

## ***Water in the Middle East: Conflict or Cooperation?***

In the Middle East, water is scarce and oil is plentiful. We hear often about the value of the crude oil deposited under desert sands in many countries of the region. We know that oil often leads to conflicts and war, but can also be the basis of trade partnerships and agreements. But as populations in the region expand and climate warms, attention turns to water. Will this scarce resource bring the region more bitter conflict and division? Or might people of the region cooperate to conserve and develop water resources for the good of all?

### **Water Sources**

In most of the Middle East, rainfall is a welcome event. In arid climates, winter is the time when some scant precipitation can be expected. Homes are built with cisterns on the roof to capture and store water for the dry months to come. Municipalities do the same. More rain falls in mountain and highland areas. Most of the rivers of the region begin in the mountain areas of Turkey and Iraq. As they flow to the seas, each of these streams is tapped for drinking water, irrigation, and industry. Each of the rivers also is used to carry away waste. Improved technology allows governments and industries to drill deep into aquifers beneath the dry lands and draw up stored water. New desalination plants along the Mediterranean Sea use expensive new equipment to remove the salt from sea water. Yet all these sources of water cannot supply the expanding population.

### **Conflict or Cooperation: A Regional Choice**

Competition for water produces winners and losers. Some settlements and businesses with access to water prosper, while others struggle to survive. Palestinians complain that Israeli policies unfairly favor Jewish farmers and housing complexes. They point out that giant Israeli wells are pumping water from the aquifer under Palestinian lands. As resentment builds, other people in the region are suggesting ways people can work together to make the most of the available water resources. They suggest that everyone should work together to conserve, recycle and reuse water. They suggest sharing the expense - and the benefits - of large, expensive projects for the benefit of all. This thirsty region can't wait for a political solution, they insist. The water problem must be solved now!

