

Foreword by the Regional Director, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States

A child struggles in the arid countryside for a drink of clean water; a family flees a drought and relocates to a city not ready; a community sees its social fabric stretched by competition for the essentials of life; a country swept by famine: The impacts of the water crisis facing the Arab world are dire.

These struggles are the human face of the statistics provided in this report: that the terrain of the Arab region is over 87 per cent desert; that the rainfall we receive is well below the world average; that the average person in the Arab region accesses one-eighth the renewable water that the average global citizen enjoys; and that 14 of the world's 20 most water-stressed countries are here.

Water challenges can and must be addressed if the Arab region is to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, attain shared prosperity, and reach a future of sustainable human development. Addressing water challenges now can also help strengthen resilience by managing the risk of potential crises that could result from inaction: such as unplanned migration, economic collapse, or regional conflict.

Resolving the crisis will require enduring progress towards political, social, economic and administrative systems that shape the use, development and management of water resources and water delivery in a more effective, strategic, sustainable and equitable direction.

As this report presents the issue, the need to improve water governance requires much more than efforts to increase the supply of water. Rather, addressing the crisis requires strengthening technical capacities and national institutions and developing mechanisms to increase the transparency and accountability of public water services.

The task ahead is for all stakeholders — including government, civil society, and the private sector— to arrive at collective understandings of diverse needs and to develop approaches to water governance that yield the highest shared value of water resources.

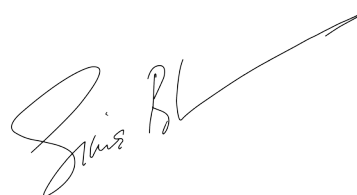
Progress towards many of the solutions is already underway in different ways across the region. However the urgency of the current situation requires accelerated and improved collective effort. Already several Arab countries are on the verge of running out of renewable water. Droughts and famines have become more frequent and agricultural output is falling behind population growth. Moreover, the impacts of climate change and demographic and economic growth exacerbate the challenge. Current projections show that by the year 2025 the water supply in the Arab region will be only 15 per cent of what it was in 1960.

Progress requires integrated approaches to the water crisis that address the links between water and health, education, poverty alleviation, environmental protection, job creation, and food and energy security. It also requires increased political attention and commitment even amid the challenging political environment of the region today. The key right now is to more broadly disseminate knowledge, to bring more stakeholders into the dialogue, and to ensure that dealing with the water crisis remains a major priority even as the region continues to pass through difficult times.

My hope is that this report will serve as a vital tool in UNDP's cooperation with the Arab region, where we are on the ground in 18 countries working with governments and other stakeholders to develop national capacities and

achieve results in moving towards sustainable development pathways that reduce poverty and inequality, towards inclusive and effective governance systems that deliver results for people, and towards resilience to the risks

of natural disaster and conflict. Water governance sits at the crossroads of these development objectives and I hope that this report fosters progress towards advances in human development across the entire Arab region.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sima Bahous', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Sima Bahous

Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, Chair of the United Nations Development Group for the Arab States, and Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States of the United Nations Development Programme.