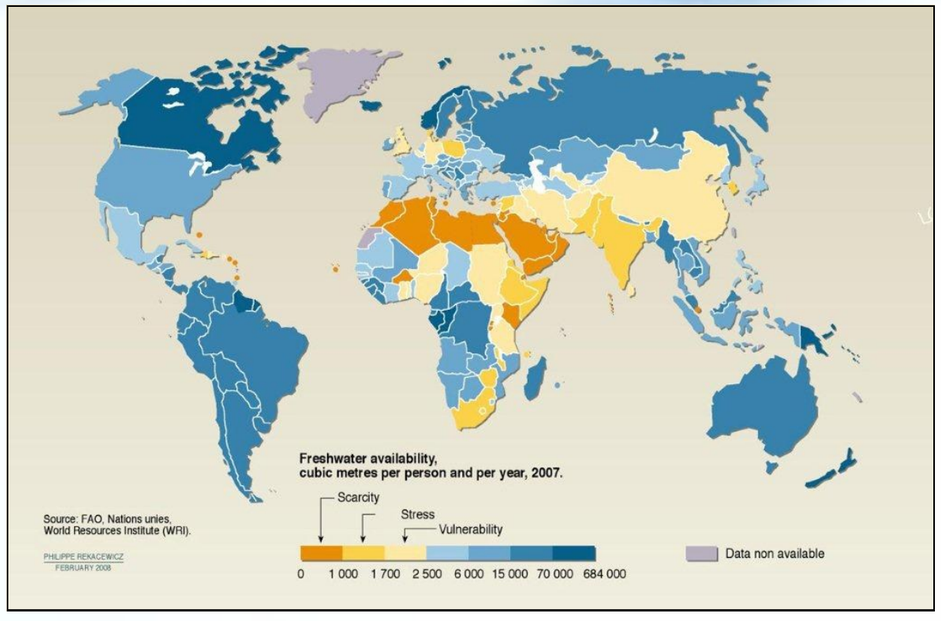
DRINKING WATER
A Precious, Limited Resource



Water Scarcity

Water scarcity is defined as the point at which the aggregate impact of all water uses impinges on the supply or quality of water under prevailing institutional arrangements. Affecting every continent in the world including ours, about 1.2 billion people, or almost one-fifth of the world's population, live in areas of physical scarcity, and 500 million people are approaching this situation. Another 1.6 billion people, or almost one-quarter of the world's population, face economic water shortage (where countries lack the necessary infrastructure to take water from rivers and aquifers).

Water scarcity is among the main problems to be faced by many societies and the World in the 21st century. Water use has been growing at more than twice the rate of population increase in the last century and, although there is no global water scarcity as such, an increasing number of regions are chronically short of water.

Water scarcity is both a natural and man-made phenomenon. There is enough water on the planet for six billion people but it is distributed unevenly and too much of it is wasted, polluted and unsustainably managed. Water managers typically assess scarcity by looking at the population-water equation. An area is experiencing water scarcity when annual water supplies drop below 1,700 m^2 per person. When annual water supplies drop below 1,000 m^2 per person, the population faces water scarcity, and below 500 cubic meters "absolute scarcity".