



IMPROVING REGIONAL COOPERATION ON WATER

Meeting Report of the Third Session
of the Parliamentarians Network for
Conflict Prevention and Human Security



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**Parliamentarians Network
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and Human Security**

The EastWest Institute is an international, non-partisan, not-for-profit policy organization focused solely on confronting critical challenges that endanger peace. EWI was established in 1980 as a catalyst to build trust, develop leadership, and promote collaboration for positive change. The institute has offices in New York, Brussels, and Moscow.

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Cover photo: The shoreline of the Dead Sea near the town of Ghor Haditha in Jordan is seen, Feb. 8, 2007 showing the shrinking water level of the sea - the lowest point on earth. (AP Photo/Nader Daoud) REPORTERS / Associated Press

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Contents

Foreword	i
Executive Summary	iii
The Challenges	1
Co-riparian equity	1
Water as a human right?	2
Efficient and sustainable use of water resources	3
Capacity building and investment in technology	4
Efficient agricultural development with limited water resources	4
Transparency and shared data	5
Building political will	6
Conclusion	8
Priority Areas for Further Action	8
Annex: Amman Declaration on Regional Cooperation on Water	9

Foreword

The principle of ‘dignity and justice for all of us’ can only flow from human civilization as a single, functioning whole. Therefore, the question of cross-border intervention versus state sovereignty is ultimately a false dichotomy. To allow everyone in the world the opportunity to live free from fear and want, and to develop our full potentials in a healthy and supportive environment, means that individual rights, state rights, and international rights must be seen as an indivisible and dynamic unity, not as a source of polarization and conflict.

In the words of Rajendra Pachauri, “We sink or swim together. Climate Change can be a threat to peace and stability. There is no part of the globe that can be immune to the security threat”.¹ We breathe the same air and drink the same water and yet, for global commons to meet regional commons, we need to act in the same cooperative manner. In my region the goal is to ensure that the Fertile Crescent does not become the Futile Crescent. A patriarchal and conflict-driven approach will yield catastrophic consequences. Challenges facing the WANA region and the Earth are interconnected and sustainable solutions require cooperation such as a regional (or global) community for water and energy. Employment generation, investment in the post-carbon economy, empowerment of the poor, and negotiating fair use of the commons are interrelated issues that must be addressed together. There is one global civilization and a unified consciousness of our intimately entwined world. Recognition of this is the first step in conceptualizing the world, our place in it and the possibilities for creative cooperative coexistence.

Water security is fundamental to human security, which is a feature of composite security. Threats to our security are interconnected and must be met with collective action at both regional and global levels. Water must be conceived of as a right and not a commodity if we are to bring about equitable distribution and ensure access to this most basic necessity of life. It is only then that we may transcend the conflict-driven mode, and move through the negotiating phase to a conceptual approach in the spirit of supra-national innovation and inter-dependence.

A synergy between energy and water is essential if we are to improve the human environment. Al Gore’s global warming complements my appeal for human warning as you cannot look at global warming without human warning. There is an urgent need for a supra-national call for a water

1 Human Impact Report – Climate Change, Global Humanitarian Forum, P.52, Geneva, 2009.

commission that looks thematically, on a non-partisan and inclusive basis, at water and energy for the human environment, and develops a carrying capacity concept of the region's resources – human, natural and economic. At least supra-nationally, the steps we have taken to build bridges across boundaries will lead us to face our challenges competently.

The EastWest Institute's Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention and Human Security Conference, which I had the honor of hosting in Amman in November last year, was focused on capacity building, awareness raising, and information exchange. The group of international Parliamentarians met in workshops and discussed with Middle East Parliamentarians the key theme of Improving Regional Cooperation on Water: A Key Opportunity for Preventive Diplomacy. I applaud these valuable efforts, firstly because they offer an arena for the exchange of ideas and the construction of practical knowledge that will enable us to find creative solutions to water-related problems. Secondly, the linkages created between the organizations and individuals who collaborated in hosting the conference are the type of transboundary social networking that has the potential to transform our environment.

Critical questions were posed during the conference such as: What are the key opportunities for improved cooperation on cross-border natural resources? What key issues should be addressed in these particular water basins to avoid future conflicts? How can we improve regional cooperation on water? The Parliamentarians provided suggestions that were the result of an ongoing fruitful dialogue over the two days. An underlying theme that was explored during the conference was that neither cooperation nor conflict over water is inevitable; rather actions may be taken now to influence the outcomes by learning from past experience to make better choices in the present and the future. The workshops also provided a forum for deliberation over the need to address the sensitive issue of co-riparian equity, which has been innovatively addressed with regard to the Jordan River Valley.

I highly recommend this report of the Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention and Human Security as it helps sensitize parliamentarians to critical issues such as the efficient and sustainable use of water resources; management of water supplies; and the threat of climate change, overuse and pollution. It is my hope that it will galvanize decision makers to address the challenges we face right now and move the water agenda forward in national parliaments.

HRH Prince El Hassan Bin Talal
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Executive Summary

Climate change, economic development and population growth are changing perceptions of water and raising awareness of the growing stresses placed on the world's freshwater resources. The limited availability of water is particularly acute in regions such as the Middle East where demand already outweighs supply and neighboring states must share their main freshwater resources. Competition over dwindling and ill-managed water resources will likely increase, potentially threatening food security, health, economic development and peace in a region already struggling with ongoing conflict.

There is an urgent need for political action in the Middle East and other regions – including much of Africa and Asia – to address the potential for conflict over water and to foster a process of cooperation among co-riparian states. Policymakers often acknowledge in principle the importance of water for regional security. However, the recent EastWest Institute policy series has shown that there is still insufficient coordination in the management of shared water resources.

To address these concerns, the EastWest Institute's Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention and Human Security issued the *Amman Declaration on Improving Regional Cooperation on Water* (page 11). The declaration outlines a set of principles for parliamentarians that are necessary to overcome major challenges to cooperation on water across national borders. It was developed by members of parliament, government officials, academics, and civil society representatives from Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. The Parliamentarians Network issued the declaration at their third international session in Amman, held under the patronage of Jordan's Prince Hassan El bin Talal and in cooperation with the Royal Scientific Society.

The following report outlines in detail key points of discussion at the meeting. In brief, its recommendations include:

1. Address co-riparian equity, a critical step to ensure the peaceful cooperation of all states and broad acceptance of agreements by upstream and downstream populations;
2. Emphasize efficient and sustainable use of water resources to better manage water supplies threatened by climate change, overuse and pollution, particularly in densely populated areas already at risk of conflict;
3. Build capacity and invest in water-management technology to ensure local ownership and management of shared water supplies;

4. Manage agricultural development with limited water resources to meet rising food and nutritional demands of growing populations;
5. Share data in a transparent manner to provide entry points for policymakers and experts to build trust and make informed legislative decisions;
6. Build political will among policy makers and in their constituencies to foster dialogue and shape legislation towards efficient, sustainable and equitable water management.

The Challenges

There are more examples of cooperation over water than conflict. But the convergence of several factors including climate change, a rapidly expanding human population, and the socio-economic impacts of the global financial crisis have increased concerns about competition for resources, including water.

The world's population of 6.7 billion is projected to swell by almost 40% to more than 9.5 billion in the next forty years. Demand for freshwater is expected to outpace supply on every continent except Antarctica. Such stresses on water supplies are likely to challenge international structures and exacerbate threats to regional security. Participants at the Amman meeting recognize a number of challenges that need to be addressed, including, but not limited to, the following:

Co-riparian equity

Water scarcity is not just an issue of water supply. It is often the unequal distribution of water that leads to heightened political tensions between co-riparian countries, countries sharing the same water sources. Such tensions are visible between Israel and the Palestinian territories. A recent Amnesty International report estimates that the average per capita consumption of water in Israel is 300 litres a day, compared to 70 litres per person per day in the Palestinian Territories.¹ The report claims that some Palestinians are receiving little more than 20 litres of water per day, the minimum amount recommended even in humanitarian emergencies.

Addressing such disparities is difficult, but cooperation is possible. In 2005, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority came together for the World Bank's Red Sea-Dead Sea Water Conveyance Study Program and agreed to jointly examine the feasibility of transferring water from the Red Sea to the rapidly declining Dead Sea, with the World Bank acting as a neutral facilitator.

Before committing to the feasibility process, problems arose in agreeing on the study's terms of reference. Some parties objected to the use of the term "co-riparian" because it may imply sovereignty over land and hence an endorsement of Palestinian statehood. Despite this fundamental disagree-

1 "Report: Palestinians denied water," BBC News on the web, 27 October 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8327188.stm> (28 January 2010).

ment, two years of negotiations and the threat of serious water shortages convinced Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority to cut a deal. They replaced “co-riparian” with “beneficiary party” and agreed on the study’s terms of reference. The study is expected to be completed by early 2011.

The approval of new terminology may not constitute a major breakthrough, but it is a step in the right direction. The Study Program shows that agreement can be reached and legal difficulties overcome albeit in steps where there is an urgent need, real or perceived, to find solutions. Through the use of a neutral facilitator, all three beneficiary parties can come to the table under mutually agreed-upon terms. The result has been continued discussions between the three parties on all issues related to the project, despite ongoing disputes over other matters.

Water as a human right?

Such examples provide some hope, but strong feelings of inequality remain. A key element of co-riparian equity is the perception of power. Many Palestinians feel that Israel controls their access to water. Similarly, downstream riparian countries often feel that water resources are dominated through use, control and pollution by upstream users.

To address issues of equity, some are calling for the declaration of water as a human right. Delegates at the 2009 World Water Forum in Istanbul remained split on this issue; the conference’s final Ministerial Statement only went as far as recognizing access to safe drinking water as a “basic human need.”

Some favour pragmatic, proactive policies to provide access to water, regardless of its human-right status. The introduction of the Federal Law for Food and Nutrition Security in Brazil provides a model of recent legislation implemented at the national level to secure food access for many of the nation’s poor. Such a model might be applied in regions facing similar problems of access to water without the need for the classification of water as a human right.²

Yet practical interests are also at the core of support for declaring water a human right. Accessibility does not necessarily imply affordability. To ensure equity, it is essential to implement shared water agreements and

2 Law No. 11346 “includes strategies for strengthening family agriculture through financing, technical assistance and purchase guarantees; local initiatives to allow for access to food and water (subsidized restaurants, food banks, community kitchens, cisterns) and strategies directed towards school meals and the promotion of healthy food habits. (Source: Ananias, Patrus. “Implementing the human right to food in Brazil”. <http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/08/hrf/ananias.htm>.)

ensure affordability for those who cannot otherwise afford it. This is a major water security concern for the poor, particularly in regions where a single power maintains control over resources.

Although the human rights debate remains unsolved, it shows that political frameworks are essential to address fair access to shared water. Parliamentarians can raise attention to the importance of enforcing existing international law, treaties and agreements. Without enforcement, agreements are meaningless.

To this end, members of parliament can initiate the development of regional evaluation processes of treaties and obligations. Such regional processes can also serve to connect co-riparian technical experts, officials, academics and civil society, as well as improve dialogue and build trust.

Efficient and sustainable use of water resources

Water scarcity is a serious threat in Africa, the Middle East and parts of South America. But glacial melt in the Himalayas provides the most striking example of water stress and its potential impact on human security.

Known as the “Water Tower of Asia,” the Himalayas are the origin of ten river systems that supply water to an estimated 1.5 billion people, a fifth of the world’s population. If one includes water used for agriculture and energy demands, the Himalayan glaciers support 3 billion people almost half of the world’s population in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan. As flows decrease and demands increase, competition for these waters risks aggravating tensions in the region, already a conflict hot spot.

Much of China and India’s recent economic development has depended on the unsustainable use and pollution of Himalayan water resources. However, according to the World Bank, “China’s leadership is well aware of the worsening water shortage and is determined to transform China into a water-saving society through policy and institutional reforms.”³ Several global and regional organizations, including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and India’s Strategic Foresight Group, are already working to promote regional cooperation on water within the Himalayan watershed. While much progress has been made, continued major investments are required in Asia and around the globe in the way that water is viewed and managed, with an emphasis on efficiency and sustainability.

3 World Bank, “Addressing Water Scarcity in China,” <<http://go.worldbank.org/7VCW836FT0>>, (28 January 2010).

Parliamentarians can play an important role in implementing such investments by driving policy reform in their governments.

Capacity building and investment in technology

Key to efficiency and sustainability is the need for investment in water-saving technologies. For many developing nations facing water deficits, water scarcity is not just a problem of depleting resources but also a problem of limited capacity to capitalize on available resources. Greater public and private investment in irrigation, water capture and storage technologies is urgently needed to maximize retention of overall available water resources, especially from rainfall. Increased investment in ground and surface water technologies is also necessary. Additionally, governments must work to include the private sector in the agricultural planning process.

Parliamentarians can use their oversight functions to ensure that adequate resources are available for water technologies such as covered irrigation systems and modern water transfer saving technologies, whether by monitoring local national investments or scrutinizing international development aid. Members of parliament should also encourage public-private partnerships in new technologies to that end.

Investments are necessary to train and retain local professionals in water resource management. “Brain drain” has become a major problem in the Middle East as poor salaries and lack of training programs have driven many young Arabs to seek work and education outside the region. Little capacity is left to manage local water resources. Parliamentarians can play an important role in urging governments to invest in regional, multi-stakeholder capacity-building programs for young professionals, especially in developing economies.

Efficient agricultural development with limited water resources

Efficient agricultural development requires immediate action, especially in developing nations with large populations. In the Middle East, for example, agriculture uses an estimated 83% of water and is the largest source of regional employment. But the sector is facing enormous challenges, primarily due to climate change, growing populations, rising demand for food, and the reallocation of water to cope with industrial needs.

The growing water deficit in the Middle East and other parts of the globe requires urgent changes in the way food is produced. One effective way to lower the amount of water required for agriculture and maximize efficiency of what is used is to reduce the growth cycle of plants by cultivating more water-efficient crops. The mass monoculture of water-intensive cotton in Central Asia, for example, is widely recognized as contributing to the devastation of the region's soil and the rapid depletion of the Aral Sea. Here, the cotton industry adversely affects downstream communities and makes regional cooperation more difficult.

Water stress necessitates a shift in thinking about how agricultural output is evaluated. Governments should measure agricultural output based on output per cubic meter rather than overall production numbers in order to emphasize efficiency and sustainability over productivity. The International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) provides an excellent cooperation model based on sustainable agriculture. The organization works through a network of partnerships with national, regional and international institutions, universities, non-governmental organizations and ministries to run regional crop improvement projects in the developing world. Its introduction of high-value crops and technology in the Nile Valley, for example, has resulted in increases in wheat yields of up to 33% in Egypt and 46% in Sudan.

To meet growing demands, particularly in the agriculture sector, governments must encourage sustainable and responsible water use. One option is to regulate water costs according to consumption, for example, by introducing standard national limits for water use. Beyond these limits, individuals, farmers and industry would pay appropriate shares for water. Central to such structural changes, however, is the willingness of policy makers to support these types of legislative reforms, which in many areas are resisted by economic elites.

Transparency and shared data

Knowledge and data sharing is a vital first step before capacity building and greater integrated water resource management can occur. Policymakers must know where gaps in management exist before they can begin to address them. In addition, sharing of information helps build trust between different actors, including technical experts and academics.

However, common experience highlights a lack of knowledge- and data-sharing, not only across borders, but also at the local and national levels. Many parties, especially in the Middle East, are reluctant to share even old

data with local, national and regional bodies. There is often a cultural unwillingness to cooperate in certain regions, even within organizations. This distrust leads to a lack of cooperation and unnecessarily expensive and elaborate programs.

There is a need for clear, transparent data and information on shared water resources as a prerequisite so that agreements can be reached in confidence by all parties. Parliamentarians should lobby for donor support, including support for cross-cutting national and regional capacity building programs, to generate shared databases while also building trust.

Members of parliament should also take a lead role in creating networking opportunities between scientists and decision makers. A first step would be the establishment of an ad hoc Committee on Water that includes the input and advice of experts within the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA). EMPA already maintains an ad hoc Committee on Energy, Environment and Water. However, a working group with a specific focus on water would help address urgent needs of the region's water stressed countries.

Building political will

It can be difficult to build political will. Many parliamentarians recognize the need for cooperation but face additional political demands from their constituencies, who may not favour public diplomacy with neighboring states. In the Middle East, for example, electoral pressures can hinder open cooperation between Arab and Israeli parliamentarians. Popular support and inclusive, bottom-up approaches are essential for cross-border cooperation.

The Friends of the Earth Middle East's "Good Water Neighbors Project" (GWN) provides a helpful example. A critical element of the project's success has been the inclusion of three main constituencies: youth, adults and decision makers. The program targets local, cross-border communities in Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian territories that depend on shared water resources and helps bring these communities together to realize the benefits of cooperation.

Benefits of such dialogue were evident in Tzur Hadassa, an Israeli municipality, and Wadi Fukin, an agrarian Palestinian village. Israel's border fence threatened to separate Wadi Fukin from the springs it relied on. Recognizing the importance of the springs for Wadi Fukin, a third of Tzur Hadassa's residents signed a petition to the Israeli govern-

ment opposing the wall. Their local parliamentarian raised the concern with the Israeli Water Commission and has so far helped pre-empt the wall. To date, the wall has not been built. Empowering both people and parliamentarians is an important step towards influencing these actions.

GWN's example shows how the empowerment of local communities can help manage water resources and build trust in the process. Ultimately, however, cooperation between co-riparian countries requires the support and commitment of decision makers. The only way to make progress is to build awareness among policymakers, help them recognize the importance of water in political development and encourage them to act.

To this end, regular political conversations can allow for better cooperation even during difficult circumstances. The Indus River Commission (IRC), for example, has met regularly since its inception despite two wars between India and Pakistan. Similarly, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, with the support of the United Nations, have cooperated since 1957 through the Mekong River Commission, formerly known as the Mekong Committee. The four countries even had technical exchanges throughout the Vietnam War.⁴

Representatives of both the Arab Water Council and the Cairo-based UNESCO Regional Office for Science and Technology for the Arab States stress that regular, face-to-face dialogue is imperative for cooperative management of the Nile River Basin. Dialogue, they said, "is key not only in this region, but in others as well. If you don't have dialogue, you have nothing."

Patience is also essential. The Indus agreement took ten years; the Mekong, thirty. Trust in the process is necessary to devise effective methods for trans-boundary cooperation on water and other shared resources. In addition, commitment to engagement despite other tensions offers entry points for dialogue on related political concerns such as border regulation, transport, trade and energy.

People who live in shared lake and river basins need a voice to make such agreements sustainable. Decision makers must be sensitized to communities' needs. To this end, parliamentarians must act as a bridge between communities, experts, technocrats and decision makers through regular interactions that build capacity, share experience and foster collaboration.

4 "Water Without Borders," 11 February 2003, <http://www.wateryear2003.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=3679&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html>, (28 January 2010).

Conclusion

There is growing and valid concern about the international security implications of water scarcity in the Middle East and other regions including many parts of Africa and Asia. Urgent political action is necessary to pre-empt potential conflict over water and to foster cooperation between co-riparian states.

Reaching agreement over shared water resources can be difficult, especially in regions with existing political tensions. But cooperation is possible. Parliamentarians have a key role to play in building political will among policy makers and in their constituencies to foster dialogue and shape legislation towards efficient, sustainable, and equitable water management. To help parliamentarians realize this role, members of the EastWest Institute's Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention and Human Security committed to a set of recommendations (outlined in Annex 1) to stress the urgency of the water scarcity issue across the globe, and to mobilize preventive action towards improved regional cooperation on water.

Priority Areas for Further Action

Participants at the Amman meeting identified the following areas that are in need of attention and where the Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention and Human Security and other organizations could help facilitate more effective regional cooperation on water:

- Jordan River Valley and the Tigris-Euphrates Watershed (West Asia)
- Northwestern Sahara Aquifer System (Algeria, Libya, Tunis)
- Nile Basin
- Himalayan Watershed
- Amu Daryia River System (Afghanistan and Central Asian states)
- Kabul River system (Afghanistan and Pakistan)
- Zambese River Basin (sub-Saharan Africa)

Annex: Amman Declaration on Regional Cooperation on Water

Amman November 4-5 2009 - Under the Patronage of HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal, members of the EastWest Institute's Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention and Human Security from Africa, the Arab region, Asia, and Europe gathered in Amman to discuss the pressing issue of shared water resources management and agreed on actions to be taken by parliamentarians, government, and civil society.

By 2025, 1.8 billion people will be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity. Two-thirds of the world population will be faced with a severe imbalance between demand and availability of water. More than 1 billion people are already living without clean drinking water; more than 2.5 billion people lack adequate sanitation; and over 90 percent of the world's population lives in countries that must share water resources across borders.

Addressing these issues requires action notably for shared management of water resources. Participants recognized that cooperation is possible even under difficult circumstances. To address these urgent needs, Parliamentarians Network members acknowledge that:

- Riparian states should seek common understanding and possibly formal agreements including dispute resolving mechanisms to achieve cooperative management of trans-boundary water resources.
- People that live in shared lake and river basins need a voice at the table to make such agreements sustainable. Decision makers must be sensitized to communities' needs.
- There is a need for clear, transparent data and information on shared water resources as a prerequisite so that agreements can be reached in confidence by all parties. Parliamentarians will lobby for donor support including with regard to national capacity building to establish such data bases.
- Ultimately, difficult political decisions are necessary. This is why transparency, ownership by local communities, and commitment to international treaty obligations is essential.

Participants recognized that parliamentarians must lead the process of persuasion, build political will and hold governments accountable. As concrete first steps to take forward regional cooperation on water, participants recommend that:

- The call by the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly to establish an ad hoc Committee on Water as a key space for inter-parliamentarian dialogue on improving regional cooperation should be implemented as soon as possible. Network members will work towards that end. The ad hoc Committee should serve as a platform for members of parliament to share experiences, address difficult issues, raise attention to the importance on water and develop cooperative actions that can be brought back to national parliaments under the concept of shared responsibility.
- Parliamentarians call on their governments to recognize water as a shared resource and that cooperation between riparian states is the most effective way to achieve sustainable use and management of current water resources.
- Parliamentarians work towards efficient water use and management, such as covered irrigation systems and modern water transfer infrastructure saving technologies; they agreed to encourage through parliamentary action private sector investment in new technologies in that regard.
- Parliamentarians recognize the need for national planning for long term priorities and benchmarks to arrive at sustainable water management across sectors.
- Parliamentarians work to legislate for the real cost of water.
- Parliamentarians must act as an interface between communities, experts, technocrats and decision-makers through regular convening that build capacity, share experience, and foster collaboration.

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