

No Water

In recent years, climate change seems to have elbowed out other environmental issues to become the number one global problem. But the alarming world-wide water scarcity is an equally important issue, and an even more immediate threat.

A decade ago, it was predicted that a third of the world's population would be facing water scarcity by 2025. But this threshold has already been reached. Two billion people live in countries that are water-stressed. And by 2025, two-thirds of the world population may suffer water stress, unless current trends alter, the possibility of which seems remote.

It is now frequently said that water will be in this century what oil was in the last. Even more dramatic, wars will be fought over water this century, just as wars were and are still being fought over control of oil these past decades.

"The global population tripled in the 20th century but water consumption went up sevenfold," noted Maudhe Barlow of the Council of Canadians and an expert on the global water crisis in her book *Blue Covenant*. "By 2050 after we add another 3 billion to the population, humans will need an 80 percent increase in water supplies just to feed ourselves. No one knows where this water is going to come from."

There is a rapidly growing demand for freshwater, but its supply is limited and decreasing.

Water supply is affected by the loss of watersheds due to deforestation and soil erosion in hills and mountains. There is also a severe depletion of valuable groundwater resources as water is taken up for agriculture and industry, and is being dug from deeper and deeper sources. Mining of groundwater has caused the water-table to drop in parts of many countries, including India and China, West Asia, Russia and the United States.

A lot of surface water is also polluted, and thus not available for human use, or if it is used the polluted water causes health problems. Five million people die from water-borne diseases annually.

Water supplies are also being affected by climate change. Global warming is causing an accelerated melting of the glaciers, and there will be fewer glaciers in future. For example, the Himalayan glaciers feed many of the great rivers in India, China and Southeast Asia. "The full-scale glacier shrinkage in the plateau regions will eventually lead to an ecological catastrophe," according to Yao Tandong of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Water scarcity has also become a reason for regional conflict. This is especially when a source of water such as a major river serves more than one country. The country or countries that have the upper reaches of the river can affect the volume of water flowing into the countries at the lower parts of the river.

Thus water must be recognised as a major crisis issue and solutions to the crisis should be at the top of the global and national agendas. But nobody is listening. □□□ [contributed]