

Kluwer Mediation Blog

Mediation in water disputes – one more drop

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Nothing is more fundamental to life than water. Water is also a potent fuel for conflict. Access to water has created many disputes through the ages. Conflicts over water are about scarcity, control, degradation, incompatible use, and quality. Their history goes back to much earlier than 2500 BC, when the city-states of Lagash and Umma fought over control of the waters in the Tigris-Euphrates basin.

Conversely, the history of water disputes is also a great history of international cooperation. According to the [United Nations University](#), 3,600 water treaties were signed between AD 805 and 1984. One of them, the [1960 Indus Waters Treaty](#) is now the basis for mediation efforts regarding a dispute between Pakistan and India.



Last week the [World Bank Group](#) urged India and Pakistan to agree to mediation in order to settle on a mechanism for the manner in which the Indus Waters Treaty should be used to resolve issues over two dams under construction along the Indus rivers system. The two neighbors are developing

competing hydro-power projects on shared waterways: the 969-MW Neelum Jhelum in Pakistan, and the 330-MW Kishenganga and 840-MW Ratle in India. It is claimed that under the Treaty, the country that completes their project first will have [priority rights](#) to the river.

It is still uncertain whether mediation will be conducted in this case. There is no doubt, however, that a great deal of know-how related to water disputes exists. Each case is different, but the sources of the problems are alike. Water scarcity per se does not lead to water conflicts. The key question is whether mechanisms exist to regulate competing demands for water use.

Water has been causing disputes for centuries, and this will not change. It will be increasingly a challenge for dispute resolution specialists. No doubt mediation can assist in dealing with these disputes.


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