

**Statement by Dr Hazim El-Naser, Chairman of the Middle Water Forum (MEWF) for
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on:
*MENA at the Crossroads: Towards a Resilient, Inclusive, Sustainable and Efficient
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me to this important meeting on MENA at the Crossroads: Towards a Resilient, Inclusive, Sustainable and Efficient Recovery.

MENA countries in general, and the Arab Region in particular, witnessed over the last 3-4 decades, major developments to its economies and social systems. However, further progress, especially for non-Petro countries, hindered by population growth, influx of refugees, political instability and water scarcity. Water shortages exuberated further by mal practices, as it is the case, in overusing the precious under groundwater resources and transboundary violations through unilateral actions by upstream riparian countries, as it is the case between Turkey and Iran with Syria and Iraq.

There is no other region in the world as in the Arab region where water is so important for economic growth, development, security and environmental systems as the majority of economic activities are highly dependent on water scarcity. For most of the countries facing economic, social and health challenges, COVID-19 and transboundary issues added more burden to its fragile infrastructure and weak financial situations (e.g., Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan). This means, however, that countries are paying less attention to sustainable development which makes some courtiers are lagging behind in achieving SDGs.

As more than 60 % of the Arab water resources are flowing in from outside their political borders, the issue of transboundary became a very serious challenge as it combines with climate change, poor water governance with all possible impacts on economic development due to lack of water and the need for additional financing to substitute lost resources through expansion and upgrading of existing infrastructure. Such financing under prevailing conditions, most probably is difficult to allocate.

Back to the title of the theme of this session “**Partnerships for financing and innovation**”, the said challenges definitely need collective actions and this is the time for addressing the

water scarcity in the region through water security framework that takes into consideration many important pillars, like; environment, human health, socio-economic development, innovation, introduction of new technologies, and regional cooperation. The frame shall further link energy and food production, all hand in hand with serious sector reforms by the countries under consideration and provision of finance by donors to increase water efficiency use and promote sustainability practices. Countries in conflict over transboundary water resources must break the political cycle of conflict through the said framework of “water security for all”, as it’s the need, for example, between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia.

As water security varies widely across the upstream and downstream countries. Countries will have a long way to go to achieve sustainable development and water security for all. They will have to take different ways to ensure water security in their countries which in no way to be achieved without long-term cooperation. Definitely, there is no magic solution, taking into consideration the multi- disciplinary aspects of water, however, there are a bundle of measures, programs and actions that could work together towards alleviation of water shortages, protection of resources and promotion of sustainable development.

When it comes to transboundary water issues, as this issue is a major security issue to some Arab countries, for example, Iraq lost over the last 10 years 20 billion cubic meter of water and will lose another 10 in the coming 10 years as a result of upstream actions, and in the case of Egypt it would lose, in case of no agreement, about 10-15 billion/year as a result of the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. These countries are encountering huge losses to their GDP where the opportunity costs of lost resources estimated between 40-45 billion USD/yr.

Hydro diplomacy can be effective, but it needs time and a lot of efforts, because water-related conflict prevention and resolution is largely the outcome of processes of research and investigations, negotiation, mediation, understanding of issues, conciliation and dissemination of information in a transparent way. They require profound understanding of politics, social aspects, cultural, economic and environmental conditions, supported by a sound assessment while promoting the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) principles.

It is already too late to save some transboundary waters due to Man-made diversions of upstream surface waters through dams and intensive irrigated agriculture, which already impacted and ultimately reduced major surface water flows to the Arab region. More cooperative action and dialogue is needed to sustain the remaining resources.

In conclusion, the bottom line is that Arab countries either reform their water sectors through their relevant water institutions and strengthening water governance or risk more poverty, jobless and political instability with all associated consequences. As we clearly witnessed over the last few years in Iraqi Basra, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

The Middle East Water Forum (MEWF) is a pioneer platform with regional perspective on raising public awareness and enhancing management of water challenges in the Middle East by adopting effectiveness, efficiency, integration and sustainability through exchange of data, expertise and innovative technologies without the need to cross political borders. Its mission is to promote best practices for cooperation and exchange of knowledge among various parties and stakeholders involved in water issues and actions through an online forum that ensures the impartial and transparent dissemination of information towards sustainable water security in the ME and Arab region, and also preparing future water leaders for the region.