



## STRATEGY WORKSHOP ON BLUE PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Zurich, Switzerland

August 21-22, 2017

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*Co-Hosted by*  
Strategic Foresight Group  
*and*  
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

*In Cooperation with*  
Human Security Division of Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs



## **CONFERENCE REPORT – STRATEGY WORKSHOP ON BLUE PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST ZURICH, AUGUST 21-22, 2017**

### **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT:**

A group of regional experts from Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Iran met in Zurich, Switzerland on 21-22 August, 2017 for a strategy workshop with a main objective of exploring the future of the Blue Peace Process and ideas for the transfer of management leadership to regional institutions. The desired outcome of the workshop was to establish a coordinating committee or mechanism under regional management for the future of the Blue Peace initiative as well as to identify the road map for the next few years. The workshop was co-hosted by Strategic Foresight Group (SFG) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in cooperation with the Human Security Division of Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).

### **OPENING REMARKS:**

On behalf of the Government of Switzerland and to introduce the Swiss point of view, Mario Carera, Senior Advisor, Human Security Division, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs; Eileen Hofstetter, Water Policy Advisor, Global Programme Water, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and Mufleh Aref Haza'Alalaween, National Program Officer, Blue Peace Middle East, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation made opening remarks. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation's work on Blue Peace was highlighted and some important projects for the Agency were introduced. These included the monitoring of groundwater in Kurdistan named 'Safeguarding Applied Management of Water Resources' (SAMoWaR) and the start-up programme and innovation training conducted in Jordan. Regarding the outcome of the workshop, one key point stated was that the main philosophy of the Blue Peace program was to transform water from threat into a tool for cooperation – i.e. to make water an instrument for peace. Despite the crisis in the region, this underlying philosophy of Blue Peace remained unchanged. At the outset, there were some important objectives for the workshop in Zurich. Objective one was the vision – to explore what the main priority will be for the work of a cooperation council-like body in the Middle East. Objective two was the mechanism – to devise a mechanism to implement any priorities that are decided upon. Regardless of the format of the mechanism, it was important that the process have regional ownership.

Ilmas Futehally, in her opening remarks, outlined the work of Strategic Foresight Group, both at the regional and global levels. At the regional level, SFG has been involved since the inception of Blue Peace in the Middle East in 2009. The objective of this meeting was that although SFG had steered this process so far, it was time to hand over. The hoped-for outcome of the meeting was a conceptual understanding and a concrete roadmap such that by the end of 2018, Blue Peace in the Middle East process should be completely owned and managed by the institutions in the region. She stated that it is unusual for an institution to give up its role in a process such as this, but SFG's philosophy is that the people of the region should take their destiny into their own hands.

Speaking on behalf of Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Esse Nilsson stated that SIDA has four different strategies for the Middle East region. One, a government strategy for the Occupied Palestinian Territories; second, one for Syria and neighbouring countries; three, a bilateral strategy for Iraq and four, a regional cooperation strategy for the Middle East and North Africa region. This fourth strategy is for the period of 2016-2020. She stated that SIDA is a funding agency, not an implementing one. It supports organizations such as Strategic Foresight Group and processes such as technical support and capacity building.

Speaking on the history of the Blue Peace in the Middle East process and its future prospects, SFG President Sundeep Waslekar stated that it is important to remember what led to this stage before discussing how the transfer of management can be done. Blue Peace in the Middle East was formally begun in 2009 – not through the decisions of Strategic Foresight Group, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation or Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, but through the a decision that came from the heads of the state in the region. When earlier attempts at regional cooperation such as the Quadrilateral Free Trade Agreement, and even an initial phase of the Blue Peace process had collapsed, a second phase was initiated. In this phase, other constituencies were also recruited. These included the media, Members of Parliament, and technical experts. In this second phase, a strong community interested in dialogue and cooperation was built. Meetings that took place during this phase led to practical ideas such as what would eventually become the Tigris Consensus. The Blue Peace Community today is at least 200 people strong. In 2009, there were maybe 2-3 water experts interested in cooperation, today that number is 200 champions. Another suggestion that was made in the meetings was made by representatives of the Heads of States of the region. They suggested two things – a political track and a technical track. In the technical track, the focus could be on activities such as capacity building, training, data exchange and harmonisation. At the political level, it was seen that leaders would be happy to meet again but only if there was a reason. At the time of the Workshop in Zurich, the situation is such that some of the fundamental political drivers of 2009 have disappeared. However, there is latent interest in proceeding, but with caution and a hope for productivity. Moreover, overall support exists for technical cooperation. Finally, there has been tremendous media interest in the last few years and every single newspaper in the region has been involved. Iran was previously not involved; however, with a change in political drivers and the lifting of sanctions that were in place, now it is possible for the country's engagement. At this stage, SFG wants to hand over management to either one single institution or a cluster of institutions in the region. In any region, the future has to be decided by the stakeholders.

#### PRESENTATIONS BY REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS:

Many of those attending the workshop presented an overview of their institutions' work and perspectives from the six countries represented there on regional strategies on water resources.

Ms Marwa Osman, Journalist and University Lecturer at Lebanese International University opened the session by stating that one potential way forward would be having one mechanism or body for Blue Peace in the Middle East located in one of the Middle Eastern countries. She offered the alternative of one group in each country to keep up the drive of the initiative. She expressed concern over a potential political deadlock where the technical experts are in agreement but the politicians object to any cooperation.

Prof. Ahmet Saatci, President of Turkish Water Institute (SUEN) spoke about the work on the institute, which is under the authority of Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs. This work includes training programs on issues such as Integrated Water Resources Management, and Hydrologic and Quality Modelling of Water Resources, and Water and Wastewater Treatment and Management amongst others. He also discussed the work of SUEN with regard to the Istanbul International Water Forum. Regarding a regional perspective on water resources issues, he mentioned both water quantity and quality as strategic focus areas. He stated that it is important when creating agreements or consensus to start with easier, more achievable issues rather than approaching complex issues at the outset. He also mentioned that frequent meetings would help achieve agreements.

Mr Dhafir Abdalla Hussain, Advisor to Minister of Water Resources of Iraq presented the overview of Iraq's share of the Tigris and Euphrates river basins. He stated that it is possible to form joint bodies

shared by riparian countries of rivers for the sustainable management of the resource. He also stated that it was necessary to mention that there are already technical committees between countries in the region and that these committees should be supported by the institutions in the Blue Peace Middle East Process. He added that technical cooperation can come first and then be broadened later.

Mr Muhammed Amin Faris, Director General of General Directorate of Water Resources in the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, Kurdistan Regional Government, outlined the total water resources and features of those resources in Kurdistan. He also discussed dams, hydropower projects and irrigation in Kurdistan. He stated that for cooperation between countries, it would be best to start with projects that can be implemented more easily and then move towards more complex ones. Projects that can be implemented jointly in earlier stages may include data exchange and gauging stations.

Eng. Khaldon Khashman, Secretary General at Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA), from Jordan discussed several challenges faced in the water resources sector, including institutional, legislative and financing challenges. He also outlined ACWUA's role in dealing with these challenges in its region of work. He described ACWUA's work in instituting best practices, capacity building and certification. He stated that shared and transboundary water issues can be political but sharing best practices for using water can be thematic and outside of the governmental system. Focusing on this would give more power to institutions.

Mr. Youssef Marai, Water Expert, Water Resources Department, Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry lands (ACSAD) from Syria discussed ACSAD's work in his presentation, including the formulation of Arab Strategy for Water Security (ASWS) in the Arab Region - Meeting the Future Challenges and Needs of Sustainable Development (2010 - 2030). He stated that the most important actions needed for transboundary water cooperation were to improve data exchange, improvement of integrated water resources management, climate change adaptation and raising awareness on water and environment issues.

Dr Shahab Araghinejad, speaking on behalf of Tehran Water Institute, presented strategies and regional perspectives of Iran. He stated that cooperation on transboundary basins is very traditional in Iran. In small basins, local communities have been very helpful. This is not the case in large river basins. He gave examples of regional strategies for transboundary basins. These included promoting local solutions for small-scale transboundary rivers based on sharing responsibilities between local communities and also promoting economic incentives such as border markets. On large river basins, he recommended that it was necessary to focus on the basket of benefits and consider that water and air quality may be more important than the water quantity. He stated that a main priority needs to be institutional capacity building when going forward with Blue Peace in the Middle East.

#### DISCUSSION IN SESSIONS:

Some important discussions that took place are detailed below. Please note, these discussion points are not conclusions made by the group. Rather, they are various issues that cropped up in the discussion of priorities, the type of mechanism that needs to be created and the overall vision for the next steps in the Blue Peace in the Middle East process.

#### Session on Priorities:

- It is clear that the process is successful when the track is technical. The political part has not been successful which is due to the nature of the developments in the region. Therefore going forward, the focus should be on technical issues. For example, exchange of good

practices to increase efficiency or productivity of the water use. These may be translated in the future to political cooperation as well.

- Two factors were required to be kept in mind. One, there are already a number of initiatives and processes. So one question to keep in mind is what value is added from this institution. Two, whatever institution takes over must have administrative capacity to be able to run such an institution.
- It is obvious there is a focus on the technical track. If the priorities are set by the technical experts and they do not have the support of political entities, there would be a deadlock. The technical track is supported by the ministers – so there is political support on the technical cooperation. The issue is about how to run these two tracks in parallel.
- One solution for this issue can be to start with some technical issues and afterwards move towards the political aspect. For example, climate change is an issue everyone can agree on.
- If there is a cluster of institutions, how would the communication between these institutions take place?
- It is important to remember that within SFG, there have been a lot of study tours and learning journeys. There may have been some interesting models that have been seen. So in order to create this body, it might help to think about strategies that have worked well in other contexts.
- Under the new mechanism, a number of thematic activity centres can be formed in various countries in order to work on the thematic priorities decided at the workshop. These centres would not focus on one country, but rather all six countries under one or more thematic topics.
- In summary, there are some issues that have been decided as priorities. These issues are common issues for the region which include
  - Water Quality and Efficiency
  - Institutional Management, i.e. Water Governance
  - Climatic Issues
- In terms of issues, there are various potential actions:
  - Tools already prepared by institutions in the region which can be modified and used must be considered and new tools can be created
  - Training programs (such as the ones already taking place at Turkish Water Institute, Tehran Water Institute and ACWUA) must also be considered
  - Lessons that can be derived from Learning Journeys must also be considered
- It is important to consider what this group's main vision will be. Will this process stop conflicts in the future? All the people present at the meeting are connected to policymakers and are hoping that the solutions found here can be conveyed to policymakers.

#### Session on Mechanism:

- Questions by Chair:
  - What is the possible structure of a regional coordination committee or mechanism for future Blue Peace activities?
  - What are the management and leadership options for the coordinating committee or mechanism?
  - Should there be one or two focal points for the management of the coordinating committee?
  - What will be the relationship with governments, media, and other stakeholders?
  - What is the purpose of this whole cooperation? Is it conflict resolution? Is it just water management? It should be something in between, i.e. confidence building, which is more than just technical.

- It is vital to consider how different institutions represented at the workshop will cooperate. How will costs be borne?
- The issue of evaluation and measuring the success of any cooperative mechanism was also discussed, including a potential feedback process to correct issues.
- It was decided that in order to facilitate this transfer of management, a transition committee was required. The committee would involve representatives from all six countries and also be a mixture of those involved in Blue Peace in the Middle East for many years and those new to the process.
- This transition committee will work on the logistical and administrative aspects of the mechanism that will be created as well as on various thematic priorities previously outlined.
- At some point, in order to further clarify the issue of financing, a secretariat will need to be decided on for the mechanism. The secretariat will have to prepare a proposal to be sent to funding agencies. Funding for the transition process will be provided.
- It is also important to ensure that, to some extent, there is local financing. The transition committee will have to ensure that this is practiced and may have to be put into proposals sent to funding agencies. Thus there will be some funding from external sources and some costs will be taken up by the local governments.
- The transition committee will decide about any political advisory committee and how to go about it.
- The members of the transition committee will be invited by Strategic Foresight Group.

#### Session on Thematic Issues:

Based on earlier discussions, thematic issues were further discussed, leading to the below list of priorities for thematic activities of the new mechanism.

- Water Quality:
  - Salinity
  - Disinfection & Water-borne Diseases
  - Water Pollution Prevention
  - Water and Wastewater Treatment
  - Water Quality Assessment
  - Water Safety Plan
  - Sanitation Safety Plan
  - Asset Management
  - Treatment of Agriculture Drainage
  - Capacity Building
- Water Efficiency:
  - Best Practices
  - Non-Revenue Water Diagnostic Tool
  - Energy Efficiency Check
  - TSM : Total Safety Management
  - Irrigation Systems
  - Wastewater Treatment and Reuse
  - Capacity Building
- Water Governance:
  - Rainwater Harvesting
  - Groundwater Modelling
  - Master Planning
  - Allocation of Water Resources
  - Water Budget
  - Capacity Building

- Climate Issues:
  - Effect of Climate Change on Utilities (48 Mediterranean cities under sea water rise threat)
  - Climate services (providing climate change info especially with agricultural communities)
  - Climate Change Adaptation
  - Dust and Sand Storms
  - Drought and Floods
  - Capacity Building

Certain specific activities were also discussed and agreed upon. They include:

- Workshops, Training, Certificates
- Best Practices for Each Case
- Climate Change Modelling
- Energy Efficiency Management
- Safety Management

Session on Next Steps

- Effective management of water resources can lead to a lessening of conflict when efficiencies improve and dependence on the resource lessens – Singapore and Malaysia’s water relations are an example of this. So this set of priorities developed can be a direct input to peace-building and confidence building.
- Previously, Strategic Foresight Group has mapped all the governorates and districts in the region and identified 40 hydro-insecure districts. Out of these, 13 are on the borders between countries. These are exactly the areas that are the most relevant to the issues of refugees, gender and terrorism. One potential way forward is to focus on these 40 districts for actions. Thus, by improving quality and efficiency, the potential for cross-border conflict and stress over water resources can be reduced.
- SFG, SDC and FDFA will discuss and decide the final names of persons to be involved with the transition committee as well as who will be consulted for strategy. Both thematic and administrative aspects will be developed by the committee in parallel. At the right time, governments will be approached to nominate institutes for a long-term committee.
- Regarding the new mechanism, it is important to discuss some important questions going forward:
  - To what extent can a network element be brought in? What different organizations can be brought in and how to go about building the network?
  - What should the relationship of the new mechanism be with governments? What is desirable and what is possible? What should the relationship look like with outside parties like donors?
  - What could be the relationship with the political constituency? Could it be a policy advisory council? Or should it be ad hoc relations with various political constituents?
- It is important, going forward, to be clear about the thematic content of the new mechanism but it is also important that the Blue Peace approach be preserved. People gathered for this workshop are behind this idea. Similarly, a large Blue Peace Community has been formed in the Middle East over the past several years; therefore it is important to explore how this community can be involved in the next phase.
- A concept paper will be drafted jointly by the individuals at the workshop. This paper will have principles that guide the basis of the new mechanism as well as concrete recommendations on what is done next. There already exists a vast body of work on Blue Peace and it will be important to use that work in order to draft this concept paper. This

paper can be extracted further into a short appeal so it can be beamed out to others in the Middle East.

**ROADMAP:**

- Mid-Sep 2017 – all participants in the meeting will send any principles or elements they want included in the Concept Paper to SFG
- End-Sep – Names of Follow-Up Committee Confirmed and Conveyed
- End-Sep – Early Notes (1-2 Pages) from institutions that have taken up thematic topics on how they will proceed
- Early Oct – Concept paper put together and disseminated by SFG
- Mid-Oct – Feedback on concept paper and Skype call (1<sup>st</sup> round) with follow up committee
- Mid-Nov – Skype or Google Hangout Conference between all thematic activity centres
- End-Dec – all detailed documents received by SFG regarding both transition modalities and thematic activities
- Jan-Feb 2018 – Follow-Up Committee meeting (possibly hosted in one of the countries)