



PRESS RELEASE

35th Cairo Climate Talks

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"Egypt's Lifeline: Managing Water Consumption and Nile Conservation"

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A vital lifeline running the length of the country, the Nile River supports millions of human, animal and plant lives in Egypt alone. Many factors affect its flow and usage, from various climate change scenarios to water management, from sedimentation to irrigation. Increasing pressure from pollution and population growth also play a significant role. The health of Egypt's burgeoning population and its agriculture are inextricably linked to the ecology and health of the river.

Egypt has reached a state of water poverty, with water consumption climbing more than 23% in a decade, the vast majority of which is used for agriculture. Though the use of recycled agricultural run-off water is also increasing, water strategies such as recycling grey water and desalination are not yet implemented widely enough to keep pace with depleting resources. Declining water quality due to industrial and agricultural pollution is also a major threat to the river.

The 35th [Cairo Climate Talks](#) brought together experts from Egypt and Germany to discuss how we can conserve and intelligently manage this crucial resource from both a supply and demand perspective.

Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Cairo H.E. Julius Georg Luy opened the panel discussion at the German Science Centre in Zamalek Wednesday evening by quoting Article 44 of the Egyptian Constitution, which underlines the significance of the Nile and guarantees its protection by the state.

Germany is also committed to the health of the Nile and Egypt's water resources, currently supporting a 491 million euro portfolio of Egyptian irrigation projects, the ambassador said.

"Since the early 1990s the German Government has been actively involved in contributing to the modernization of the irrigation infrastructure in Egypt, aiming to increase agricultural productivity in connection with a more equitable water distribution between farmers," Ambassador Luy said.

"This fruitful cooperation with our Egyptian partners has resulted in the co-financing and implementation of numerous projects such as the building of grand barrages, the modernization

of irrigation and drainage infrastructure, the improvement of canals and networks as well as the rehabilitation and replacement of pumping stations.”

Dr. Ahmed Abou Seoud, Chief Executive Officer of Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency, also gave opening remarks, highlighting a national program to stop industrial pollution of the river.

Prior to 2014 there were 102 factories discharging waste into the Nile, he said, and all but four sugarcane factories and two paper mills are now complying with government regulations. However, there are many businesses and small cities and villages still indirectly discharging pollutants into the Nile through drains due to lack of wastewater treatment facilities, according to Abou Seoud.

“We have 714 villages that need facilities, which requires LE8 billion. The Ministry of Housing has made an agreement with the World Bank to start this program [to provide wastewater treatment infrastructure] and it will take 2 years,” he said.

Encroachments on the river are also a massive problem, said Dr. Khaled Kheir El Deen, Head of Environment and Climate Research Institute at the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation. Though the ministry has removed 7,000 of the 50,000 violations in recent years, more buildings continue to crop up.

“If we look to the history of the pharaohs, their religion considered the river almost as a god, as a holy entity. How did it come that generation after generation we reached this situation?” he asked, saying every Egyptian needs to make river protection their personal concern.

He added that there is cause for optimism if Egypt can purify and reuse industrial wastewater and shift toward three promising areas for maximizing water use: hydroponic farming, desalination and real-time irrigation monitoring.

Ibrahim Eshra, Vice President of Engineering Consultants Group said desalination is the primary way to meet the growing population’s water needs.

“We have to move to more productive, larger scale desalination projects,” he said, adding “One of the main solutions is recycling water, wastewater and industrial and irrigation waste; this is a huge amount of water that should be well utilized. It requires a lot of investment, which in my opinion is a first priority because this is our future life.”

Panelist Lama El-Hatow, Co-Founder of the Water Institute for the Nile, questioned how efforts to conserve and maximize water use in a water-poor country can go hand-in-hand with large-scale efforts to cultivate desert land.

“We understand the pressures and demands like lack of water resources, transboundary water conflicts, increased population and demand, and with all of these pressures, both external and internal, how is it feasible that we will have such a developmental project that we can reclaim 1.5 million feddans in the desert?” she asked. “What water is being used and do we have available water? We need to seriously discuss where we are headed in terms of mainstreaming issues such as climate change and water scarcity into the national strategy and how science is informing policy.”

Tight control of information regarding water availability and quality can also inhibit informed

policymaking, said Dr. Lars Ribbe, Professor of Integrated Land and Water Resources Management at TH Köln, Cologne University of Applied Sciences.

“Information is power; many people take that slogan quite seriously and believe if they share information they share power, or they give away power, and that is a problem worldwide,” he said. Liberating some data regarding Nile water could be a first step toward regional cooperation as well as providing economic benefits, Ribbe suggested.

EI-Hatow said she believes climate change will be the binding factor that forces Nile Basin countries to come together to cooperate.

“If we within the confines of Egypt no longer have water availability to grow rice or wheat we could import it from Ethiopia in the form of other commodities. So when we discuss the water-energy-food nexus we’re discussing trade that’s of mutual benefit to the countries ... this is how we can break down borders and enhance regional cooperation. It’s nothing new, it sounds great and we would love to have that mutual benefit-sharing but it comes down to where we’re headed in terms of politics and cooperation and trust. We’re not there yet.”

Background Information:

The Cairo Climate Talks are conceived, organized and hosted as a cooperation between the German Embassy in Cairo, the Egyptian Ministry of Environment, the German Science Center (DWZ), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). For more information, please visit our [website](http://www.cairoclimatetalks.net) or contact press@cairoclimatetalks.net.