



Blue Peace in the Middle East

Rhine Learning Mission
25-27 September, 2013

Switzerland and Germany

Hosted by
Strategic Foresight Group
In cooperation with
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

OUTCOME REPORT

In September, the High Level Group for Blue Peace in the Middle East, along with Members of Parliament and the Middle East Media Network embarked on a Rhine Learning Mission. Conducted over three days in Switzerland and Germany, the learning mission was a unique opportunity for participants of the Middle East to learn, first-hand, about water cooperation in the Rhine River Basin and draw experiences for the Middle East. The mission served to inform both the media and the policy makers on the best practices in joint management of trans-boundary water resources and offer concrete ideas of how water cooperation can be achieved.

The learning mission was organized under the Blue Peace Middle East initiative and jointly hosted by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and Strategic Foresight Group from September 25-27, 2013. The Rhine visit was the result of a formal request by the High Level Group at the House of Lords, in London in 2012 and also reiterated in March 2013 during a meeting at the Zaman Media Group Headquarters, Istanbul. The mission benefited from a Strategic Foresight Group project on experience exchange supported by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).



Meetings and presentations were organized with representatives of the Swiss Parliament across parties, the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine, the International Commission for the Hydrology of the Rhine Basin, the Germany Federal Institute of Hydrology and others.

The Middle East delegation included Dr Yasar Yakis, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Turkey, Dr Mohamad Chatah, former Minister of Finance, Lebanon, and Dr Bakhtiar Amin, former Human Rights Minister, Iraq. Others included Mr Saban Disli, Member of Parliament, Turkey, Dr Bassem Shabb, Member of Parliament, Lebanon and Dr Maysoun Zoubi, former Secretary General, Ministry of Water Resources, Jordan, besides Members of Parliament from Jordan and Lebanon. There was a diverse set of leading print and television media persons from Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and pan Arab newspapers. The Middle East delegation was joined by representatives of the Swiss media during their field visits.

INTELLECTUAL EXCHANGES IN BERN

The learning mission began in Bern with a presentation on the overview of the Rhine River Basin and the various commissions that jointly manage the river which spans 9 countries in Western Europe. The presentation was given by Dr Manfred Spreafico, former President of the Rhine Hydrological Commission, and his extensive knowledge and decades of experience in transboundary water cooperation was beneficial to all.

During the course of the day, the Middle East delegation met, interacted with and gained knowledge on other water cooperation efforts under the Blue Peace Initiative spearheaded by the Swiss Government. One such project is on the Orontes River basin between Syria and Lebanon where the delegation was given an overview on the assessment of challenges and opportunities for integrated water resources management in the basin.

The new Strategic Foresight Group report “Water Cooperation for a Secure World” was presented to the delegation which was followed by a brief discussion. The report examines transboundary water basins around the world and discusses the correlation between the lack of water cooperation and the increased risk of war.

The participants expressed support for various tracks that will lead to regional water cooperation and realized that the Middle East region falls at the bottom of the cooperation index as detailed in the new report. A greater understanding of best practices from around the world is required, which will begin with the Rhine Learning Mission. Various ideas were discussed with a plan outlined on parallel tracks involving the High Level Group and Blue Peace Core Group, the media network and the technical and scientific community.



The delegation was hosted by the State Secretariat of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs for lunch and by the Human Securities Division, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs for a traditional Swiss dinner.

INTERACTION WITH SWISS PARLIAMENTARIANS

In a private meeting, Parliamentarians from the Middle East and members of the High Level Group engaged in a fruitful and interesting interaction with the Swiss Parliamentarians in Bern at the grand Parliament Building. The Swiss parliamentarians were represented by all the major parties in the country. Discussion centred on ideas for water and security and different possibilities for transboundary water cooperation with their Middle Eastern counterparts. The Middle East delegation was led by Dr Yasar Yakis, and the interaction was chaired by the Chairman of the Environment Committee.

BLUE PEACE MEDIA NETWORK DISCUSSION

The Blue Peace media network discussed a number of joint and collaborative actions to increase awareness and encourage debate on the Blue Peace initiative in their home countries and across the region. These included writing regular articles and features to generate interest amongst the public, increase communications amongst the media network to ensure better reporting of water related issues, and explore the idea of a Blue Peace documentary amongst others. The media will also work with the scientific and technical community to create a better informed public discourse through interviews and consultations.

FIELD VISIT AND LEARNING MISSION

Hydrological station Rhine-Rheinfelden

The hydrological gauging station in Rheinfelden is a small 10 square foot building on the banks of the Rhine with a series of machines inside and measuring equipment underwater.



The station constantly measures the level, pressure and temperature of water and transmits the data to a lab in Basel. The data is then used for a variety of reasons including mapping changes in water levels, changes in climate and precipitation levels. The data transmitted to the lab can be accessed by all countries part of the Rhine basin and all the different commissions that manage the basin. The delegation had a chance to closely examine the machines that measure the data and transmit the information.

International Monitoring and Alarm Station at Weil-Basel

The international station at Basel is a larger station that tracks the water both in Switzerland and Germany and is primarily a quality monitoring station. The delegation was taken to the lower levels of the station to see the different pipes that bring in water from both countries. The station is jointly managed and the information again is used by the relevant bodies that manage the river. The quality of water and changes in pollutants are constantly measured, to ensure that the water remains at the desired quality and laws are complied with. The delegation was given a tour of the storage units that store and examine the water, as well as an idea of what pollutants are commonly found. The delegation learnt that during the study of the Rhine basin, the water had traces of enzymes that can lead to happy hormones in the human body.

International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine

Situation in Koblenz, Germany, the ICPR is one of the main bodies that manage the Rhine River basin. The delegates learnt that only with the highest political assurance from all the riparian states of the Rhine River and a strong commitment to maintaining the health of the basin was effective cooperation possible. The ICPR works on the basis of consensus and all member states have the obligation to report on the implementation of all decisions and activities. Ministers from all the 9 riparian countries meet on a regular basis, with further constant interaction between the scientific and technical committee. The history of the Rhine River, which was once known as the sewer of Europe, tells us that time and patience is required and political willingness is essential.

International Commission for the Hydrology of the Rhine Basin

The CHR manages the flow regime and quality of the river and jointly maintains the health and ecology of the entire basin. It has evolved from a commission that only dealt with pollution control, to creating and achieving goals on flood management, climate change adaption, identifying key trends and forecasting for policy makers. The Rhine Alarm model is an important achievement which was developed in cooperation with ICPR and delivers effective forecasts for various alarm situations.

The delegation also learnt about the working of the German Federal Institute of Hydrology which works with the CHR. The CHR as well as other joint bodies works closely with the individual government and relevant government

ministries for better management of the shared river basin.



KEY LEARNINGS AND MESSAGES

- ◆ Political commitment and willingness at the highest level is extremely important
- ◆ Time and patience is needed, especially when the political climate might not be favourable
- ◆ Trust is a necessary factor in joint management at all levels. The media is a good tool to correctly inform the public and dispel myths about neighbours
- ◆ Joint monitoring can be achieved in many different ways, through a joint international monitoring station at national borders, or through sharing of data from national monitoring stations
- ◆ While it is not necessary to have the same monitoring equipment at different monitoring stations, exchange of data is very imperative
- ◆ Frequent exchange and interaction between relevant government departments and the scientific and technical community is essential to inform policy decisions
- ◆ Building small monitoring stations for quality control is not expensive and can be a step towards building cooperation
- ◆ Local community involvement to build ownership is an important parallel track



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

HIGH LEVEL GROUP AND BLUE PEACE CORE GROUP

- Dr YasarYakis, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Turkey
- Dr Mohamad Chatah, former Minister of Finance, Lebanon
- Dr Bakhtiar Amin, former Human Rights Minister, Iraq
- Mr Saban Disli, Member of Parliament, Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister, Turkey
- Dr Bassem Shabb, Member of Parliament, Lebanon
- Dr Maysoon Zoubi, former Secretary General, Ministry of Water Resources, Jordan

POLICY MAKERS AND EXPERTS

- Mr Mohammad Kabbani, Member of Parliament, Chairman of Parliamentary Committee of Public Works, Transportation, Energy and Water, Lebanon
- Mr Jean Ogassabian, Member of Parliament, Lebanon
- Dr Ibrahim Shahdad, Member of Parliament, Jordan
- Engineer Saleem Batayneh, Member of Parliament, Jordan
- Engineer Zeina Majdalani, Economic Expert, Office of the Prime Minister, Lebanon
- Dr Muhammad Saidam, Executive Director, Knowledge Sector, Royal Scientific Society, Jordan
- Dr Maha Alziydi, Technical Expert, Ministry of Water, Iraq
- Dr Walid Saleh, Head, MENA Regional Programme, The United Nations University, Institute for Water, Environment, & Health (UNU-INWEH), UAE
- Prof Dr Aysegul Kibaroglu, International Relations Department, Okan University, Turkey

MEDIA

- Mr Ismail Zayer, Editor, Newsabah and CEO, New Sabah Media Corporation, Iraq
- Mr Hiwa Osman, Senior Columnist, Al Alam, Iraq
- Ms Reem Sharaf, Senior Columnist, Al Rai Newspaper, Jordan
- Mr Abdul Hafeth Al Hrout, Editor, Petra News, Jordan
- Mr Tariq Alhmaidi, Producer, NILESAT and Journalist, Roya TV, Jordan
- Dr Haytham Mouzahem, Programme Writer, Al-mayadeen TV and researcher, Lebanon
- Mr Michael Young, Opinion Editor, Daily Star, Lebanon
- Ms Mey Sayegh, International News Editor, Al-Joumhouria, Lebanon
- Ms Sara Matar, Senior Columnist, Future Newspaper, Lebanon
- Ms Suzanne Baaklini, Environment Journalist, L'Orient, Lebanon
- Mr Bulent Kenes, Editor, Today's Zaman Daily, Turkey
- Mr Kerim Balci, Editor, Turkish Review, Turkey
- Ms Rana Cetin, Producer, Al Jazeera Turkey
- Dr Ayman Nour, Editor, All4Syria, Syria
- Mr Abdelaziz Alkhamis, Editor in Chief, Al Arab Newspaper, UK
- Ms Mai El Sahfie, Senior Broadcaster, Egypt Radio and Columnist, Nile Media Network, Egypt

GOVERNMENT OF SWITZERLAND

- Mr Claude Wild, Head of Human Securities Division, Directorate of Political Affairs, Switzerland
- Mr Mario Carera, Senior Political Advisor, Human Security Division, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland
- Mr Johan Gély, Senior Water Policy Advisor, Water Initiatives, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- Mr Christophe Bosch, Program Manager, Global Program Water Initiatives, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- Ms Eileen Hofstetter, Programme Manager, Water Initiatives, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- Mr Alexis Palomeque, Assistant, Water Initiatives, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- Prof Dr Manfred Spreafico, former President, Rhine Hydrological Commission

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT GROUP

- Dr Sundeep Waslekar, President
- Ms Ilmas Futehally, Executive Director and Vice President
- Ms Ambika Vishwanath, Senior Programme Manager

The report is a reflection of Strategic Foresight Group on the proceedings during the Rhine Learning Mission in Switzerland and Germany from September 25-27, 2013. It does not represent views of the Governments of Switzerland, nor does it indicate consensus of the participants.