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TODAY'S TOP STORIES

World Water Day Wraps

By Megan Gambino

The United Nations brought the issue of water scarcity into the public consciousness with Thursday's "Coping with Scarcity"-themed World Water Day, revealing ominous statistics about access and shortages in a call for support.

The U.N. projects that two-thirds of the world's population will experience water stress by 2025, with the most dire regions being North Africa, the Middle East, and West Asia. Director-General of the U.N.'s Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Jacques Diouf declared in a speech at the World Water Day celebration at the FAO headquarters in Rome that 1.2 billion people currently live in regions with shortages, with the potential for 500 million more to reach that state, according to the Agence France Presse (AFP).

The observance of World Water Day sprung from the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. The day was set as March 22, and the first year of observance was 1993.

UNICEF, which works in more than 90 countries to improve access to sanitary water, collected one-dollar donations from diners drinking tap water at 297 New York City restaurants for its "Tap Project," one of the most visible partnerships with World Water Day.

"The key measurement of success in this first year was the number of restaurants on board in the Manhattan area," says Stevan Miller, director of corporate partnerships for the US Fund, who has been leading the project. "The event was an amazing success, and in most cases diners were donating three, four...ten times more than the dollar amount."

According to UNICEF, more than 21 percent of children living in developing countries are deprived of clean water, making water scarcity the second largest cause of death in children under the age of five. Each dollar donation made in New York City yesterday can provide 100 water purification tablets or 40 liters of safe drinking water for 40 days to one child. UNICEF has also linked more than a billion people to water access over the past 15 years and intends to reduce the staggering 1.2 billion still affected by half by 2015, drilling and digging new wells within about a two-mile range of people in need.

UNICEF plans to take the Tap Project national next year, expanding into L.A., Chicago, Boston, Atlanta, Houston, and a half a dozen other markets, in hopes of becoming the key program to recognize World Water Day.

In lieu of the second chapter of the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report due to be released in Brussels on April 6, experts also warned that global warming will exacerbate the water scarcity problem, according to the AFP. The newswire was granted access to the latest draft of the report and relayed the calculation that a temperature rise of 3.8 to 7.2 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100 compared with 1990 levels would place from 2 to 3.2 billion people in a position of "increased water scarcity."

For more on the global water crisis, read "Tapped" in the Special Edition Green Issue of *Outside*, now on stands. [Plus, click here to hear podcast interviews with water warriors Jean-Michel Cousteau and Greg MacGillivray.](#)