

What the Water Crisis in Cape Town Reminds Us

Perhaps we remember - when we were young - of TV ads advising us to use water wisely, and perhaps when we were young, we did exactly just that. But a lot of us today might keep the tap water running while brushing our teeth, taking a lot of time showering, not finishing our drinking water, etc., thinking just what would happen anyway. What if something serious might happen? What if, "Day Zero" would hit us any moment now?

"Day Zero", as Newsweek puts it, is "...when the city's water will go dry, a global first for major metropolis." And this is what is happening to Cape Town, South Africa. It is a condition, that CNN shows the satellite images of just how Cape Town's "...water reservoir has shrunk..." as the city prepares for "Day Zero" which at first should happen by mid-April 2018, and now it has been pushed back to June 4. The government of South Africa has planned on actions for "Day Zero" in Cape Town, starting from shutting off the water supply, limiting the city's water usage, up to using the country's "...military to protect Cape Town's water supply in the event...of..." "Day Zero"..." as reported by Global news. Should the day come, Cape Town will be the first major city in the world to have lost its water supply.

What happens when a city loses its water? Newsweek explains Cape Town residents "...would need to go to collection points for a daily consumption of 25 liters, or nearly 7 gallons." While the city still assures that places such as hospitals and schools would be prioritized in terms of water supply, no one knows how long that condition would last. When the city could no longer provide water even for hospitals and schools, what would happen? Moody's report, as written in Daily mail, predicts that following 'Day Zero,' a threat to public health would materialize, given poor sanitation of the city, this would make Cape Town a perfect place where various diseases would develop.

The report also warns of the "...threat of social order..." This warning has actually occurred. On January 31, 2018, ABC News reports of how the city formerly known as Camissa is witnessing a growing tension; the police has detained one person within the week for breaking a fight over water. A fight here and there might not mean much, but when the haves of the city keep using water indiscriminately, then this inequality "...might lead to civil strife and increased of conflict and crime..."

In 2003, the United States' Department of Defense produced a report warning of "...violence and disruption stemming from the stresses created by abrupt changes in the climate pose a different threat to national security than we are accustomed today." Professor Marcus King from George Washington University's Elliot School of International Affairs concluded that climate change has been thought about in "...very confined areas..." and advised "...it's important to demonstrate the links between things like climate change, drought, and conflicts." If all of the above happened in Cape Town, then the conflict would definitely stay in Cape Town. Or would it?

The Guardian writes that as we speak, the world, "from California to the Middle East..." including North Africa, South Asia, countries like Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran among others, are drying up, where experts fear that the world "...is standing on a precipice." With no water - drinking, washing, agriculture, energy production - life, would be difficult. Mass migrations to better places would be inevitable, making today's refugee flows look minuscule. And this might just lead to what ISIS did, where it 'weaponized' water in order to control the population. This might also lead to inter-state war, just like Egypt when it threatened Ethiopia with airstrikes due to the damming of the Nile River.

Why did it happen? Like all stories, there is more than one side to it, and the same goes for Cape Town water crisis. In this case, that other side would better be served as a question. Some questions that arise about the drought are surrounding climate change, some Israel, and some, the country's economic system. The drought began to hit the country in 2015 where annual rainfall between January and December 2015 has been it's lowest in more than 100 years. 2016 El Nino that hit the country had worsened the country's drought. Cape town actually has more than 15 spring tunnels underneath it serving its residents with fresh water. Yet its poor management and the growth of the city caused the Cape Town's water system to become polluted, making the water to be diverted underground straight into the ocean. Add that to climate change, Cape Town had just been served a recipe for disaster. And even with Government's push back of the date of "Day Zero" to June 4, South Africa's Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs said the current situation has been classified as a

“national disaster.”

Israel has been offering help to the country. During 2015's Milan Expo Benjamin Netanyahu stated that he wanted to befriend African countries by offering its technology, including that of water treatment and irrigation. Netanyahu went on in his speech saying that “People today around the world have a better quality of life thanks to Israeli technology and innovation...this is much stronger than any boycott.” If South Africa's drought has been acknowledged a few years earlier, why then the country did not buy the technology offered by Israel in order to prevent this disaster from happening? Why did South Africa decline to collaborate with Israel? So much so that even 2016 “water summit” in the country was canceled “...following protest against the planned participation of an Israeli diplomat...”

Political economist Lorenzo Fioramonti who was scheduled to take part in the summit canceled his participation after it was announced that Israel's ambassador to South Africa Arthur Lenk was also planning to speak there. Professor Patrick Bond from the University of KwaZulu-Natal added that “...Israeli diplomats should not have been invited to the “summit”...” arguing that Israel is stealing Palestine's water.

Israeli media has been blaming South Africa's drought on its decision not to take Israeli's technology, in which a Jerusalem opinion writes that “...South Africa is in no position to refuse help from Israel...South Africa, in contrast, has stubbornly boycotted Israel, out of solidarity with the Palestinian cause.”

Boycott Divestment and Sanction (BDS) is big in South Africa. Boycott, the word that Netanyahu tried to erase in South Africans' minds towards Israel, is exactly what stopped the country from using its water technology. South Africa's minister of Water and Sanitation, Nomvula Mokonyane, during the Israeli Apartheid Week, acknowledged that Israel wants South Africa to use its water technology, yet questions Israel's strategy to use water “...more as a weapon of war...” towards the Palestinians. South Africa believes that Israel is practicing Apartheid towards Palestinians, something that brought back too many traumas to South Africans. And Adri Nieuwhof writes in the Electronic Intifada how “It is the reason the Israeli government and its lobby continue to attack South Africans who make the comparison between Apartheid in South Africa and Israel.”

Regarding South Africa's economic system, Fioramonti explains to the Daily Vox how his research “...shows that we are running out of water not only because of environmental trends that we...ignore but also because our economic system dictates that we take water away from people in need to feed obsolete energy and agricultural systems...controlled by small elite...” He adds that this is the result “...of a highly unequal society...” in 2009 former Justice Kate O'Regan also said that despite rainfalls in the country, “...access to water has been grossly unequal...in South Africa...”

Cape Town, as explained earlier, was formerly known as Camissa, meaning “The place of sweet waters.” The world needs to help the country with technologies coming from a place that does not bring gruesome memories to the country like Israel. And like Kate O'Regan said, equality of water supply is a must, both to the wealthy and to the poor. And South Africans needs to rethink about their water consumption and brace for what nature has got on its sleeves. If Cape Town is heading to a point of no return, then this should serve the world as a lesson, and this situation should never have to happen again anywhere in the world. Or the impact would be unthinkable.

Resources

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