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The Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative Announces First Water Catalyst Research Grant with Georgia Tech, MIT and UAE University to Advance Energy-Efficient Atmospheric Water Harvesting

- The two-year research grant brings together world-class expertise from Georgia Tech, MIT and UAEU to advance the development of an innovative atmospheric water harvesting technology.
- The research aims to develop an energy-efficient system capable of harvesting water from the air, with field testing planned in the UAE.
- The first project under the Initiative's new Water Catalyst Research Grant will help advance promising water technologies from research toward real-world application.

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates and Atlanta, United States, (17 November 2026): The Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative announced the first project to be supported by its Water Catalyst Research Grant, backing a two-year research partnership bringing together Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and United Arab Emirates University (UAEU). The collaboration will advance innovative atmospheric water harvesting technology designed to produce water from the air with greater energy efficiency, leveraging a UAE-US research collaboration to help expand sustainable water supplies in water-scarce environments.

The grant agreement was signed at Georgia Tech, officially launching the collaboration and bringing together the combined expertise of the three institutions.

Atmospheric Water Harvesting

Led by Dr. Bachir El Fil, Assistant Professor at Georgia Tech's George W. Woodruff School of Mechanical Engineering, the project brings together expertise from the United States and the UAE in atmospheric water harvesting, advanced materials, and system design to develop an integrated energy-efficient technology capable of producing water directly from the atmosphere across a wide range of humidity conditions. The research seeks to advance a promising new approach to expanding sustainable water supplies in arid and water-scarce regions.

The technology will integrate hygroscopic salt-impregnated hydrogels, which capture moisture from the air, with engineered mesh membranes designed to harvest water from fog and high-humidity conditions. By combining these complementary capabilities within a single system, the project aims to enable reliable water production across diverse environmental conditions while minimizing energy consumption.

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Water Catalyst Research Grant: Turning Science into Real-World Solutions

The collaboration is the first project to be supported by The Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative's Water Catalyst Research Grant, a global program open to researchers, innovators and organizations worldwide that is designed to advance promising water technologies through prototype and pilot development, testing, validation and demonstration, accelerating their progression towards real-world application.

Commenting on the announcement, Ayesha Al Ateeqi, CEO of The Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative, said: “Water is essential to sustaining life and ensuring the stability of societies. Addressing water scarcity will require both scientific ambition and sustained collaboration. Around the world, researchers are developing ideas with the potential to transform how we produce, manage, and access water. Our role is to help those ideas move beyond the laboratory and toward meaningful impact."

"Through this inaugural Water Catalyst Research Grant, we are proud to support a partnership between Georgia Tech, MIT, and UAE University that brings together world-class expertise to advance next-generation atmospheric water harvesting technologies. This collaboration highlights the value of coordinated research efforts and knowledge exchange in developing practical solutions to tackle water scarcity. By developing energy-efficient systems capable of producing water directly from the air across diverse environmental conditions, we aim to advance technological innovation and harness the atmosphere as an alternative source of freshwater, contributing to the long-term sustainability of water supplies for communities facing water scarcity.

“We’re grateful to the Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative for its support and proud to see Bachir leading this effort, bringing together complementary expertise from Georgia Tech, MIT and UAEU to address a critical global challenge,” said Carolyn Seepersad, Eugene C. Gwaltney, Jr. School Chair and professor in the Woodruff School. “This partnership offers a genuine opportunity for knowledge exchange and reflects the power of collaborative research to advance innovative solutions with the potential for meaningful impact.”

The research collaboration will unite complementary expertise from the United States and the UAE to accelerate the development, testing, and validation of the technology, helping bridge the gap between scientific innovation and real-world application.

“The team led by Prof. El Fil is pursuing an innovative solution to water harvesting challenges, with the research spanning materials development to device deployment,” said Matthew McDowell, Associate Chair for Research in the Woodruff School, Georgia Tech. “Georgia Tech is excited for this partnership and for the new science and technology that will result.”

Dr. Bachir El Fil, Assistant Professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology, added: "We believe clean water should be available to anyone, anywhere, under any conditions. Achieving that requires rethinking water harvesting from the material up, designing sorbents and devices together rather than in isolation, while keeping cost low enough that the technology is accessible to all. With the support of the MBZWI

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and the combined expertise of Georgia Tech, MIT, and UAEU, we can move faster toward practical systems that deliver water where traditional infrastructure cannot reach."

Professor Evelyn N. Wang, Vice President for Energy and Climate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), added: "Water is among the world's most consequential resources, central to the resilience and security of communities, economies, and ecosystems. We are thrilled to be collaborating with MBZWI on this important project, which brings together complementary expertise to advance innovative, practical solutions for decentralized water harvesting."

H.E Prof. Ahmed Al Raeesi, Vice Chancellor at United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), added: "This grant reflects UAE University's strategic commitment to producing impactful research that addresses global challenges. Water security is an urgent priority, and meaningful progress depends on academic partnerships that unite complementary expertise, advanced infrastructure, and ambition. By collaborating with the Georgia Tech Research Corporation and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, UAEU is helping develop an innovative dual system to harvest water from atmospheric air and fog under varying humidity conditions. We are grateful to the Mohamed Bin Zayed Water Initiative Foundation for its generous support and leadership in advancing sustainable water innovation. "

Yaser Greish, PhD in Materials Science and Engineering, Professor at United Arab Emirates University, added: "This collaboration represents exactly the kind of ambitious, international research that is needed to tackle water scarcity. By bringing together world-class scientific expertise and testing innovative technologies in the UAE, we have an opportunity to advance practical solutions that could contribute to more sustainable water production in water-stressed environments."

The Water Catalyst Research Grant expands the Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative's portfolio of programs, alongside XPRIZE Water Scarcity and Al Miyah Challenge for Agriculture, strengthening the Initiative's efforts to accelerate breakthrough water technologies and advance their path from innovation to real-world impact at scale for all.

Applications for the Water Catalyst Research Grant are open to eligible researchers, innovators and organizations worldwide with water technologies on the Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative website by visiting Catalyst Research Grant Program.

-ENDS-

Image Caption:

Image from L-R: Professor Evelyn N. Wang, Vice President for Energy and Climate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Ayesha Al Ateeqi, CEO of The Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative, Dr. Bachir El Fil Assistant Professor at Georgia Tech's George W. Woodruff School of Mechanical Engineering, Ines Strohschien, Director of Innovation at the Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative, alongside students from Georgia Tech University

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About the Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative:

The Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative works to accelerate innovative solutions to water scarcity and support their application for the benefit of communities around the world.

The Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative is dedicated to addressing global water scarcity by enabling the development and application of breakthrough technologies, raising the importance of water scarcity on the international agenda, and deploying needed water solutions to benefit people and communities around the world. In its first priority project, in March 2024 the Initiative partnered with XPRIZE Foundation to launch XPRIZE Water Scarcity – a five-year, $119 million prize made possible by a $150 million contribution from The Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative. The competition is designed to drive widespread access to clean water by creating more reliable, sustainable, and affordable seawater desalination systems and membranes. In April 2025, The Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative launched Al Miyah Challenge for Agriculture, an AED 8 million competition to accelerate innovation in the development of technological solutions that can reduce the consumption of water in agriculture while maintaining or improving crop yield. The Challenge is open to international participants and will require aspiring teams to test and demonstrate their technology's applicability in the UAE, with potential for deployment in other locations with similar weather and climate conditions.

For more information about The Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative, please visit https://www.mohamedbinzayedwi.ae/

About The Institute of Georgia Tech:

The Georgia Institute of Technology, or Georgia Tech, is one of the top public research universities in the U.S., developing leaders who advance technology and improve the human condition.

The Institute offers business, computing, design, engineering, liberal arts, and sciences degrees, as well as professional development and K-12 programs for fostering success at every stage of life. Its more than 56,000 undergraduate and graduate students represent 54 U.S. states and territories and more than 146 countries. They study at the main campus in Atlanta, at instructional sites around the world, and through distance and online learning.

As a leading technological university, Georgia Tech is an engine of economic development for Georgia, the Southeast, and the nation, conducting more than $1 billion in research annually for government, industry, and society.

Media enquiries:

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