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# West Asia



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# UNEP in the regions

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## West Asia UNEP in the Regions

### Environment for Development

The mission of the United Nations Environment Programme

is

**“to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations”**



## About UNEP

UNEP, established in 1972 to be the watchdog of the environment, has its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The organisation follows the guidance and requests of the ministers of the environment of member-countries, sitting in the UNEP Governing Council.

UNEP is organized under divisions that reflect the various priorities of the organization – early warning and assessment, policy development and law, policy implementation, communications and public information, regional cooperation, trade industry and economics and support for multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs). Another division coordinates UNEP work as an implementing agency of the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

The Division of Regional Cooperation consists of the six UNEP regional offices – for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and West Asia – and a small coordination unit at headquarters. There are also a number of liaison offices under the relevant regional offices – in Addis Ababa, Brussels, Cairo (the Liaison Office for the League of Arab States (LAS)), Moscow, Brasília and Beijing.

### What we do

For the past thirty years, since the deteriorating state of the environment first came to world attention, UNEP has nurtured global collaboration on environmental issues. Some problems have been tackled - the loss of biodiversity, degradation of soil and deterioration of water resources, climate change, production and consumption patterns, the relationship between trade and the environment and environmental legislation, to name a few examples. At times UNEP seemed a lone voice, but over time the world community has taken more notice. More action has been taken – major environmental fora have resulted in action plans and programmes of activities – but with varying and often disappointing results. As the global environmental crisis deepens, more is expected from UNEP and the world community in the wake of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) of 2002 and the resulting Plan of Implementation.

UNEP remains a leader in environmental initiatives, encouraging the adoption of multilateral environmental agreements, integrating the private sector into a new culture of environmental responsibility, creating space for the participation

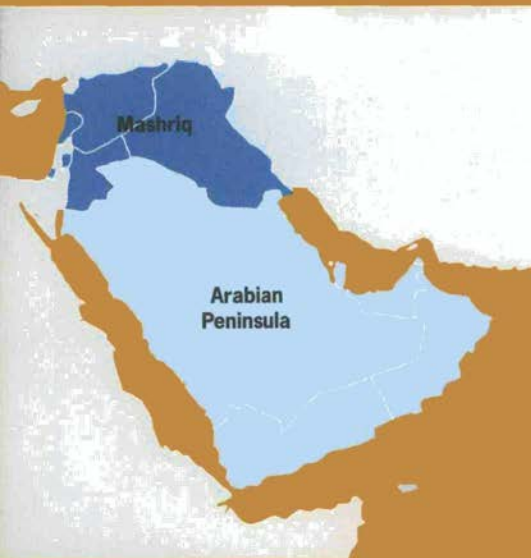


*"We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected"*

United Nations Millennium Declaration – 2000

### Development Goals in the Millennium Declaration

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV / AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development



of civil society and fostering environmental policies and legislation. Capacity building and technology transfer are at the top of the UNEP agenda. Close partnerships with governments, international and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and others have been forged.

Intensive worldwide preparations for WSSD took place during 2000-2002. In the aftermath of the Summit, UNEP realigned programmes more closely to the resulting Plan of Implementation, but maintained an essential continuity with the UNEP priorities and programmes of the immediate past. New strategies for the regional programmes have been put in place as a blueprint for the way forward – strategies that are within the global priorities and mandates of UNEP, but that also respond to the different regional priorities and help fulfil the internationally agreed development goals in the Millennium Declaration.

### West Asia

The West Asia Region is made up of two geographic sub-regions covering in total 12 countries: the Mashriq sub-region (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Syria) and the Arabian Peninsula sub-region consisting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) and Yemen. The region contains diverse terrestrial eco-systems, including vast deserts, mountains, forests, extensive coastal areas spread over three regional seas and two oceans, and fertile pastures.

#### West Asia in brief

- The region has a dry, harsh climate and limited natural resources of water, soil and vegetation - rainfall is erratic and droughts are frequent
- Levels of water scarcity are among the highest in the world
- The population of the Arab region is estimated at 312 million (2003) - 30 per cent is in West Asia - with a high percentage of youths in the age bracket 16-24
- The region is highly urbanized with 69 per cent of the population living in urban areas, but urban growth does not reflect major improvements in socio-economic conditions
- The economies of the Mashriq countries (plus Yemen) are based on agriculture, and those of the GCC countries on gas and oil.
- The agricultural sector does not support development and employment needs in rural areas - rural-urban migration is increasing
- Agriculture and food production contribute 12-13 per cent of regional GDP

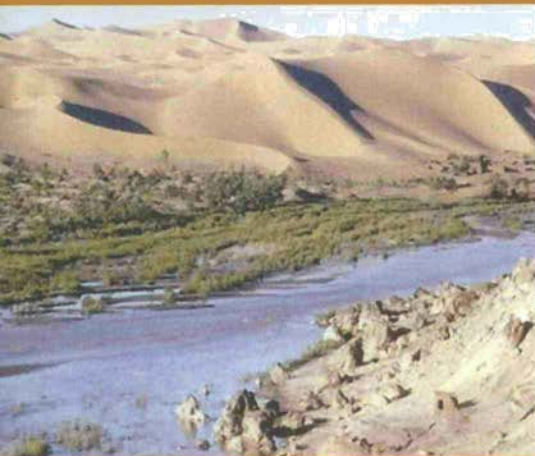
- National land use plans and population distribution strategies are in place in many countries (e.g. Lebanon, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia)
- Large-scale government industries, especially in the oil, gas and petrochemicals sectors dominate - the small and medium-scale enterprises (SME) sector remains limited in most countries, although is expanding
- Economic growth has been adversely affected by war and instability and lags behind the world average - continued instability in Iraq and the Occupied Palestinian Territories could have a direct impact on economic and social development
- Trade liberalization poses challenges for sustainable development efforts
- Unemployment reaches double figures in most countries, especially among females, - the average unemployment rate is 22 per cent, but with wide variations (up to 60 per cent in Gaza and the West Bank)
- Unemployment is rising, but so is a reliance on an expatriate workforce in some countries
- The war in Iraq had major impacts on socio-political and economic stability, the environment and human safety, and health that could also affect neighbouring countries
- National security has been given great prominence in many countries because of the security situation, often to the detriment of attention to the environment
- Privatisation is increasing - even the most conservative countries of the region are taking drastic measures to promote domestic private investment, and to attract foreign direct investment

### Environmental challenges in West Asia

#### Land

- Serious overgrazing, inefficient water use, political instability and farmer's subsidies are key factors triggering degradation – many areas have four times as many sheep as the land can naturally support
- Erosion and loss of productivity have been aggravated by climatic factors, population growth, urbanisation and clearing vegetation for agriculture
- Much land is vulnerable to wind and water erosion – over 80 per cent of land in the Arabian Peninsula is degraded as a result of wind erosion





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- Salinisation resulting from poor irrigation methods has left up to 40 per cent of the land area in West Asia degraded - about 30 per cent of the arable area of Iraq has been abandoned because of it

*Action: Many countries are drawing up national action plans to tackle the problem and a Sub-regional Action Programme has been established within the framework of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), including pilot projects in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen*

#### **Water**

- Rapid population growth is causing water stress and scarcity - demand is outstripping supply – over 80 per cent of the water is used for agriculture
- Groundwater is being mined causing saline intrusions into coastal aquifers
- Sanitation is a major challenge because of the rapid pace of economic and social development
- Shared water resources between countries threatens stability and creates potential for conflict - in 2003, tension grew between Israel and Lebanon on the waters of Wazani and Hasbani Rivers in Lebanon
- About 60 per cent of water resources in the Arab region originate from outside the region - again creating tension

*Action: The reduction of agricultural subsidies, more modern irrigation methods, wastewater recycling and metering groundwater supplies aim to reduce demand and boost efficiency in water use. Sanitation services and wastewater treatment are being improved. Recognition is growing of the need for conventions and agreements on sharing and managing water resources (including surface and groundwater)*

#### **Coastal and marine**

- Over-fishing, habitat destruction, and increased coastal and marine pollution emanating from land-based sources as well as increased shipping traffic have resulted in a halving of fish catches
- Oil spills, dredging, wastewater discharges threaten the marine environment
- Coastal development has increased rapidly in many countries

*Action: The Mediterranean, Kuwait and Red Sea action plans aim to protect and promote the sustainable development of coastal zones. New sewage works have been built in Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The GCC countries have introduced fishing licenses and closed seasons to conserve fish stocks and Environmental Impact Assessments are increasingly used for coastal zone developments*

### Forests and biodiversity

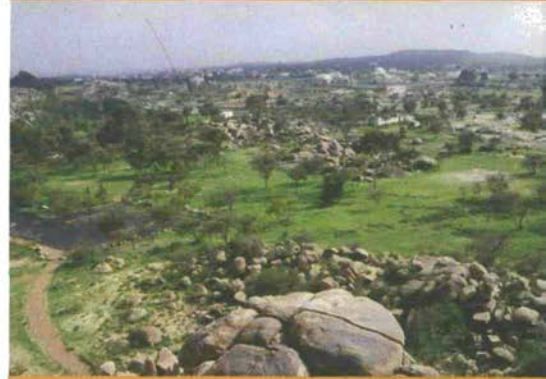
- Forest cover has decreased in many countries – by 50 per cent in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and by 17 per cent in Yemen
- Off road driving and excessive hunting threaten some species with extinction
- Habitat destruction, intensive agriculture and coastal pollution have led to a sharp decline of many other species
- Marine pollution threatens the wide variety of species found in the seas

*Action: Tree planting schemes have increased forest cover by 32 per cent in the UAE and 20 per cent in Jordan. Captive breeding and re-introduction programmes are in progress in many countries. Most countries have ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity. There is a growing move towards establishing protected areas*

### Atmosphere

- The ageing vehicle fleet, with high emission levels, is a factor in declining air quality in the region
- Energy consumption is rising by 3.5 per cent a year, with significant increases in the emission of greenhouse gases
- Increasing rates of release of emissions, liquid effluents and solid (including hazardous) wastes are a major challenge for the rapidly growing industrial sector
- The health effects attributable to poor air quality cause significant economic losses, especially in large cities

*Action: Awareness and interest in more sustainable forms of industrial production has resulted in progress in cutting emissions through the use of cleaner, more efficient energy technologies and higher air-quality standards. The movement towards unleaded fuels is gaining momentum*



## Working for the environment in West Asia

### I. Regional and sub-regional cooperation

The Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE), established in 1978, is the major ministerial forum that develops, coordinates and follows-up on the environment programme for the region. It meets annually at the headquarters of the League of Arab States (unless hosted by a member state). It has a Bureau and is served by a Technical Secretariat and a number of technical teams (including the Arab Technical Team on MEAs relevant to

Chemicals and Waste Management and Arab Team on Desertification, Land Degradation, Biodiversity and Water). A Joint Committee on Environment and Development for the Arab Region (JCEDAR) formulates a plan of work for approval by the Bureau and the Council. UNEP supports CAMRE by active involvement in the preparation and follow-up of the programme of work and by regular reporting on activities and progress in implementing the global environment programme as well as providing policy guidance and advice to the Technical Teams.

Other regional and sub-regional intergovernmental mechanisms include the ministerial fora of the GCC, the two regional seas programmes - the Regional Organisation for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA) and the Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME) - and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). UNEP is a partner in their activities. In addition to cooperation with UNEP in the implementation of the regional programme, the GCC also provides logistical support to the Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA) in Bahrain.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) coordinates regional UN activities as Chair of the Regional Coordination Group (RCG) – UNEP is one of the members. UNEP and ESCWA have a strong partnership; they provide technical support to CAMRE and individual countries, and cooperate jointly in the implementation of three major programmes – on water, trade and environment and energy. Together they played a major role with CAMRE in the preparations for WSSD, helping countries to develop a common vision for the region that culminated in the Arab Initiative for Sustainable Development launched in Johannesburg. With CAMRE they set up a Joint Secretariat to coordinate project development under the Arab Initiative and develop an implementation strategy.



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### **The Arab Initiative on Sustainable Development (AISD)**

The AISD initiative :

- summarizes progress and underlines the challenges and obstacles facing Arab countries in achieving sustainable development
- asserts the commitment of Arab countries to implement Agenda 21 and fulfill the objectives of the Millennium Declaration
- emphasizes the principle of common but differentiated responsibility
- forms a framework for implementing programmes and activities through



stakeholder partnerships, especially those involving civil society and the media

- calls for fair, non-discriminatory, and non-politically-motivated partnership initiatives among developing countries, between developed and developing countries and between the organizations of civil society and the private sector

The major thrusts of the initiative are:

- peace and security
- institutional frameworks
- poverty alleviation
- population and health
- education, awareness, scientific research, and technology transfer
- resource management
- production and consumption
- globalization, trade and investment

Initial priorities for project development:

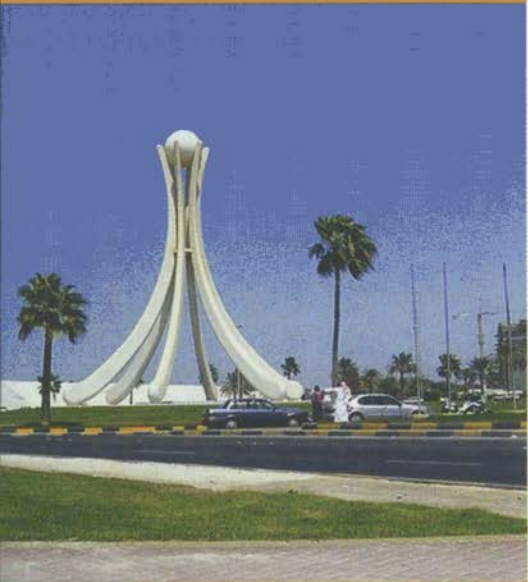
- integrated management of water resources
- land degradation and combating desertification
- the integrated management of coastal zones and marine resources

The Arab Initiative, various declarations and pan-Arab initiatives, reflect growing concerns about the sustainability of environmental and socio-economic development in the region. The inability to attract funding for environmental services and the difficulty of establishing local and external partners are constraints on sustainable development.

## II. UNEP in the region

UNEP is a committed partner in the region's environmental initiatives, taking a major role in converting the global programme and activities of UNEP to respond to the needs of the region. This includes the development of the biennial Programme of Work for the Regional Office for West Asia, linking the decisions of UNEP's Governing Council with the decision and needs identified by CAMRE, and in 2005 the development of the regional approach to the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building.





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## Highlights of the 2006-2007 Programme of Work for West Asia

The key activities to be carried out by UNEP in West Asia in 2006-2007 include:

### Publications and data:

- Series of Environmental Law, Education and Awareness Kits including legislative guidelines and model legislation
- Inputs to global GEO and other regional GEO reports
- Publication on sustainable energy technologies
- Publication on integrated approach to chemicals and waste management in West Asia
- Publication on a regional approach to sustainable consumption
- Booklets on opportunities and applications of CDM projects in West Asia
- Sustainable consumption fact sheets
- Monthly electronic newsletter in English and Arabic
- Updated ROWA website
- Development of regional knowledge network

### Support to countries in:

- Development of their National Action Plans (NAP) in the area of water resources and demand management
- Updating national legal frameworks for environmental law
- Implementation of the Health and Environmental Linkages Initiative (HELI) in West Asia
- Establishment/strengthening of national committees/councils for sustainable development and a regional mechanism at the level of the League of Arab States
- Sustainable development of the Mesopotamian Marshlands
- Implementation of MEA requirements

### Policy and technical advice:

- Expert group meeting on trade and environment
- Promotion of the implementation of global and regional environmental agreements in West Asia including regional conventions, and related support to Governments
- Technical guidance and assistance to governments and regional organisations and programmes in West Asia, in the development of environmental projects for GEF, United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP) and other sources of funding

### Training workshops:

- Integrated environmental assessment and information systems, (including regional environmental data and development of regional environmental knowledge network)
- Conflict resolution on shared water resources
- Development and implementation of NAPs for desertification
- Energy efficient technologies, clean fuel and sustainable mobility (Middle East and North Africa Renewable Energy Conference MENAREC III, Green Industry Conference)
- Cleaner production, Sustainable Consumption, EMS, IEM, APELL
- Integrated chemicals and waste management (International Conference on Chemicals Management, and workshops on Hazardous Wastes, Medical Wastes and Oil and Gas Sectors Wastes)
- Sustainable construction and sustainable tourism
- Trade and environment
- Compliance and enforcement of environmental law
- Obligations of CITES and implementation of the Biosafety Protocol
- Post conflict capacity building
- Wastewater treatment and solid waste management
- Integrated coastal zone management under GPA

### Outreach:

- Organizational support to special media and outreach events (World Environment Day, youth and children, and other major groups events)
- Organization of environmental campaigns, awards and competitions such as Champions of the Earth, UNEP Sasakawa Prize and Zayed International Prize for the Environment
- Regional outreach programme focussing on civil society groups including moral and ethical aspects of sustainable development and environmental education

### Regional Cooperation:

- Continue to fortify UNEP partnership role with CAMRE and ESCWA in the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR)
- Support to CAMRE Secretariat in the implementation phase of the Arab Initiative on Sustainable Development
- Support cooperation between AMCEN and CAMRE with regard to NEPAD and AISD
- Participation at CAMRE Technical Teams (including provision of support to Arab LDCs)



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## TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Adopted by the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its twenty-third session in February 2005 the **Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-Building (BSP)** is an intergovernmentally agreed approach to strengthen technology support and capacity-building in developing countries, as well as countries with economies in transition. The Bali Strategic Plan is designed to assist these countries:

- To strengthen their capacity to achieve their environmental goals, targets and objectives, as well as environment-related internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.
- To strengthen their capacity to implement programmatic goals set by the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, in parallel to the response by UNEP to requests by Governments for targeted capacity building within the mandate of UNEP.
- To strengthen their capacity to participate fully in the development of coherent international environmental policy, to comply with international agreements and implement their obligations at the national level, and to use and sustain the capacity or technology obtained through training or other capacity-building efforts after such efforts have been completed.
- To strengthen their capacity to develop national research, monitoring and assessment capacity to support national institutions in data collection, analysis and monitoring of environmental trends and in establishing infrastructure for scientific development and environmental management, in order to ensure sustainability of capacity building efforts.

- Participation in and contributions to other intergovernmental regional and sub-regional processes, such as ESCWA and the League of Arab States

### Implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan (BSP) for Technology Support and Capacity Building in the West Asia Region

The implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan in the West Asia region will be closely linked to the activities identified in the Arab Initiative on Sustainable Development and as such, UNEP, through ROWA, is working closely with partners in the region, through CAMRE, to ensure a systematic approach towards the implementation of these two important initiatives. Some key thematic areas are: water and energy supply (in accordance with the MDGs), institutional frameworks (including support to implementation of the MEAs) and production and consumption. The priorities for the region have been presented to member states and relevant regional organisations through the mechanism of the Joint Committee for Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR).

### Regional partnerships

As well as the activities related to regional coordination mechanisms, UNEP has been involved in the major activities and events related to sustainable development and environment in the region, such as the Dubai International Conference on Atmospheric Pollution, Environment 2005 Conference and Exhibition and the Deserts Festival in Dubai in 2005.

### Cooperation with regional organizations - the Zayed International Prize for the Environment

The Zayed International Prize for the Environment - worth \$US 1 million - promotes and encourages long lasting environmental achievements in line with the environment and development vision and philosophy of the dedicated environmentalist, H.H. Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan - the father and late President of the United Arab Emirates. The Zayed International Prize for the Environment was founded by General H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai.

The **Zayed Prize Foundation** promotes sustainable development through various environmental initiatives in fields such as fresh water, biological diversity, the marine environment and coastal zone management, agriculture, pollution control, cleaner production and environmentally sound technology, environmental health, environmental education, the role of women in environment and development and environmental security.

UNEP cooperates with the Zayed Prize Foundation by actively participating in the Technical Advisory Committee responsible for searching out and screening nominees for the Prize. An International Jury (chaired by the Executive Director of UNEP) makes the final selection.

The Zayed Prize Foundation is UNEP's partner in the logistical organization of the Ninth Special Session of UNEP's Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environmental Forum (GCSS.IX/GMEF) and its associated meetings in Dubai in February 2006. The key policy issues discussed at the GCSS.IX/GMEF were Chemicals Management, Energy and Tourism. The associated activities included International Conference on Chemicals Management (4-6 February 2006), Global Civil Society Forum (5-6 February 2006), and Environmentally Sound Technology Showcase (5-8 February 2006).

### Assessment and Early Warning

UNEP works with governments, other partners and expert centres in the region on a wide range of environmental assessment activities, providing information to support environmental management, decision-making and policy-setting, for example, on emerging issues, early warning and urban environmental management. Activities include:

- **Integrated environmental assessments** - using the methodology developed by the GEO process, which at whatever level - municipal, national, sub-regional, regional or global - aims to answer the four basic questions on the environment: What is happening?, Why?, What is being done about it?, and What will happen if no action is taken?
- **Data management** - harmonising data collection, facilitating access to information and generating high quality data and indicators to address information gaps
- **Environmental vulnerability studies** - observing and monitoring changes, identifying and assessing emerging environmental threats that may affect the long-term vulnerability of people, ecosystems and the services they provide, in order to provide early warning





### State of Environment in the Arab Region A progress Report



United Nations Environment Programme  
Division of Regional Cooperation  
Regional Office for West Asia



### What is being done

- Development of a regional strategy on capacity building for integrated environmental assessment with a major goal of integrating the Integrated Environmental Assessment (IEA) approach into the decision-making and policy frameworks for sustainable development in the Region
- Setting the stage for the preparation of West Asia input to GEO-4 (to be published in 2007) and coordination of the regional plan
- The Arab Region Millennium Ecosystem Assessment forms part of the Global Millennium Ecosystem Assessment led by UNEP and the Millennium Secretariat. The project, funded by the Kingdom of the Saudi Arabia, has been implemented in three sites in the Arab region, in cooperation with partners in the countries:
  - the Assir National Park, Saudi Arabia
  - the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt
  - the Tafilalt Oasis, Morocco

### The Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative (AGEDI)

AGEDI was launched jointly by ERWDA (now the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi) and UNEP at WSSD, aims to bridge the environmental data gap between and within developing and developed countries and to provide direct and cost-effective access to environmental data. It also aims to upgrade the ways of monitoring environmental problems and to make policy recommendations at national and international levels.

Advanced technology such as remote sensing will be used to make the process of data collection much easier. Regular annual reports on each region will be produced as a basis for decision making.

The initiative is being implemented in three stages:

- Formulation of a Strategic Implementation Plan focussing on data collection, management, and dissemination at all levels and an evaluation of existing operational programmes
- Implementation of a regional pilot programme in West Asia - AGEDI will support the development of the UNEP assessment programme and establishment of a Regional Centre for Environmental Information and Assessment
- Implementation of a national pilot project at AGEDI headquarters in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi - as a model for replication – with a primary focus on the collection, verification, assessment and standardization of environmental data

## Post Conflict Assessment

### The Occupied Palestinian Territories

In 2003, UNEP prepared a desk study on the state of the environment in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and identified major areas of environmental damage requiring urgent attention. The study was based on recent scientific reports, interviews with over 250 regional and international experts – from environmental official bodies, NGOs, municipal authorities, academic and research institutes, and international organizations. In addition, site visits took place in major towns and cities throughout the West Bank and Gaza. The study identifies environmental problems arising from the ongoing conflict, as well as those stemming from long-term inadequate resource allocation and environmental management :

- the rapid deterioration of water resources
- soil and groundwater pollution - due to agricultural practices, localized industrial activities, inadequate or improper disposal of wastewater and solid waste (including hazardous materials) and seawater intrusion to groundwater (especially in Gaza - caused by many years of over-pumping)
- fragmenting of ecosystems and the rupture of natural ecological corridors associated with the separation wall

The report also :

- notes the difficulties that the Palestinian Authority has had in carrying out its responsibilities on land-use planning as a result of military occupation - security demands mean that access is restricted to some designated waste sites
- recommends the urgent renewal of trans-boundary environmental cooperation - Joint Environmental Expert Committee activities have been on hold since the beginning of the present stage of the conflict
- makes 136 recommendations on a broad range of environmental topics

### What is being done

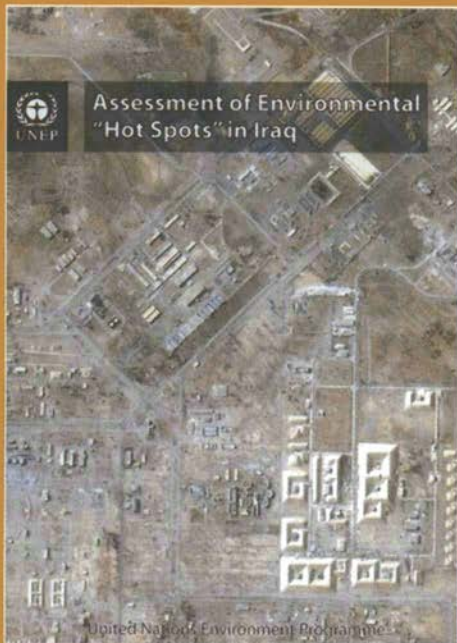
- With the ongoing evacuation of Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip, the Environmental Quality Authority of the Palestinian National Authority approached the Executive Director of UNEP to provide assistance in undertaking an environmental audit of the settlements after their evacuation and disengagement. UNEP agreed to undertake this activity and in August and September 2005 preparations began for such an audit.



Desk Study on the  
Environment  
in the

## Occupied Palestinian Territories

United Nations Environment Programme



- In addition to the audit itself, UNEP is providing Palestinian Officials with capacity building training so that they are able to undertake such audits themselves in future
- Support to Palestine is also focused on capacity building for Palestinian experts in a range of areas relating to environmental assessment and monitoring, and has included the UNEP Capacity Building Training Seminar on Environmental Standards and Air Pollution for Palestinian Environmental Officials
- Facilitate the implementation of the Desk Study recommendations in coordination with the relevant national authorities and international donors

### **The Environmental Situation in Iraq**

In April 2003, UNEP published a *Desk Study on the Environment in Iraq*, providing an overview of key environmental issues in the aftermath of the recent conflict. The study used published and online information sources and satellite data. Despite these limitations, the report set out the general environmental context and provided guidance on the next steps for addressing key environmental challenges

The report issued by UNEP in 2005 "Assessment of Environmental 'Hotspots' in Iraq", depicted a list of 50 sites presented to the Iraqi Ministry of the Environment. Five sites were selected for detailed environmental assessment, and one, "Al Quadissiya", was considered for clean-up. The Al Quadissiya site (a former metal plating facility) has been found to contain numerous hazardous wastes including several tonnes of cyanide compounds. The six month clean-up programme, which started in December 2005, will entail removing, storing and treating the cyanide wastes to reduce the public health risks currently considered to be "severe".

### **What is being done:**

- Capacity building training programmes for Iraqi officials working in the area of environmental management and contaminated sites assessment, including community-based training, environmental emergency response, technology assessment, environmental inspections, environmental laboratory analyses, environmental impact assessment and environmental site assessment



- Work towards the rehabilitation of the Mesopotamian Marshlands, working with stakeholders from both Iraq and Iran to increase co-operative efforts in the management of the Marshlands. Several coordination meetings were held in 2004 & 2005, with the officials from the two countries present. Additionally, more than 10 training Workshops & Symposiums on the rehabilitation of Marshlands were convened in 2005 in the Arab Region, as well as in Japan, Paris and Geneva that were funded by the Japanese government and other donors. This project is expected to continue in 2006 with financial support from the Italian government.
- Work with the Ministry of Environment in Iraq, in their preparations to sign and ratify a number of MEAs, including Montreal Protocol, Stockholm Convention, Basel Convention, Rotterdam Convention, CBD, Ramsar and UNCCD

UNEP is currently undertaking the sustainable management and restoration project of the Mesopotamian Marshlands, with the following immediate objectives:

- To monitor and assess baseline characteristics of the marshland conditions, to provide objective and up-to-date information, and to disseminate tools needed for assessment and management
- To enhance capacity building of Iraqi decision makers and community representatives on aspects of marshland management, including: policy and institutional aspects, technical subjects, and analytical tools
- To identify Environmentally Sound Technologies (ESTs) options that are suitable for immediate provision of drinking water and sanitation, as well as wetland management, and to implement them on a pilot basis
- To identify needs for additional strategy formulation and coordination for the development of longer term marshland management plan, based on pilot results and cross-sectorial dialogue

### **Environmental law, policy and conventions, including Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)**

UNEP supports environmental policy design, and environmental legislation formulation and enforcement in the region through:

- technical assistance to governments
- assistance to national parliaments in designing and formulating environmental legislation



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- capacity building and training on environmental law and implementation of MEAs
- dissemination of information

#### What is being done

- There is a focus on building capacity in countries of the region in the implementation of and compliance with MEAs, including the Arab Regional Consultation on Compliance and Enforcement of MEAs in 2005
- Cooperation with the CITES Secretariat to review and monitor the registration process and all measures and efforts to manage falconry in the region and enhance the breeding of falcons and Hubara Bustard in the region
- Cooperation with the CITES Secretariat in the development of regional programme of reinforcement of the provisions of the Convention, capacity building and public awareness
- Contacts with CITES are underway to translate the convention into Arabic and to adapt Arabic as an official language for the convention
- UNEP and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Secretariat (MA) are jointly undertaking an Arab Region Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. The project supports the Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the Ramsar Wetlands Convention to contribute to the fulfillment of their assessment needs. It is being implemented in three selected sites in the Arab region (the Assir National Park, Saudi Arabia; the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt and the Tafilalt Oasis Morocco)
- The regional office completed the translation into English of the "Convention on the Conservation of Wildlife and Natural Habitats in the Countries of the GCC". Further efforts are underway to finalize and publish the translated version of the convention

#### Technology and Industry

UNEP supports decision-makers from governments, local authorities and the industry sector to develop and adopt policies and practices that:

- are cleaner and safer
- utilise natural resources in an efficient manner
- ensure an adequate management of chemical products
- incorporate environmental costs
- reduce contamination and decrease risks for human beings and the environment.



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### Chemicals and waste management:

Public concern over the management of solid and hazardous waste has markedly increased over the past few years. The signing and ratification of relevant MEAs, including the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions are an active goal in the region. UNEP and member states are also looking to the development of an integrated regional strategy on chemicals and wastes management, advocating principles of Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), alongside sound management strategies.

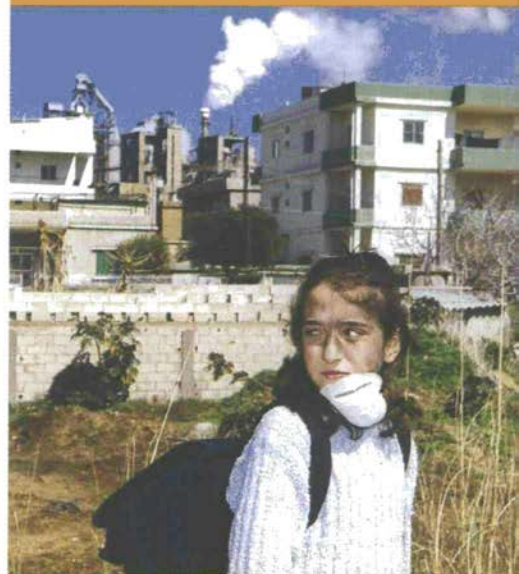
#### What is being done

- Involved through CAMRE in the development of an integrated regional strategy on chemicals and waste management - as part of the Arab Technical Team concerned with MEAs relevant to chemicals and waste management (Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, and Montreal Protocol)
- Support is also being provided to member states in their coordinated national legislations and Implementation Plans under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions through the co-organisation of the Arab Regional Symposium on the Adequacy of Arab Legislations Concerning Chemicals & Wastes Management
- UNEP, as a member of the steering board, continues to support the Regional Center of Training Technology Transfer for the Arab Countries under the Basel Convention (in Cairo)

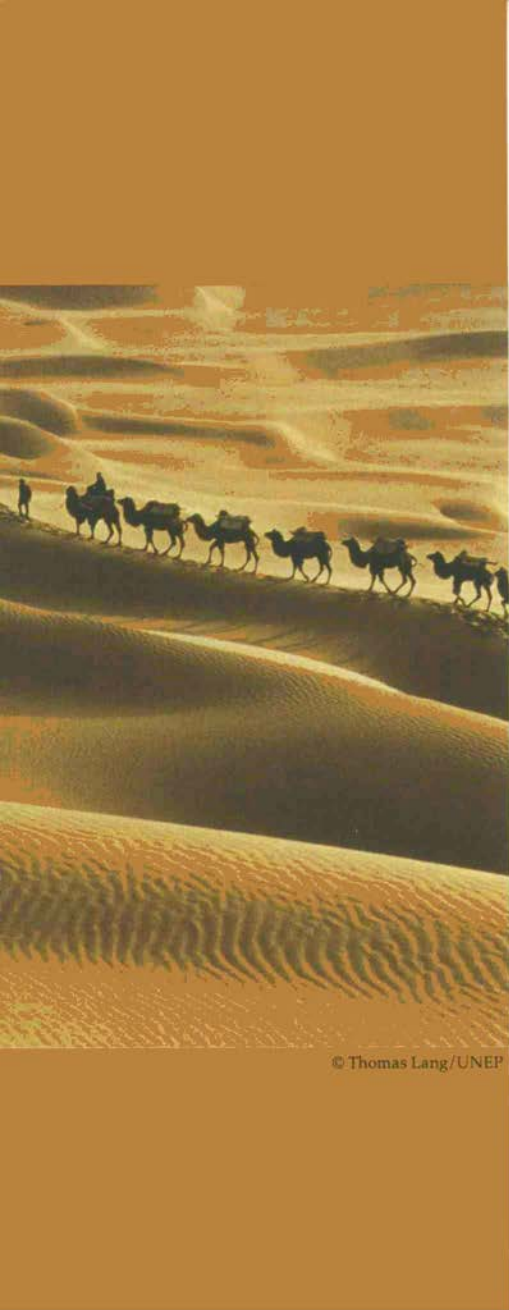
### OzonAction Programme

The Compliance Assistance Programme (CAP) operating under UNEP's OzonAction Programme enhances, strengthens and catalyzes efforts of member states to achieve and maintain their compliance with the Montreal Protocol and its amendments, targeting the phase out of the Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS). This is done through several means utilizing the technical and policy expertise of CAP and providing regular fora to facilitate direct contact and share experience among ODS officers in member states and key relevant organizations/secretariats. CAP also facilitates technology transfer through organizing thematic workshops/round table meetings based on the outcomes of biannual meetings of ODS officers.

As of the 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Parties (MOP 17), all West Asia Parties are in full compliance with all control measures of the protocol. The Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and Halon are considered the main consumed ODS. The consumption of West Asia Parties, as reported to the Ozone Secretariat, has decreased by 64.3%



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from 1987 to 2004. This trend is expected to continue and most West Asia Parties are expected to meet the 2007 cut-off (85%) of ODS consumption.

Several key challenges remain i.e. complying with final measures for CFCs and Halons, enforcing national/regional adopted legislation/regulations, curbing the growing trend of illegal trade in ODS, sustaining compliance beyond 2010, particularly for reducing dependency, and freezing HCFCs consumption and developing policies that deal with cross-cutting issues with other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). CAP maintains close cooperation at national levels, and with regional and sub-regional organizations and secretariats (e.g., LAS, CAMRE, GCC, Regional Intelligence Liaison Office (RILO), World Customs Organization (WCO), American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE)) to ensure their involvement for maintaining the region in compliance with the Montreal Protocol.

#### **What we have done - Recent Programme Highlights**

- CAP supported the GCC Secretariat in developing a unified ODS regulation which was endorsed by GCC leaders in their annual summit in 2005 (Abu Dhabi)
- CAP signed a regional cooperation agreement with the ASHRAE Chapters in West Asia to provide technical backstopping support for phase-out activities in West Asia countries in the refrigeration and air-conditioning sectors
- Integration of Montreal Protocol with the three conventions (Basel, Stockholm and Rotterdam) with the responsible Arab Technical Teams
- Training workshops were organized for Customs Officers on the control and monitor of ODS trade and curbing illegal trade. The concept of Green Customs was introduced during these workshops – in coordination with respective MEAs secretariats – and through individual meetings.

#### **Sustainable production and consumption**

Natural resources have been depleted and environmental degradation has risen dramatically with the increased scope and intensity of industrial (and urban) activities. Correspondingly, awareness has grown of the diverse and complex environmental problems caused by industrialisation and their impacts. Prevention is increasingly used by Arab industry as a control for environmental pollution, with the result that support for national cleaner production centres (NCPCs) has grown. NCPCs have been set up in Jordan and Lebanon and are

at the planning stage in the United Arab Emirates and Syria. Many voluntary initiatives in industry are also underway.

UNEP supports activities to raise awareness and build capacity in government agencies, industrial support agencies, and offers technical support and training to small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) to improve environmental management systems (EMS) and performance.

#### What is being done

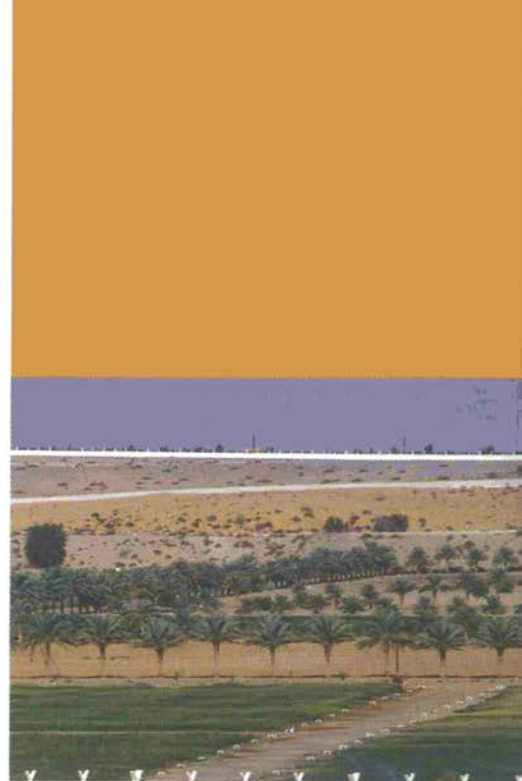
- Supported Arab industries to integrate environmental considerations into industrial development and implementation, for example:
  - The Arab cement and building materials industry (through the Arab Union of Cement and Building Materials Board Council) and support to sustainable construction initiatives
  - Arab SMEs have incorporated the components of EMS into day-to-day operations - over 70 companies have recently been trained on EMS
  - Issuance of the Arabic version of the Efficient Entrepreneur Calendar 2005 and circulation to over 300 companies and organisations in the Arab region
  - Launching of the Youth Exchange Manual-Arabic Version (UAE, April 2005), and participation in the Training Workshop on Sustainable Life Style for Youth

#### Energy and Transport

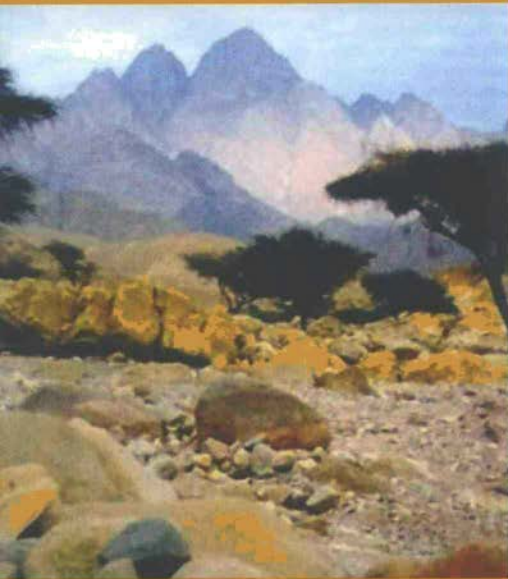
The per capita consumption of energy in some Arab States is among the highest in the world, giving rise to high emissions of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) and particulate air pollutants. UNEP supports the region to develop new policy approaches related to promoting less polluting fuels, such as unleaded fuel and natural gas alternatives, as part of a global Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles (PCFV) established at WSSD. UNEP hosts the Clearinghouse for this initiative. All GCC countries and several other Arab States phased out leaded gasoline during 2003. More sustainable fuels for power generation are also being promoted. UNEP also catalyses policies and programmes that promote energy efficiencies, cleaner technologies and renewable energy in industrial, urban and other sectors.

#### What is being done

- Coorganized the Environment 2005 Conference and Exhibition on Sustainable Transportation, including one-day Workshop on UNEP initiatives



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- The development of a number of Cleaner Development Mechanism (CDM) projects in the region, particularly in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen
- Further development of the proposal to establish a West Asia Centre of Excellence in Energy for Sustainable Development in Yemen, as a part of the Global Network on Energy for Sustainable Development
- In cooperation with ESCWA, LAS and the Ministry of Electricity and Energy in Egypt, UNEP organized the Arab Regional Conference on Energy for Sustainable Development: Progress Achieved and Environmental Issues, in Cairo during September 2005

### **Sustainable tourism and eco-tourism**

The Arab region is rich in tourism resources including archaeological, natural, religious and scenic sites. Approximately 24 million tourists come to the region annually (3.4 per cent of the world total) with a rate of growth of about 9.4 per cent.

#### **What is being done**

- In partnership with CAMRE and other regional stakeholders, promotion of an Arab approach towards sustainable tourism
- Development of policy guidelines and a regional strategy for sustainable tourism
- Capacity building within the tourism sector for sustainable development, focusing on the promotion in the Arab Region of the establishment of national and regional tourism strategies and programmes of action

### **Trade and Environment**

The establishment of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area represents a major effort by the League of Arab States to address the challenges of globalization and world trade liberalization.

#### **What is being done**

- Developing a 5-year regional trade and environment capacity building programme - in partnership with CAMRE and ESCWA - whose key objective is to enhance the competitiveness of Arab goods in the global market, while satisfying environmental protection standards
- Coorganized with CAMRE a regional workshop on Arab Bilateral Trade Liberalisation in Environmental Services

## Natural resources

### Land

UNEP helps countries to combat this scourge of the drylands through supporting the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). UNEP supported the development and implementation of the UNCCD Subregional Regional Action Programme for West Asia (UNCCD/SRAP-WA) as well as the UNCCD National Action Plans (NAPs) for several West Asia countries. SRAP focuses on two strategic domains common to all member countries of the sub-region namely: water resources and vegetation cover. Accordingly, SRAP operates through two thematic networks (TNs): Sustainable Water Management (TN1) and Sustainable Management of Vegetative Cover (TN2).

### What is being done

Sub-regional Action Programme (SRAP) for West Asia

- Regular meetings held with partners and stakeholders
- A meeting with key SRAP partners to review SRAP progress and to support its implementation was held in Bahrain in 2006
- A GEF Medium Size Proposal is in preparation in support of the SRAP

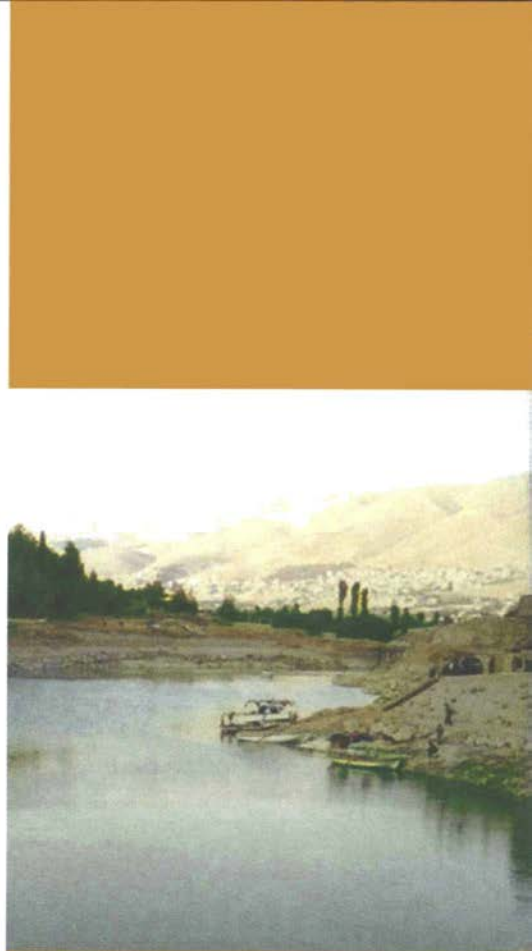
### UNCCD National Action Plans

UNEP has supported the development and formulation of the UNCCD National Action Plans (NAPs) for several West Asia member states and is currently supporting the formulation of the NAPs for Bahrain and Kuwait. In addition, UNEP has provided capacity building to UNCCD focal points through technical assistance and sponsoring their participation in many workshops and activities related to land degradation among other related issues.

### Abu Dhabi Initiative (ADI)

The First Regional Consultation Meeting of the Abu Dhabi Initiative for Implementation of the Priority Activities for the Regional Programme 2003-2008 was held from March 21-23, 2005 in Abu Dhabi. The priority areas identified include:

- Integrated management of water resources
- Land degradation and combating desertification



- Capacity building in the field of meteorology and to build early warning systems to contribution to the prevention or mitigation of emergency drought cases
- Disseminate available remote sensing technology for monitoring land degradation and vegetation cover

The ADI emphasizes the need to use existing expertise and experience in the region and to provide support to research and academic institutes in the region.

UNEP is a key partner with CAMRE on these initiatives and continues to support the development of projects related to combating land degradation in the region. UNEP also plays an active role in the activities of CAMRE Arab Technical Team on Biodiversity and Land Degradation.

### **Freshwater Resources**

In view of the scarcity of water resources and the high priority given by countries to the development and management of these resources, UNEP is assisting the countries of the region to develop national water plans in accordance with the provisions of Agenda 21 in close cooperation with other UN agencies.

#### **Water - institutional reforms and a shift towards demand management**

The West Asia region is one of the most water-stressed areas in the world, and its long-term water situation is becoming increasingly uncertain. Water balances either have already slumped into serious deficit, or are moving steadily in that direction. Water management is the main challenge

The fragmentation of water authorities is a major constraint on water resources management. Oman, Yemen, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Saudi Arabia, have established single water ministries responsible for all aspects of water resources. For example, in Saudi Arabia one ministry replaced three ministries dealing with different aspects of water resource management and development.



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### What is being done

- To respond to the needs of sustainable water development in the region, UNEP, with other UN agencies is focusing on a regional programme addressing Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), water demand management and water quality guidelines for desalinated water
- Ongoing support to the Water Middle East Conferences and Water Science and Technology Association's Conferences
- Member of the Arab Water Council

### Water returns to the desiccated Mesopotamian Marshlands

Positive signs of environmental recovery in the parched Mesopotamian Marshlands have been seen from new satellite images, taken in May 2003, examined by UNEP.

Streams and waterways that shrank and dried over the past decade have come back to life and drainage canals were swollen by an exceptional increase in water flows. Dry areas have been inundated as floodgates are opened, embankments and dykes breached and dams emptied upstream. Heavy rains have also contributed to the rising water levels.

Piecemeal interventions to modify control structures and earthworks, including those by the Marsh Arabs themselves, confirm their belief in the power of nature to heal itself. A coordinated management of the returning waters is needed urgently to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Marshlands, which is being achieved through the work being led by UNEP in the region.

### Marine and Coastal Areas

To meet the growing demand for urbanization and recreational activities, dredging and land reclamation has intensified and will continue to do so. The marine environment is increasingly threatened by land-based sources of pollution.

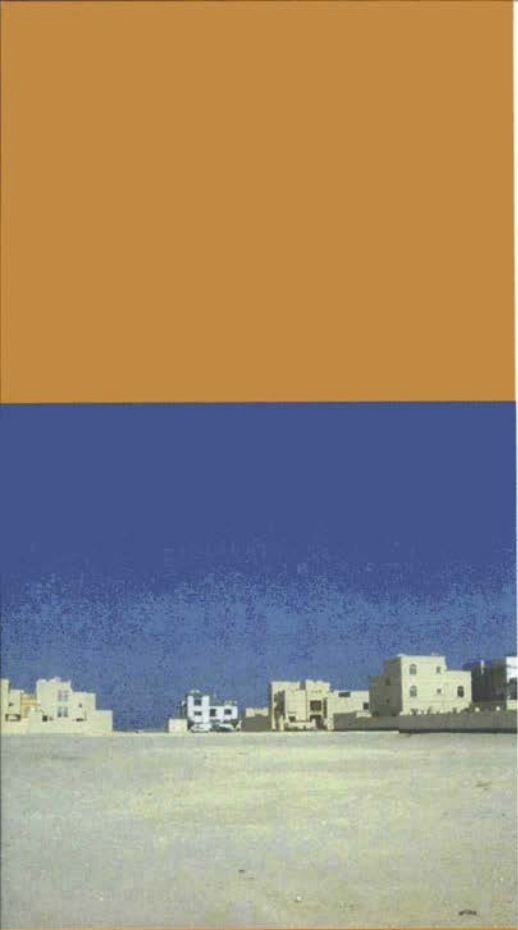
### What is being done

- Continued cooperation with PERSGA and ROPME in the implementation of programmes in the region
- Promotion of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), including development of ICZM strategies and programmes for the region

UNEP BAHRAIN



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## Biodiversity

The unique and highly vulnerable biodiversity of the Arab Region is at serious risk from degradation and/or destruction of habitats and the loss of species caused by population growth, agricultural and urban expansion, unsustainable use of biota, and industrial pollution.

### What is being done

- Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional Gene Bank - in cooperation with CAMRE and ICARDA
- Development of a regional programme on biodiversity
- Presentation of a Workshop on Biodiversity in Desert Ecosystems: Challenges and Opportunities at the Second Festival of the Cultures and Civilizations of World Deserts

## The urban environment

Air contamination has risen to alarming levels, especially in cities with more than one million inhabitants such as Baghdad, Damascus and Beirut.  $\text{SO}_2$  levels of more than  $100 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  are not unusual near industrial areas with refineries and power stations. Traffic also contributes to air pollution, emitting 5% of total  $\text{SO}_2$ , 37% of  $\text{NO}_x$ , 10% of suspended particulates and more than 80% of CO and hydrocarbons (GEO-2000).

The increases in particulate matter in the air, especially the high level in the region's cities is having an impact of human health in terms of increased incidence of asthma, bronchitis, allergies and other respiratory illnesses.

### What is being done

- Support to Yemen for an air quality expert to work with them on issues related to air pollution due to urban transportation systems. The technical expert delineated the problem, studied existing records, designed a systematic monitoring programme and recommended corrective policies, workable solutions and national action plan to be carried out in major cities (e.g., Sana'a).

## Global Environment Facility (GEF) activities in West Asia

UNEP, as one of the three implementing agencies of the GEF, is supporting a growing portfolio of national and regional projects in West Asia. In addition, some global projects addressing global environmental issues in biodiversity,

climate change, land degradation, persistent organic pollutants and international waters involve several countries of the region. UNEP located a GEF Liaison Officer in ROWA in September 2005 to support countries of West Asia in the formulation of project proposals to be submitted to GEF for funding and who will also help in UNEP/GEF project implementation and monitoring.

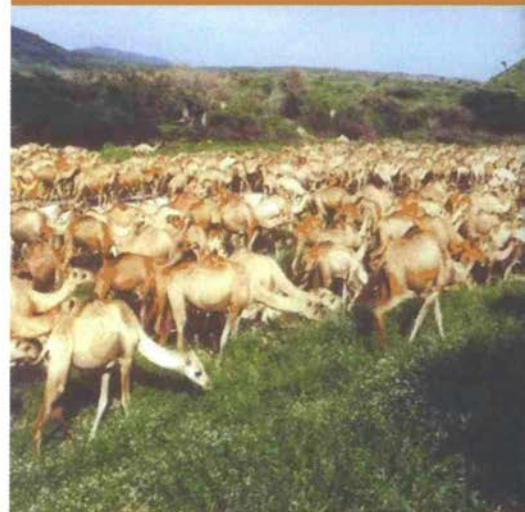
UNEP is supporting countries to implement MEAs through GEF funded “national enabling activities” on climate change (Bahrain), persistent organic pollutants (Lebanon, Jordan, Oman, Syria, Yemen), and biosafety (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen).

UNEP/GEF projects in biodiversity are in Yemen (on wetlands and migratory birds), Lebanon (on cedar Forests and on conserving wild plants) in Jordan, Kuwait and Syria (on biodiversity in arid and semi-arid zones).

UNEP/GEF projects on international waters in Lebanon and Syria and in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen are concerned with the strategic action programmes for the neighbouring seas. A project on integrated natural resources management for combating desertification in West Asia is under preparation.

All the countries of the West Asia region are included in the UNEP/GEF global environmental assessments, including the Global International Waters Assessment (GIWA), the Regionally Based Assessment of Persistent Toxic Substances, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA).

UNEP/GEF is supporting the formulation of two projects on the development of geothermal energy and energy efficiency for Yemen. A sizeable second phase of the implementation of the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden will be developed in collaboration with PERSGA, The World Bank and UNDP. The SAP will involve Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen from West Asia in addition to Arab countries bordering the Red Sea. In addition, a regional project to promote saline agriculture is being discussed with the International Centre for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) based in Dubai, UAE. Potential exists to support sustainable transport development and adaptation activities under the GEF operational programmes for climate change.



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## Communications and public awareness

This is the channel by which UNEP makes itself visible in West Asia and brings to regional attention matters of global environmental importance, encouraging links with governments, civil society and institutions interested in environmental topics. The UNEP message is put out through the printed word, electronic means, and the organisation of events. The International Year of Mountains, the International Year of Freshwater and World Environment Day in 2002 and 2003 provided ample opportunity for media coverage and information dissemination. For more information and a list of publications visit [www.unep.org.bh](http://www.unep.org.bh)



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### What is being done

- Organization of annual Regional Civil Society Forums
- Work relating to the YouthXchange Programme, including translation of the Manual on Sustainability to Arabic, organization of a seminar for the launching of the Arabic version of the YouthXchange Manual and dissemination of the Arabic Manual in the region with the Emirates Diving Association
- Regular press releases and media interviews on relevant issues
- Monthly inputs to the Environment and Development Magazine on UNEP activities
- Numerous TV, radio and newspapers interview on occasions associated with major Environmental events (World Environment Day, Arab Environment Day, and key conferences)

### 2006 - International Year of Deserts and Desertification

At its 22<sup>nd</sup> Governing Council session, UNEP invited the UN General Assembly to consider declaring an international year of deserts and desertification. Subsequently, the General Assembly proclaimed 2006 as the International Year of Deserts and Desertification with the view to raise public awareness of the issue and protect the biological diversity of deserts as well as the traditional knowledge of those communities affected by desertification. An inter-agency committee has been set up, bringing together the principal institutional partners of the United Nations active in the UNCCD implementation process, including UNEP, UNDP, IFAD, and other relevant UN bodies. All countries and civil society organisations are encouraged to undertake special initiatives to mark the Year and to get involved in any way possible. ([www.iydd.org](http://www.iydd.org))



## **UNEP partners in the region**

Governments in the region

United Nations system organisations

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia - ESCWA

### **Subregional organisations :**

The Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment - CAMRE

League of Arab States - LAS

Organization of the Islamic Conference - OIC

Regional Organisation for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden - PERSGA

Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment - ROPME

### **Others**

Arabian Gulf University - AGU

Arab Regional Centre for Environmental Law - ARCEL, Kuwait University

Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries - OPEC

Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries - OAPEC

International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas - ICARDA

Arab Centre for the Study of the Arid Zone and Drylands - ACSAD

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