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Written statement* submitted by Verein Sudwind Entwicklungspolitik, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

A Brief Report on Iran's Water Situation

Iran's water resources are in a critical situation and give rise to the profound concern of experts and environmentalists.

Iran is geographically located in an arid and semiarid climate with a median yearly rainfall of 250 mm. More than 80% of the country is arid and semiarid.

As a result, water management is of extraordinary importance. Unfortunately, however, the erroneous approach adopted by the country's authorities and leaders has led to the desiccation of almost all natural bodies of water.

According to Isa Kalantari, the former minister of agriculture, ground water resources have been exhausted and water shortage threatens the country. The negative balance of water withdrawal in the early years of the Islamic Revolution was less than 100 million m³ per annum. It has now increased 110 times to 11 billion m³. If nothing is done, Iran will turn into a desert over the next 30 years. The lakes of Orumiyeh, Bakhtegan, Tashk, Parishan and Gavkhuni, the wetlands of Hawr-al-Azim and the Hamun-e Jaz Murian are disappearing.¹

The erroneous approach adopted by the country's authorities with regard to the management of Iran's water resources can be summarised in three parts:

1 - Lack of investment in rainwater harvesting

The average rainfall capacity in Iran is approximately 413 billion m³ of which only 130 billion m³ are harvested. Because of inappropriate supervision, 20 billion m³ of harvestable water are allowed to flow into the Persian Gulf.²

2 - The implementation of giant projects without environmental assessment

The haphazard construction of dams and wells without environmental assessment and the use of novel tools with strong pumps have had a grave impact on the water resources. The dams themselves have been compromised as their natural supply has been disrupted.

According to a report by the Energy Ministry, the volume of water entering the reservoirs at Lar, Taleqan, Mamlu, Karaj and Latian from the beginning of the water year 2013 until now has decreased by 31% compared to the same period in the previous water year. The lack of rainfall has caused a drop in the water level. Also, more than half of the country's dams have not been dredged and no longer fulfil their original role of irrigation or power generation.³

An example of the implementation of plans without environmental assessment and infrastructures is the disaster of the Karun-3 Dam and the submersion of roads connecting 24 villages. Forced to travel by tugboat, many villagers have lost their lives over the past 9 years. The most recent catastrophe happened on 31 July 2013. Twelve women and children from the Gharibi-ha village in the Dehdez district of Khuzestan, travelling inside a minibus on a tugboat,

¹ <http://fararu.com/fa/news/155693/%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%DA%A9%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%AF>

² <http://asre-nou.net/php/view.php?objnr=26327>

³ <http://www.magiran.com/npview.asp?ID=1480533>

drowned after the minibus keeled over and fell into the Karun.⁴

3 - Water contamination

More than 20 tons of untreated municipal, industrial and chemical waste and sewage water are discharged annually into the surface and ground waters, the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. Each year at least 1.2 million barrels of oil are discharged into the Persian Gulf along Iran's maritime borders.⁵

There are about 163 polluted rivers, 60 to 70 of which are dead, i.e. an excess of sludge and pollution has destroyed their ecosystem. Around 35% of Iran's rivers are dead. The most polluted among them, Zarjub and Gowhar in Gilan, are biologically dead because of industrial and hospital wastewaters. These rivers contribute to the death of the Anzali Lagoon. According to the governor of Rasht, they are beyond restoration.^{6,7}

Because of high pollution, the Agh Balagh River in Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari Province suffers from the same fate. Not only is the region's drinking water affected but the ecological health of the Gandoman Wetland is also threatened.

The Karun River in Khuzestan is another highly polluted body of water. The development of the sugar cane agro-industry and peripheral industries with their discharge of contaminants and sludges into the river is one of the main causes of pollution.

According to Abdollah Tamimi, the MP for Shadgan, the extreme pollution of the Karun River, the absence of a well-equipped sewage treatment plant and the use of the river's raw and contaminated water as drinking water is responsible for numerous irreversible illnesses among the local population.⁸

Only in Ahvaz, the industry waste water of more than 20 major industries and a significant number of small industries without sewage treatment system flow directly into the Karun⁹ while in Khuzestan, the amount is 265 million m³ of pollution per year.¹⁰

The seventh largest wetland in the world and the largest national freshwater lake, Lake Hamun has been all but wiped off the map. The destruction of Lake Hamun is responsible for the greatest nationwide displacement of people due to an environmental cause. In fact, the dust particles blown off the lake during sandstorms are causing respiratory and ocular diseases.

⁴ <http://ahwaz.irib.ir/%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AB/6863-12%20%D8%B2%D9%86%20%D9%88%20%DA%A9%D9%88%D8%AF%DA%A9%20%D8%AF%D8%B1%20%D8%AF%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7%DA%86%D9%87%20%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%203%20%D8%BA%D8%B1%D9%82%20%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF>

⁵ <http://hamshahrionline.ir/details/218417>

⁶ <http://www.iranpress.ir/jahaneghtesad/template2/News.aspx?NID=5631>

⁷ <http://www.mehrnews.com/detail/News/1712523>

⁸ <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/292671/%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%A2%D8%A8-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%81%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87-%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%DA%A9%D9%86%D9%86%D8%AF>

⁹ <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/42125>

¹⁰ <http://sharto.ir/Template1/News.aspx?NID=12715>

Today, Lake Hamun waits in vain for a drop of water from Helmand River. Several factors have contributed to this situation: on the part of the Afghanistan, a lack of regard for the recommendations made by the delta committee (composed of experts from Canada, the US and Chile) for Helmand River and a violation of the 1972 agreement between Iran and Afghanistan, according to which 26 m³ metres of water per second should be allowed to flow freely; the creation of two dams (Kajaki and Kaman Khan) along the Afghan part of the river; and the weakness of Iran's diplomatic relations in solving this issue.¹¹

Another concern is the new phenomenon of fine dust particles in the Western parts of Iran, also mentioned in last year's Sudwind report.¹² These particles cannot be exclusively attributed to the desertification of arable lands in Iraq; rather, they have internal as well as external sources. The Western parts of Iran must be allowed the required share of water from wetlands and rivers if the internal source of suspended particles is to be eliminated.

As long as no serious countermeasures are taken and operational programmes put into place, Iran's 18 provinces will continue to grapple with the phenomenon of fine dust particles. The atmospheric pollution caused by these suspended particles – critical at present – puts the health of the population at serious risk.

Since little attention is paid to industrial agriculture and funds available for mechanisation are insufficient, farmers tend to pursue fast yields. According to a May 2013 report of Mehr newspaper, the per capita ingestion of pesticides is 400 grams: an extremely high rate that puts the health of the population at risk.

According to, Dr. Mohammad Kazem Nadafi, the head of the Centre for Environmental and Workplace Health at the Ministry of Health, 11 provinces are currently forced to use untreated sewage water for irrigation, thereby causing various diseases among the population.

He said: "Our expectation is that alternatives will be suggested, that provincial governors will address the problem and that suitable methods will be adopted against the spread of diseases from contaminated water and vegetables."¹³

The inefficient waste collection and management system is another aspect of water pollution. The leachate of waste materials in landfill sites contaminates surface and ground waters. Unfortunately, even though enormous sums have been spent, attempts to change the waste collection system and reclaim raw materials have so far been unsuccessful.

In sum, Iran is suffering from an environmental crisis. Here as in previous reports, we have outlined the facts: the pollution of the Caspian Sea in the North and the Persian Gulf in the South, the risk of desiccation threatening Lake Orumiyeh in Azarbaijan, the contamination of numerous rivers and the drying up of wetlands and water reservoirs. To overcome this crisis, experts and environmentalists propose the following measures and request those responsible at the HRC to call on the Iranian government to honour international environmental commitments.

Recommendations:

- 1- A precise evaluation of the short term and long term agricultural, industrial and drinking water needs considering urban populations and population growth.

¹¹ <http://www.mehrnews.com/detail/News/2114958>

¹² <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G12/166/03/PDF/G1216603.pdf?OpenElement>

¹³ <http://news.gooya.com/society/archives/163005.php>

- 2- A comprehensive roadmap towards reducing the waste of water that is endemic in Iran.
 - 3- A moratorium on the construction of wells and dams; the restoration of lake water levels; and serious negotiations with neighbouring countries on the issue of common rivers.
 - 4- A review of industrial sites; the promotion of clean and sustainable industries in the water and energy fields; a review of industrial production.
 - 5- A survey of agricultural production methods and crops across the country; an investigation into new water-saving irrigation methods.
 - 6- The prevention of water contamination; the cleaning up of all waterways; the enforcement of applicable laws against industrial and governmental polluters.
 - 7- Getting the population and civil institutions involved in water management; promoting environmental awareness in order to preserve Iran's natural resources; raising young generations with a responsible outlook on the world and teaching them to be less wasteful with natural resources. Our ecological responsibility extends beyond the present circumstances to the needs of future generations.
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