

Water Security and Regional Cooperation

The notion of water security has gained considerable support in the international policy circles during the past few years. Many reports (e.g., including the 2012 ICA report on Water Security published by the US intelligence community) point to the challenges associated with the lack of water security, which if not addressed properly could lead to unraveling of societies and countries. Many regions in the world have been identified as under increasing level of threat to water security as a result of grossly modified water cycles through climate change, increasing demands emerging from a range of water consumers, degrading water quality as a result of anthropogenic activities, and perhaps most importantly, lack of adequate institutional and human capacity to respond to water threats.

The work undertaken by UN-Water, a coordination mechanism among 32 United Nations organizations and 37 international water associations and organization – has pushed the level of understanding around the notion of water security. A key achievement has been arriving at consensus on a working definition: **Water Security** is the capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability. This definition captures the multi-dimensional nature of water security.

Achieving water security in a regional context, particularly when water bodies and systems are shared across national boundaries, remains a major challenge. In such situations, water security challenges are further compounded by the need to ensure coordination and dialogue between sovereign states, each with its own set of varied and sometimes competing demands for water resources. The geographic scale of regional water security is enormous, considering that there are about 276 transboundary basins and more than 300 transboundary aquifers. Economic and social development in these contexts is often delicately balanced to avoid adverse impacts like fragmentation of river systems, aquatic ecosystems deterioration, and loss of sustainable fisheries. The latter is linked to livelihoods and food security for many communities.

A number of successes in regional water security can be cited. For example, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) coordinates transboundary water cooperation on 15 basins across Southern Africa. In Southeast Asia, the Mekong River Commission has decades of cooperation on river basin management among the lower Mekong countries. In Europe, degrading water quality and transboundary pollution prompted a move towards greater cooperation on the Danube River Basin. In Latin America, transboundary cooperation has taken place over hydro-electric development on the Paraná River between Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. International watercourses, particularly when supported by international instruments such as the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention and the 1992 UNECE Convention, can help to alleviate increased incidents of water insecurity as a result of the pursuit of sovereign interests that may threaten regional peace and security.

This session will undertake a review of key aspects of regional water security, as follows:

- Ecosystem protection in a regional (and basin-wide) context
- Legal and international law dimensions of water security, including the UN Conventions
- Linking water, food, and energy security to develop new dialogues in a transboundary context

- Water security as a determinant of regional peace and political stability
- Regional cooperation opportunities – including sharing of resources, trade and commerce, and track II diplomacy – offered through water security
- The role of non-state actors in achieving regional water security

Tentative Programme

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Water Security and Regional Cooperation		
Chair/Moderator: Zafar Adeel		
Time	Topic	Speaker
0-10	Opening and session orientation	Dr. Zafar Adeel
10-30	Keynote presentation	Dr. Alberto Palombo
30-60	Panel Presentation - each panelist speaking on one aspect of regional security: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Ecosystem protection 2 Legal dimensions of water security 3 Water, food, and energy security in a transboundary setting 4 Water security for regional peace and political stability and the role of non-state actors 5 Regional cooperation opportunities 	Dr. Stanley Liphadzi Dr. Axel Charles Dourojeanni Ricordi Mr. Andrés Felipe Sánchez Peña Dr. Lisa Guppy Dr. Eiman Karar
60-80	Open Discussion	Moderated by Zafar Adeel
80-90	Wrap up and summary for Regional Expert Consultation	Dr. Eiman Karar, Dr. Zafar Adeel, Dr. Alberto Palombo