

Egypt, Uganda talk over River Nile water

Contributed by Egypt News
Wednesday, 04 November 2009

Egypt's Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif

Egypt and Uganda are in new talks about the use of the River Nile water after previous negotiations with riparian countries failed to reach a compromise, a top Egyptian government official on a visit here said on Wednesday.

Mona Omar, the assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for African Affairs, told reporters that a delegation of Egyptian experts were sent to Uganda about a week ago with new proposals for a compromise clause into the proposed Nile Water Basin Cooperative Framework agreement.

She did not however reveal what the proposals are but said the Egyptian team had already met its Ugandan counterpart.

"We think that the only way for us the riparian countries is just cooperation, if we don't cooperate then the agreement will be useless," she said.

"We agreed on about 98 percent of the agreement, it is only two or three points that we did not agree on," she added.

Tension has been brewing between Egypt, Sudan and other Nile basin countries including Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, and Ethiopia over the content of colonial agreements that favored Egypt and Sudan over exploitation of the Nile.

The other riparian countries demand an equitable water-sharing pact that would allow for bigger access to Nile water resources for irrigation in view of the persistent drought, which has caused food shortages, leaving millions of people on the verge of starvation.

Egypt argues that the upstream countries have far greater rainfall than it has, but they have hardly any and no other sources of water other than the Nile.

Recent negotiations between Egypt, Sudan and the other countries stalled after the two countries, Egypt and Sudan, declined to sign the new cooperation framework agreement.

The two countries want a review of Article 4 (b) of the Nile Water Basin Cooperative Framework, which states: "Nile Basin states therefore agree, in a spirit of cooperation, not to significantly affect the water security of any other Nile Basin State."

Egypt and Sudan want the clause to be: "Nile Basin States therefore agree, in a spirit of cooperation, not to adversely affect the water security and current uses and rights of any other Nile Basin States."

Omar said Egypt's main concern is the management of water which if not properly done can lead to the death of millions of Egyptians who solely depend on the Nile.

"The only thing we are asking is that we get a notification so as to know whether it will cause any harm for us. In Egypt more than 80 million people depend completely on the Nile, if the water goes less, the 80 million will die," she said.

Uganda after suffering from a severe drought which has left over 3.5 million people on the verge of starvation, especially in the semi arid northeastern part of the country, is embarking on a major irrigation plan instead of depending on rainfall-fed agriculture.

The country suffering from a power crisis, which according to experts has slowed down its economic growth, is also embarking on setting up hydropower dams along the Nile.

EGYPT NEWS