Water&Africa

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Water for peace and prosperity in Africa

African Desk
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What World Water Day 2025 Reminds Us of Africa



World Water Day 2025 reminds us that water security remains one of the defining challenges of our time. As the global population grows and climate change accelerates, access to clean and reliable water sources is becoming increasingly strained. Rising demand, pollution, and extreme weather events are pushing water systems to their limits, requiring urgent action to safeguard this critical resource.

This year's UN theme, "Glacier Preservation," highlights the vital role that glaciers play in sustaining freshwater supplies for millions worldwide. Glaciers act as natural reservoirs, releasing water steadily to rivers and ecosystems. However, rapid glacier melt due to climate change threatens water availability, disrupts ecosystems, and increases the risk of natural disasters such as floods and droughts. Protecting these frozen water sources is essential for ensuring long-term water security.

Water systems are inherently interconnected, shaped by physical, social, economic, and

political factors. The way water resources are preserved today will determine the future of our food systems, energy access, biodiversity, and global stability. Investing in sustainable water management is not just an environmental imperative—it is a pathway to resilience and long-term security.

The Importance of Glaciers for Africa

Though Africa is known for its warm climate, it is home to a few glaciers, found on high mountain peaks like Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, Mount Kenya in Kenya, and the Rwenzori Mountains along the Uganda–DR Congo border. These glaciers are small compared to those in colder regions, but they hold great environmental and symbolic importance for the continent.

Glaciers in Africa are a source of freshwater, feeding rivers and ecosystems, especially during dry seasons. They help regulate the water cycle and support local agriculture and wildlife. For communities living near these mountains, the glaciers are not only vital for survival but also hold cultural and spiritual value.

However, due to climate change, Africa's glaciers are rapidly melting. Scientists predict that these glaciers could disappear entirely within a few decades if current warming trends continue. This loss would not only affect water availability but also signal the broader impacts of global climate change on vulnerable regions.

The shrinking glaciers of Africa are a stark reminder that climate change is a global issue, affecting even the least expected places. Their disappearance would mark the loss of a natural treasure and a vital part of Africa's environmental heritage.

A Vanishing Legacy

Sadly, Africa's glaciers are disappearing fast. Over the past century, they have shrunk dramatically. Scientists estimate that Mount Kilimanjaro has lost over 80% of its glacier coverage since 1912. If current trends continue, all tropical glaciers in Africa may vanish within the next 20 years.

The report from the World Meteorological Organization released in 2021 reminded that Africa's 1.3 billion people remain "extremely vulnerable" as the continent warms more, and at a faster rate, than the global average. And yet Africa's 54 countries are responsible for less than 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

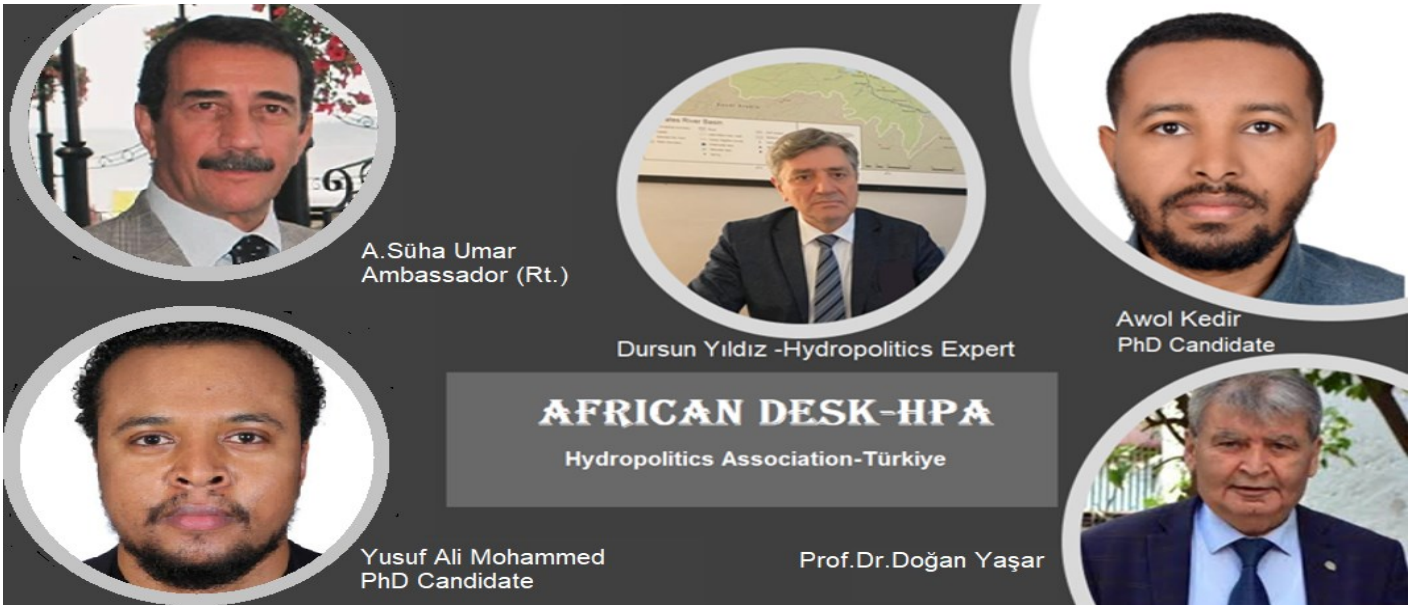
This report seizes on the shrinking glaciers of Mount Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya and the Rwenzori Mountains in Uganda as symbols of the rapid and widespread changes to come. "Their current retreat rates are higher than the global average. If this continues, it will lead to total deglaciation by the 2040s," it says.

This is not just a loss of ice—it's a loss of biodiversity, cultural heritage, and an early warning system for climate change. It also highlights the vulnerability of Africa to global environmental issues, even though the continent contributes relatively little to greenhouse gas emissions

Africa's glaciers may be small, but they carry big messages. Their decline is a call to action for global climate responsibility. Protecting these ice caps, and the ecosystems and people that depend on them, is not just an African concern—it's a global one.

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Where people live in harmony with nature

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