

Environmental Pollution in Arab Countries will Increase: Report

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ABU DHABI — Challenges facing Arab countries especially in fresh water scarcity, desertification and, air and marine pollution, will increase because of climate change implications, according to the Arab Environment Future Challenges Report.

The presentation was made by the Arab Forum for Environmental Development (AFED), at a ceremony in Abu Dhabi on Thursday.

The ceremony was jointly organised by the Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi and AFED. The Arab region, which stretches from Morocco and Mauritania in the west, through northern Africa and the Levant, to the Arabian Gulf in the east, is a region facing distinctive environmental circumstances and challenges, the report said.

The report, compiled by independent experts, estimated that in the Arab region as a whole, the cost of environmental degradation is estimated at five per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). The report also said that some governments in the region had failed to address these mounting economic costs with effective policies.

However, the report praised the environmental work carried out in Abu Dhabi, describing the Abu Dhabi Emirate Environment Strategy 2009-2013, adopted by the emirate, as a “model” and called on Arab countries to follow this model. The report also praised the clean energy initiative ‘Masdar,’ which was launched by Abu Dhabi government. “Although they are often largely invisible or ignored, the economic costs of environmental degradation in the Arab region are growing,” stated the report. “By environmental degradation we mean issues such as air pollution. For example, the health bill paid by Arab countries for diseases caused by air pollution from transport only is \$5 billion”, Najib Saab, secretary general of AFED, told *Khaleej Times*. “Other source of loss of income is sea pollution, which not only affects fisheries, but also severely decreases the potential of tourism”, added Saab.

Water scarcity, is a major dilemma in the Arab region. As Saab explained, 15 out of 22 Arab countries are below the water poverty line. A different kind of problem is the rise of sea levels by up to four metres in the next decades. “There are 18,000 kilometres of inhabited coastal area in the Arab region, which is going to be affected by sea water rise”, warned Saab. “Although the Arab region does not contribute more than 5 per cent to the causes of global climate change, its effects on the region will be very severe. According to recent modelling studies, the Arab region will face an increase of 2 to 5.5 degrees Celsius in the surface temperature by the end of the 21st century. “In addition, this temperature increase will be coupled with a projected decrease in precipitation of between 0 and 20 per cent. Clearly, adaptation and mitigation strategies need to be researched, discussed and implemented”, the report stressed.

Saab admitted that not all is bleak. The report is taken on an Arab road tour and so far it was well received. “In Lebanon for example, we convinced the government to include environmental degradation in their budget, which will encourage more spending on environment”, said Saab.

In Abu Dhabi the report was welcomed and endorsed by Mohammad Bowardi, secretary general of Abu Dhabi Executive Council, managing director of Environment Agency — Abu Dhabi and board member of AFED.

“Despite the magnitude of the pollution levels and environmental degradation in the Arab states, we still have a chance to stop this deterioration”, said Bowardi.

(khaleej Times)

