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ENVIRONMENT

WATER: War Fears Aired At Kyoto Forum Opening; More

A potential war in Iraq marked the opening of the [World Water Forum](#) today in Kyoto, Japan, with a shrinking number of attendees calling for shoring up water supplies in the interest of long-term development goals.

"The water crisis and the discussions that will take place at the forum will have a greater effect on humankind in the 21st century than the current Middle East crisis," said [World Water Council](#) Vice President William Cosgrove.

About 10,000 delegates were expected to take part in the conference, but only an estimated 5,700 have shown up (Eric Johnson, [Japan Times](#), March 17).

Sanitation is emerging as a leading concern at the conference. Arno Rosemarin of the [Stockholm Environment Institute](#) called on delegates to put aside what he called a "psychology of excrement" that prevented serious discussion of a deepening crisis. "We are entrenched in a global sanitation crisis, but no one wants to talk about it," Rosemarin said. Until excrement can be discussed "without squirming or giggling, we will not resolve this crisis," he added (Lauren Gelfand, Agence France-Presse, March 17).

The World Bank is expected to use the conference to sound renewed calls for controversial dam projects aimed at increasing stores of usable water in developing countries. "We have to confront the fact that developing countries will have to invest more," said World Bank Vice President Ian Johnson. "That means governments embracing controversial projects -- and that includes dams" (Mason/Houlder, *Financial Times*, March 15-16).

Arsenic is also set to be a leading topic, with U.N. research pointing to potentially toxic water supplies affecting some 35 million people in India, Bangladesh and Nepal over the next 20 years. "People need clean water to live," said Zafar Adeel of the [U.N. University](#). "Without international commitment to resolve the crisis, we could reach catastrophic levels in a very short time."

A declaration of support for rainwater harvesting as a remedy to water shortages is expected to be part of a coming forum statement, with U.N. officials pointing to such projects in China as examples. "Rainwater harvesting could help literally billions of people," said Nick Nuttall, a spokesman for the U.N. Environment Program (AFP, March 16).

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