flows, synergies and the sharing of successful experiences, but as well, we hope it will facilitate the forging of new partnerships that complement and maximize the impact of on-going work in this sector for the benefit all countries in the region.”

In addition to leading partners supporting WGP-AS including Japan, Finland and Sweden Khordagui pointed out that new partnerships are being established with the private sector to support public awareness of water governance issues in the region.

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