



# Amman Aspirations

## Creating Concentric Circles of Cooperation

Strategic Foresight Group hosted a High Level Plenary on **Our Common Future: Water, Environment and Energy Community** at WANA Forum on May 17, 2010 in Amman, Jordan. It had three components. The first component was a Vision Conversation with HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan. The second component was a Strategic Dialogue with Members of Parliament, advisers to Heads of Government and heads of water authorities from West Asia as well as senior diplomats from Sweden and Switzerland. The third component was an Open House with WANA Forum participants from across Asia, ranging from UAE to Yemen and Iraq to Japan. Finally, a paper on water scarcity and drought in West Asia and North Africa was presented by a representative of the WANA Forum.



HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal presented an innovative approach to break the political deadlock in the region, which has made collaborative response to humanitarian problems very difficult. He proposed that we should create concentric circles of cooperation, where each circle consists of countries that are part of the same political dynamic. He suggested that the first such circle of cooperation can be formed by Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan for sustainable management of water and environment. In order for such a circle to translate into a reality, he recommended

the establishment of an independent regional entity with a mandate to introduce practical measures for cooperation. This idea was supported by opinion makers from the region, as well as international diplomats who participated in the Strategic Dialogue of the plenary. Other concrete ideas were also presented in all the three components of the plenary to enable the region to move ahead, breaking the cycle of conflict that has undermined the ability to harness human potential and allowed crisis of water scarcity to loom on the horizon.

Strategic Foresight Group organised the High Level Plenary as a part of its initiative for water security in the Middle East. The initiative is supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation of the Government of Switzerland and the Swedish International Development Agency of the Government of



Sweden. The Plenary was hosted with a view to advance policy deliberations, which began at Montreux, Switzerland, in February 2010, with two workshops engaging 60 senior opinion makers from the Middle East. The Montreux Workshops had resulted in an Agenda for Action, with several ideas presented for consideration of the policy community in the region and the international donor community interested in peace and cooperation in the Middle East. At Amman the discussion progressed to develop some of the broad ideas into realisable aspirations.

The High Level Plenary was hosted by SFG in cooperation with WANA Forum, launched by El Majlis El Hassan with a plan to organise five annual conferences from 2009 to 2014, besides focussed seminars, to develop and advocate policy options for regional cooperation in Asia. It is supported by Nippon Foundation of Japan.

## The First Circle

HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal lamented the transformation of Fertile Crescent into Futile Crescent and promptly introduced the concept of concentric circles of cooperation to break political deadlock. He emphasised that such concentric circles should be created for developing a shared vision and for not at all for bargaining and negotiations. He recommended that the first such circle could be formed by Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan for the sustainable management of water and environment. This idea was developed further by him and other speakers from the region.

**“We are practising a Zero-Conflict Neighbourhood Policy.”**

**-Saban Disli**

The Plenary emphasised that concentric circles of cooperation should be based on a shared conceptual premise.

- Water should be treated as a cornerstone of cooperation. Much as the way coal and steel provided a foundation for regional cooperation in Europe in the 1950s, water and environment are at the core of the current stage of technological development in the world.

- If water is not treated as an instrument of cooperation, crises are inevitable. Much as the way nuclear arms race threatened destruction of humankind half a century ago, water scarcity threatens human survival in the coming decades.
- Water scarcity is closely linked to food security and health security. Therefore, cooperation in water should be seen in the context of agriculture and sanitation. Food is already perceived as a basic human right. In a similar way, sanitation should be treated as a human right.
- While not ignoring water rights, water should be treated as an instrument of partnership driven by needs and sustainability of the entire population in a given geography.
- Experience from around the world proves that good ideas need sound institutional mechanisms to transform into actions, and therefore a real concentric circle of cooperation would only evolve with an institutional architecture.



The Plenary realised that for the first circle to become a reality, the concerned countries would need to create an independent regional entity with the following objectives:

- To undertake an independent assessment of water resources in the first circle countries and to examine emerging trends with regards to availability, needs, and environmental implications of alternative water scenarios
- To create regional protocols and practical measures for standardising

**“We must introduce regional protocols for standardising measurements and legal frameworks.”**

**-Selim Catafago**

- measurements of water flows and environmental indicators
- To harmonise water laws for sustainable environment in the countries forming the first circle
- To enable projects of regional nature, which by their very characteristic cannot be undertaken at the national level, including the development of a regional climate change model and using satellites and remote sensing for mapping underground water, arid land and other phenomenon
- To prepare for integrated water resource management on a sustainable basis at the basin level.

The proponents of the regional entity were clear that such a mechanism should not be a negotiating platform, a task performed by inter-governmental committees nor should it

undertake studies and organise conferences, a task undertaken by established regional research centres.

They proposed a multiple-layer structure for such a regional entity:

- A regional concept group of high level political leaders or their representatives
- A regional technical group of representatives of concerned ministries and water authorities
- A regional advisory group of experts and civil society representatives
- An international group of donor countries and relevant international organisations
- An independent secretariat.

The speakers from outside the region indicated that such a regional entity can potentially attract international support provided stakeholders in the region take initiative and ownership to create its foundation. Such an endeavour should be seen as the possibility of a partnership between regional and international actors.

Once a successful beginning is made in the first circle, stakeholders from other countries can form similar concentric circles of cooperation. Eventually it might be possible for different circles to explore intersecting linkages. Such a phased approach can free cooperation in such essential human issues as water security, which is closely linked to food and health security, from protracted conflicts.

## Fast Track for Israel and Palestine

The High Level Plenary articulated aspirations for countries outside the first circle. One way to break the deadlock in Israel-Palestine negotiations could be to agree on a special fast track for negotiations on water. The importance of water in the peace process was recognised by the Oslo Process, which created a Joint Water Committee. Unfortunately, at present it does not function as a joint forum, as the Palestinians complain about their proposals being rejected by the Israeli authorities and unfair exploitation of aquifers by Israeli nationals, while the Israeli side has expressed reservations about the Palestinian water management practices in its conversations with the Strategic Foresight Group.

In order to break the deadlock, it is necessary to revive and reorganise the Joint Water Committee in such a way that

- It facilitates discussion on equitable basis between Israeli and Palestinian counterparts, where they discuss their grievances and expectations with a common vision to save and sustain water resources



- It brings in representatives of international donor governments as observers to ensure fairness in the management of water sector.

The Amman Aspirations recognise water security as an important component of human security and therefore recommend that parties should agree to treat water as a problem to be jointly solved on a fast track basis, without being subjected to the long and protracted process of negotiations on other contentious issues. It is for the opinion makers in Israel and the Palestinian Territories to recognise their common future in sustainable water management. If they agree to create such a fast track, it will automatically create the second concentric circle of cooperation in the region.

## Efficiency and Environment

The plenary recognised that water is not merely an issue of discussion between parties across borders and territorial jurisdiction, but it is also an issue of sound management within the jurisdiction of each country. Trans-boundary problems need to be resolved but they cannot provide an alibi for ignoring domestic actions for improving sustainability.

**"If water is life,  
sanitation is dignity."  
-Francois Muenger**

Experts have outlined a long list of measures for sustainable water management. The Amman Aspirations identified some priority areas where action cannot wait any longer. While these desired measures are well known, they need to be repeated until they are implemented on a wide scale. These include

- Mitigating conveyance losses which amount to 50% or more in several countries in West Asia
- Introduction of efficient irrigation practices and drought-resistant crops given that agriculture accounts for more than 80% of water needs in several countries
- Use of small, particularly solar-powered, waste water treatment plants and desalination plants, which can be deployed at the household level, on a large scale
- Partnership with private sector to exploit technology and modern management practices
- Involvement of what HRH Prince Hassan calls the "third sphere" to spread awareness and education about sound demand management practices, including the use of



Internet to publicise maps and facts, and public hearings to express concerns and aspirations of the marginalised sections of population. (SFG understands the

“third sphere” as a space where environmental NGOs, the media, educational organisations, farmers’ unions, water user associations, and catalysts function.)

The Plenary put a special emphasis on solutions that benefit poorest of the poor. Small waste water treatment plants and desalination plants, which cost \$2000-3000 per unit, can be used by a household or a small cluster of households to produce water for some of the households needs and also for supporting small home gardens to produce vegetables, which can create additional income.



## Conclusion

The Amman Aspirations provide a practical way forward from ideas presented at Montreux in February 2010. They aim to place the region on a journey that can eventually create regional commons. While they emphasise local and regional actions, they have a global vision of an international humanitarian order. When regional commons are created in various regions, it is possible to dream of global commons. In order to see the day when the world talks about global commons rather than global crisis, we need a Global Intellectual Contract to promote knowledge transfer, social solidarity and empowerment of the silenced majority. However, we cannot wait for the day when the entire world will be transformed. The concept of Concentric Circles of Cooperation provides a practical way forward.

**“We need an international treaty for protecting groundwater.”**

**-Ismail Serageldin**

## Participants in the High Level Plenary

### *Chair*

- Mr Sundeep Waslekar, President, Strategic Foresight Group

### *Vision Conversation*

- HRH El Hassan bin Talal, Chairman, WANA Forum

### *Strategic Dialogue I*

- Hon. Saban Disli, Member of Parliament, Economic Adviser to the Prime Minister of Turkey
- Dr Karim Nashashibi, Economic Adviser to the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority
- Dr Selim Catafago, President, Litani River Authority
- Hon. Emin Onen, Member of Parliament, Deputy Chairman for Foreign Affairs of AK Party of Turkey
- Dr Kamal Field Al Basri, Director of Iraq Institute for Economic Reforms
- Dr Dureid Mahasneh, former Secretary General of the Jordan Valley Authority

### *Strategic Dialogue II*

- Ambassador Jean-Daniel Ruch, Special Representative for the Middle East of the Government of Switzerland
- Dr Francois Muenger, Global Head of Water Initiatives, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- Mr Dag Juhlin-Danfeld, Deputy Head of the Middle East Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden
- Ms Annika Johansson, Regional Water Coordinator, Swedish International Development Agency

### *Invited Interventions*

- Dr Ismail Serageldin, Director, Bibilotheca Alexandrina
- Dr Jauad El Kharraz, Researcher, Euro-Mediterranean Information System on know-how in the water sector (presentation of WANA Forum draft paper on water scarcity and drought in the region)

### *Open House*

- Contributions from WANA Forum members from across Asia

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*This report reflects the understanding of the proceedings of the High Level Plenary by SFG as the convenor. It is neither a statement of agreement by participants nor does it represent endorsement by any of the supporting parties, including agencies and departments of the Government of Sweden and Switzerland, and El Majlis El Hassan.*

*A report on workshops at Montreux, the texts of keynote speeches delivered on the occasion, notes on conversations with cabinet ministers and other decision makers in the region, and other details of the SFG initiative on water security in the Middle East are available on our website.*

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