

**Committee:** Youth Assembly

**Issue:** Action Paper 1 on the International Year of Water Cooperation 2013

**Student Officer:** Nefeli Kousta, Ioanna Schuppert

**Position:** Head, Co-Head

## Introduction

In December 2010, the United Nations General Assembly passed the resolution A/RES/65/154, declaring 2013 the International Year of Water Cooperation, in order to draw attention to the problems faced today in meeting the increasing demand for fresh water. There are several problems, including the growth of the world population and a decrease of safe, unpolluted water, as well as conflicting interests and the uneven distribution of water. Due to the fact that fresh water sources, such as rivers and lakes, often transcend national boundaries, these problems must be addressed through cooperation. By working together, fresh water can be accessible to more people, providing them with food security and social equality, as well as serving to eradicate poverty and increasing education.

## Definition of Key Terms

### UN International Year

Since 1959, the United Nations have been declaring International Years to draw attention to increase focus on important global issues. The International Year of Water Cooperation (IYWC) was established in December 2010 by the General Assembly.

### Cooperation

Cooperation is the process of working together towards an end. This topic includes cooperation on all levels, including local, international as well as institutional.

## Background Information

Even though 2/3 of the Earth are covered by water, only 3% of this is the fresh water required to meet human needs, which are ever-increasing as the population of the Earth swells. This is further complicated by the uneven distribution of water. According to UN-Water, 85% of people live in the most dehydrated 50% of the Earth, such as the continent of Africa, where 66% of the land has a scarcity in water. Over 300 million people in the Sub-Saharan Africa live in arid areas (NEPAD, 2006). Making sure that people living in such conditions have adequate access to water is of great importance so as to create social and gender equality and eradicate poverty. However, 50% of the world's population currently lives in constantly growing urban areas, and even there it is becoming difficult to meet the

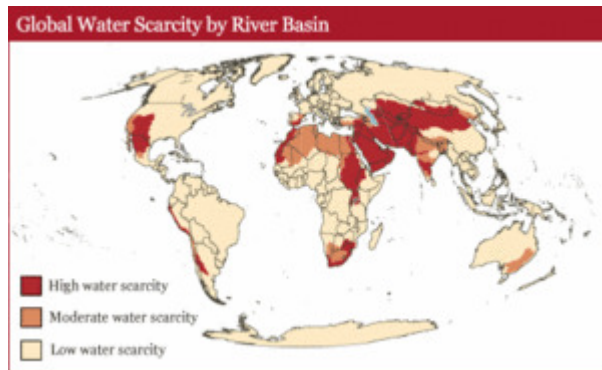
needs of the increasing number of people. The uneven distribution of water can also be seen in terms of the “virtual water” in products, or the water that was used in their fabrication. In North America and Europe (excluding former USSR nations), a person will consume more than 3m<sup>3</sup> of “virtual water” in food per day, while in Asia only 1.4m<sup>3</sup> and in Africa 1.1m<sup>3</sup> (Zimmer and Renault).

An important facet of the problem in meeting all needs for water are conflicting interests. A world average of 70% of all fresh water is used for irrigation of food production and up to 90% in rapidly developing nations, while the need for water in food production will increase as world population increases. The importance of water in many aspects of our lives and economies can be seen in a study done by the United Association of South Africa about the water crisis there, which concludes that “for every percent of water that becomes unusable, 200 000 jobs may be lost, which could lead to a 5.7% drop in disposable income.” These results further draw attention to wastewater. In developing countries, up to 90% of wastewater is not been disposed at all and is simply allowed to flow back into rivers and lakes, posing an enormous threat to health and food security.

In order to deal with these problems effectively, cooperation is utterly vital. 276 river basins cross national boundaries, of which 256 cross between 2 and 4 nations. Therefore, cooperation is essential for water to be used in the most effective way. As demand is increasing, cooperation has to mimic water itself and cross all borders in a social, cultural local, national, international, institutional basis, so that people can work together to meet the increasing demand. Although the competition for water is a potential for conflict, in the past it has shown to rather bring about cooperation in need, overcoming tensions in social, political, and cultural sectors, as well as built trust between communities.



<http://www.unwater.org/water-cooperation-2013/water-cooperation/facts-and-figures/en/>



<http://www.unwater.org/water-cooperation-2013/water-cooperation/facts-and-figures/en/>

### Further Material

UN TV Videos: <http://www.un.org/en/events/worldwateryear/videos.shtml>

UN-Water info graphic:

[http://www.unwater.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/watercooperation2013/doc/2013\\_infographic.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/fileadmin/user_upload/watercooperation2013/doc/2013_infographic.pdf)

[http://www.unwater.org/statistics\\_KWIP.html](http://www.unwater.org/statistics_KWIP.html)

## **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was chosen to be responsible for the preparations for the International Year of Water Cooperation, mainly because it has been playing an important role in the management of fresh water for many years. Furthermore, many other organisations provided UNESCO with their assistance, such as the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UN ECE), the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the UN-Water Decade Programme on Capacity Development (UNW-DPC), and the UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC).

### UN-Water

UN-Water is a UN mechanism with representatives of 30 UN organizations, established in 2003 to focus on fresh water and sanitation in order to implement the 2000 Millennium Declaration and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. It focuses mainly on the management of the scarce resource, as well as sanitation and health.

### UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization works chiefly through dialogue between peoples to achieve its goals toward peace, sustainable development,

education, the eradication of poverty, and communication. Currently, it has set Africa and gender equality – both of which are important in the IYWC – into focus.

## FAO

The Water branch of the Food and Agricultural Organization promotes and enhances sustainability for water used in the production of food. Managing water resources and trans-boundaries and enhancing the efficiency of irrigation systems are areas, in which FAO Water especially focuses on along with the use of non-conventional water and water-quality management.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1790 BC	Hammurabi, the sixth king of Babylon, created the first laws against negligence of irrigation systems and water theft
1720 BC	Blockade of Tigris river, an event considered to be the first use of water in conflict
1992	The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) proposed the establishment of an international day to celebrate fresh water
17 March 1992	Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes at Helsinki (Water Convention)
22 March 1993	The 1st World Water Day designated by the UN General Assembly
March 1997	1st World Water Programme
17 June 1999	Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, done in London
September 2000	UN Member States agreed on the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) by 2015
September 2001	International Conference on Conflict Assessment and Resolution for Reservoir System
September 2001	1st International Conference on Water Resources Management
2003	International Year of Fresh Water
March 2011	UN-Water in cooperation with the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB) organized an official side event to the second Rio 2012 Preparatory Committee: How the Green Economy depends on Water
6 February 2013	Amendments on Water Convention entered into force and transformed it into a global legal framework for transboundary water cooperation

## Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

### Resolution A/RES/65/154

This resolution was adopted by the General Assembly in December 2010 and declares 2013 as the United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation. For all the events linked to the International Year of Water Cooperation as well as the World Water Day (22 March) the responsible organization is UNESCO, which is supported by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the UN-Water Decade Programme on Capacity Development (UNW-DPC) and the UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC).

### The International Hydrological Programme (IHP)

IHP is an Intergovernmental Scientific Cooperative Programme in Hydrology and Water Resources that aims at promoting water research, improving water management, education and capacity. It consists of eleven programmes, each one of them focusing on specific factors that must be addressed. One of these programmes and a very important as well, called FRIEND (Flow Regimes from International Experimental and Network Data) is designated to contribute in the creation of regional networks for analysing hydrological data.

### The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP)

The Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP) is the official UN mechanism responsible for monitoring international efforts, in order to accomplish the 10th target of the MDG's, which reads as to *"Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation"*. JMP is the only mechanism that provides countries with reports, thus enabling the comparison with other member states in terms of progress in drinking water and sanitation systems.

### The UNECE Water Convention

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes focuses on the right use of transboundary waters by the Member States, in order to avoid exploitation and promote sustainable methods of management. Moreover, the convention binds the Parties involved to cooperate, as well as to develop treaties and agreements concerning the mutual use of any transboundary waters, thus avoiding any emerging disputes between them. It was created on the 17th March 1992 in Helsinki and at first it was announced as a regional instrument. However, after the 2013 amendments, it is officially recognized as a global legal framework dedicated to strengthen the cooperation as far as trans-boundary waters are concerned.

Worldwide Events: <http://www.unwater.org/water-cooperation-2013/events/worldwide-events/world-map-view/en/>

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

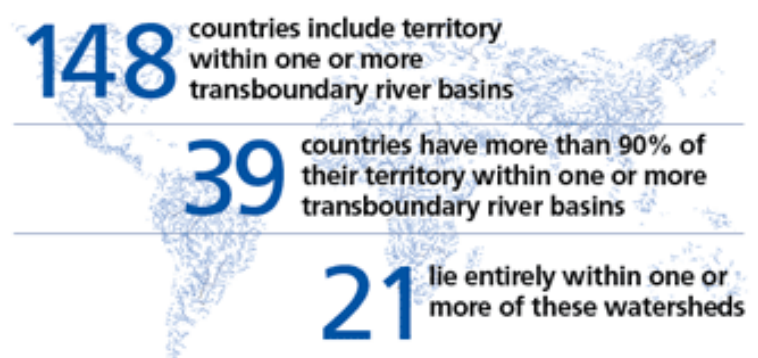
The UN firstly addressed the issue of water cooperation in 1992 through the Water Convention. Since then more and more conventions, treaties and agreements have been adopted by the member states (almost 450 agreements on international waters have been signed from 1820 till 2007). Following the proposal by Tajikistan, the UN General Assembly has declared 2013 as the International Year of Water Cooperation thereby appointing UNESCO as the coordinator of all the events and projects related to it. Concerning freshwater resources, UNESCO has established the United Nations World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP), which is responsible for the World Water Development Report (WWDR) that provides information on worldwide freshwater resources as well as the knowledge, in order to promote the sustainable use of such resources, thus enabling decision-makers to adjust their policies. Furthermore, in the context of the annual celebration day for water (22 March), the UN underlines every year a different important aspect of freshwater and in this way contributes to the raising of people's awareness concerning this burning issue. Aiming at the promotion of international peace and security, in June 2003 UNESCO developed the Conflict Resolution Support System in order to prevent countries from disputes over the management of water resources. In conclusion, the UN in cooperation with international, regional or even local organisations has put a lot of effort in strengthening international laws, suggesting new frameworks, adopting conventions and supporting education and scientific research concerning water and constantly praises its importance for the entire human race through innovative campaigns and interactive programmes.

### Cooperation outweighs conflict



Since 1947 there have been **300** international water agreements against **37** conflicts between states over water

### Global figures on transboundary waters



## Possible Solutions

Water is an element that plays an important role in every aspect of our lives whether it has to do with the fulfilment of basic human needs or the development of the economy. It is therefore vital for the international community to get its acts together and protect this valuable gift given by nature. However, this is a complicated issue to deal with and requires many aspects to be addressed. To start with, global cooperation is a determining factor in facing the numerous difficulties that are expected to emerge. Many disputes do nowadays exist between nations due to water resources. These disagreements derive from cultural, ethnic, religious, economic and other differences between them. It is therefore understandable that they need to be faced with seriousness by bringing all the parties involved together in order for negotiations to take place. Given the rapid population growth, there are increasing demands for water and thereby member states need to share water resources equitably. Furthermore, as far as the environmental aspect is concerned, reviewed conventions and treaties should promote the sustainable usage of renewable resources focusing on water. In addition, raising awareness campaigns can help in informing populations about global warming and its impacts on water resources, in order for them to adopt more sustainable habits. The need for education to children should also be stressed, as the informing at an early stage of life is really beneficial. The International Year of Water Cooperation is a huge opportunity for the mankind to shift its interest to more sustainable ways of taking advantage of water resources rather than unconsciously waste them and utilize all its forces, in order to preserve its precious natural environment.

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Resolution A/RES/65/154: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/521/78/PDF/N1052178.pdf?OpenElement>

JMP: <http://www.wssinfo.org/>

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- <http://www.wssinfo.org/data-estimates/graphs/>
- The UNECE Water Convention: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/>
- Water Conflict <http://www.worldwater.org/conflict.html>