



23 April 2014 – Over 1 billion people lack access to safe drinking water. That means that 1 person in 7 of the global population cannot quench their thirst. Even more have an unstable or scarce access to water, and one fifth of the world’s population face concrete water scarcity.

Oil powers our cars, diamonds adorn our jewels and gold has always been coveted - but none is a fundamental need. The scarcity of water today, and its necessity, has given it a new name: Blue Gold. And, like diamonds and oil, water already has played a role in several conflicts. For example, Blue Gold is a factor impeding the settlement of disputes between India and Pakistan. A 2012 report found that, “With India constructing several dams in the Indus River Basin, the Pakistani military and jihadi groups now identify water disputes as a core issue”.

Water is unique because of its indispensability; everyone understands that no water simply means no life.

However, one crucial difference remains between water and its other, conflict-prone counterparts: “Water - as opposed to other conflict resources such as diamonds - is not lootable, meaning it’s not a resource you can pick up and walk away with,” explained David Michel, director of the environmental security programme at [The Stimson Centre](#) , pointing out that a cubic metre of water weighs a ton.

In disaster relief situations, water is one of the first necessities mobilized to victims.

Contaminated water not only exacerbates a disaster situation but poses an everyday health risks. Following the violence in South Sudan more than 10,000 people arrived at the UNICEF base in Bentiu. “Those who survived horrendous violence now face the very real risk of fatal water-borne disease outbreak”, [said UNICEF’s Representative](#) in South Sudan, Jonathan Veitch.

“In times of drought the populations will move to wherever the resources are. It does trigger conflict quite often... In years of scarcity they are happening almost every day. Will water-based conflicts increase? Certainly. But there’s all kinds of different solutions,” said Jeanine Cooper, former head of office for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Kenya. These solutions include international legislation such as [UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses](#)

“Water is food production, it’s drinking, it’s fisheries and transportation, it’s a solvent, it’s sanitation, it’s cooling, and it has religious significance,” says Michel. A person can live for a couple weeks without food; yet only survive a few days without water. H2O makes up the majority of the human body. Water not only surrounds us, but it’s an integral part of us. Better management, cooperation and local discussion is needed to not only ensure water supply, but to ward off the previous UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s [declaration](#) that: “Fierce competition for fresh water may well become a source of conflict and wars in the future.”

Source: [IRIN News](#)

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