

PRESIDENT RASHID'S SPEECH
UNITED NATIONS WATER CONFERENCE
NEW YORK
(MARCH 2023)

WATER CRISIS IN IRAQ:
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Your Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

SUMMARY

Water is our lifeline and well-being; it is essential to social and economic development. Iraq is emerging from the ashes of war, facing an unprecedented water crisis that is worsened by the compounded effects of climate change, and neighbouring countries' water policies.

The water crisis in Iraq is already affecting livelihoods, disappearing jobs, causing displacements at an alarming rate, and posing significant threats to food security and biodiversity.

Without immediate intervention, water shortages pose significant risks to the Agri-food system, ecosystem, and social stability in Iraq.

To address Iraq's water crisis, sustainable and innovative solutions are urgently needed at local, national, and international levels.

PAST

Within the past century, Iraq has experienced many sporadic drought episodes, but in recent years, these drought episodes have occurred more frequently, which is a strong indication of the negative impact of climate change.

The Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian civilisations existed on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers for thousands of years.

In modern Iraq, the livelihoods of millions of people depend on these rivers, which are under threat by the adverse effects of climate change and our neighbouring countries' water policies.

The Tigris and Euphrates rivers are the lifeblood of Iraq, while the marshlands are a vital part of the human civilisation and serve as the key aspect in supporting life in our country; they have always been the fundamental factor in maintaining ecological balance not only to Iraq but to the whole region.

In addition to the adverse effects of climate change and a significant decrease in transboundary water flow, insufficient application of modern methods of water resources management, primarily due to twelve years of international sanctions on the former regime, inadequate policies, and successive conflicts have put the country several decades behind international levels of development. Failure to take advantage of modern technologies, upgrading the irrigation systems,

and modernising the agricultural sector in a timely manner has contributed to the scale of today's water crisis in Iraq.

PRESENT

Today, Iraq is bearing the brunt of climate change and extreme weather conditions, including regular floods, droughts, dust storms, and rising temperatures which are beyond our control;

decreased transboundary water flows in the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers due the neighbouring countries' water policies, have created the worst water crisis in the history of modern Iraq.

Iraq is primarily reliant on these rivers, and the neighbouring countries' water policies are directly impacting the livelihoods of millions of Iraqis, causing mass migration, and social and economic instability in the country.

Iraq's water need is expected to increase in the next decade due to population growth, economic development, and the effects of climate change, yet its primary sources of water (Tigris and Euphrates) continue to decrease due to its neighbours' water policies.

The behaviours of the neighbouring countries (Turkey, Syria, and Iran) in their operational water plans limit the flow of freshwater, through the construction of storage dams, irrigation projects, and diversion hydraulic structures with disregard for the devastating consequence of decreased water flow in Iraq and the deterioration of their quality including water salinity's negative impacts must be immediately addressed.

The worsening drought has seriously threatened peoples' livelihoods and the state's economy in Iraq; it casts a shadow on the life and environment in the region, adding to the already shrinking green areas in the world.

Desertification is now threatening almost forty percent of Iraq, a country once had the most fertile and productive lands in the region.

FUTURE

We urgently need wider cooperation with the water and political authorities of our neighbouring countries, particularly Turkey, and form a permanent committee including technical and legal experts, establish regional basin-wide agreements, ensure a practical enforcement mechanism under the auspices of the United Nations, including operating procedures on time and quantity to ensure that there are adequate and fair water rations for everybody.

The Iraqi government will invest in and improve water filtering and treatment systems, Additionally, the federal government works toward establishing effective and implementable water resources management plans and service delivery through appropriate funding and improving private sector participation.

Additionally, Iraq will invest in research programmes, focused on the impact of water scarcity in relation to the effects of drought, climate change, and transboundary flows on water quantity and quality, as well as the impact on farming communities.

The Iraqi water authorities will focus on rehabilitation, building, operating, and maintaining water pumping stations throughout the country, in addition to rehabilitating irrigation and drainage systems, using modern irrigation system techniques

to improve the efficiency of water use and minimise the negative impacts of the water crisis.

The restoration of the marshlands in Iraq is paramount, including building infrastructure and rendering basic services.

The Iraqi government is addressing the water crisis through constructing, rehabilitating, operating, and maintaining dams, water barrages, reservoirs, and the system of water distribution including

installations that use the hydraulic control system.
Constructing new dams (in the Kurdistan Region as well as the southern and western parts of Iraq).

We are introducing robust measures to protect the environment, biodiversity, and relevant ecosystems, and prevent desertification through coordination with the states of the region to control this dangerous phenomenon.

RECAP:

- Climate related factors such as regular droughts episodes, dust-storms, and high temperatures that have occurred in recent years are beyond our control.

- We must take necessary precautions to minimise the negative impacts, including the construction of necessary infrastructure to collect and save the maximum amount of rain.
- Arrangements must be made with our neighbouring countries through agreements and commitments to ensure a fair share of water for all, especially during the agricultural seasons.

- Iraq shall implement a rigorous water management plan to save water and reduce waste, including infrastructure improvement and introduction of modern systems of irrigation, modernising agriculture sector, and giving serious attention to establishing an appropriate legal framework in relation to water management and waste control.
- We appeal to the United Nations to take serious actions toward minimising the effects of climate

change and enforce transboundary water
cooperation to ensure a fair distribution of water.

Thank you