On behalf of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), I am pleased to welcome you to the United Nations House to celebrate, for the first time, the Arab Water Day, in implementation of the resolution adopted by the Arab Ministerial Water Council in which the third of March of each year was proclaimed as a water day in the Arab region.

Please allow me, first of all, to express gratitude and appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Gebran Bassil, Minister of Energy and Water of the Republic of Lebanon, for his patronage of this event, to their Excellencies the ambassadors and to the distinguished guests attending this event.

The Arab region suffers from scarcity in water resources due to the arid and semi-arid climate conditions prevailing in almost 82 percent of its area. While the region is facing a major challenge with the increasing demand on water resources from all sectors, especially agriculture, ensuring the right of countries in the region to share common water resources is yet an additional challenge to the achievement of Arab water and food security. In this context, ESCWA has given paramount importance to issues related to the management of shared water resources in the region, including them in the work programme of the Sustainable Development and Productivity Division since 2005 and for the years to come. ESCWA, in cooperation with the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources in the Federal Republic of Germany (BGR), has implemented several capacity building programmes for experts from Member States focusing on ways and methodologies for negotiations on shared water resources. Moreover, ESCWA has held numerous meetings for experts from Member States on international legal and institutional frameworks governing shared water resources with the aim of developing a common regional vision for the management of shared water resources and achieving water and food security in the Arab region.
Ladies and gentlemen,

Climate change represents a clear threat to Arab water security. Based on scientific projections, water resources will be greatly affected, quantitatively and qualitatively, by climate change, as it will lead to a decrease in water resources and to an increase of drought conditions in many parts of the region. This, in turn, will lead to lower agricultural productivity and will expose the region to further desertification. In this context, and through effective partnership with the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Program - Regional Office for Western Asia and other relevant regional organizations, ESCWA has undertaken numerous activities in support of its member countries preparedness efforts to face the potential impacts of climate change. At its twenty-fifth ministerial session, ESCWA adopted a resolution by which it would prepare a study to assess the impact of climate change on the economic and social development in the region, with an emphasis on fresh water resources. According to the same resolution, ESCWA would adopt the necessary processes to raise awareness on climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, to work with the governments of member states on enhancing capacities, and to provide technical support for integrating these measures into national strategies and to develop required implementation mechanisms.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Arab leaders have accorded particular interest to water issues. The Arab Economic, Social and Development Summit, held in Kuwait in early 2009, adopted an important resolution by which it mandated the Arab Ministerial Water Council to develop a strategy for water security in the Arab region in order to meet the challenges and the future requirements for sustainable development and to approve a regional project for integrated water resources management in the Arab region. The Summit resolution underscored the commitment of Arab States to the implementation of this project, with the support and in coordination with all partners, including Arab financial institutions and Arab and international organizations, including civil society organizations.

Ladies and gentlemen

Finally, we would like to emphasize that Arab countries and their institutions have taken positive and effective steps towards setting efficient water policies and developing the institutional and legal frameworks necessary for achieving water security at the national level, even though to extents that vary from one country to another, depending on prevailing economic and social conditions and available resources. However, the greatest challenge for the region lies in the particular circumstances it is facing, which contribute to further deteriorating their capabilities, natural resources, increase pollution and raise human suffering. This calls for more impetus to Arab efforts, within a framework of regional and international cooperation, in order to achieve Arab water security as a basic requirement for sustainable development for all the peoples of the region.

Thank you!