

BLUE PEACE BULLETIN

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BLUE PEACE DECADE CONFERENCE



Strategic Foresight Group

Blue Peace Decade
House of Lords and National Liberal Club, London,
17-18 February 2020

Co-hosted by

Strategic Foresight Group

Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflicts at Harris Manchester
College,
Oxford University

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation



Experts from more than 25 countries participated in the Blue Peace Decade Conference at the House of Lords and the National Liberal Club in London on 17-18 February 2020. The conference was convened by the Strategic Foresight Group, Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict at Oxford University and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

The Conference was convened to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Blue Peace Movement as in February 2010 at Montreux, the Blue Peace process was launched with the first conference on Water Security in the Middle East convened by the Strategic Foresight Group (SFG). The first Blue Peace report was released in February 2011, at the hands of the President of the Swiss Confederation.

Key Achievements of the Blue Peace Movement (2010-2020)

In the last 10 years, the Blue Peace Movement has had a global footprint, with concrete achievements, including the following:

- Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace (GHLP), co-convened by 15 countries from different parts of the world, functioned from 2015-2017, and presented its report with concrete recommendations to the United Nations in 2017.
- For the first time in history, United Nations Security Council convened an open session on water, peace and security, addressed by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Chairman of GHPL and President of SFG.
- In November 2018, the EU Council of Ministers adopted Council Conclusions on Water Diplomacy, based on the Blue Peace ideas and mentioned the GHLP report.

- For the first time in history, a regional institution for water cooperation in the Middle East was established, with a key role played by the upper riparian country (Turkey), and building on a community of practice of more than 200 politicians, government officials and experts.

- The Blue Peace process facilitated understanding between Iraq and Turkey on cooperation on the Tigris River, with the potential to impact the life of more than 10 million people.

- Geneva Water Hub (GWH) was established in international Geneva to pursue the Blue Peace approach on a structured and sustained basis.

- Regional Blue Peace initiatives fostered intra-regional linkages between countries involved in conflicts in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa.

- The Blue Peace Index was launched by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2019.

- About 500 newspaper articles appeared during the decade in different parts of the world, supporting the Blue Peace idea.

- SFG published about 20 in-depth research reports under the Blue Peace initiative. In addition, reports were published by SDC, Geneva Water Hub and Earth Security Group.



The Opening Session

The objective of the conference was to celebrate the success of the decade long Blue Peace Movement and also use the occasion to reflect on the journey so far and the options ahead.

In his opening address the Rt Hon. Lord Alderdice emphasized the importance of dialogue between people belonging to societies in conflict. He spoke about his personal experience from Northern Ireland where the Foyle Fisheries Commission was established to foster cooperation on the River Foyle shared between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. He said that in the last century, coal and steel provided the basis for cooperation in Europe. Similarly in this century, water and environment can provide the core elements of cooperation in the world.

Amb. Christian Frutiger, head of Global Cooperation at the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation reviewed the progress of Blue Peace in the last decade. The analysis of the cost of inaction in Central Asia cost 4.5 billion USD and led to talks and cooperation. It has also led to the mobilization of young people in Central Asia. The youth have taken a lead in the debate on Climate Change and may be instrumental in taking the water agenda ahead as well. He explained that Switzerland has an interdependent relationship on water management with other countries in Europe. Therefore, Switzerland accords priority to water cooperation in its development agenda. He urged that efforts should be made to bring water to the top of the international agenda.

President Danilo Turk, Chairman of the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace expressed dissatisfaction on the lack of progress on achieving SDG6 on water. He called for “intensified action” on a number of different fronts, including the need to engage with the media. He also mentioned progress on some of the key recommendations of the report of the GHLPWP.



Ten years of Trans-boundary Water Cooperation

In the last 10 years, a number of developments have taken place in trans-boundary water cooperation, most of which are positive. In the Middle East, Iraq and Turkey are cooperating on the Tigris and there is an agreement on building three check dams. Turkey has been flexible on deciding the filling schedule of the Illusu Dam. This was impossible to imagine 10 years ago.

In Central Asia, with the change in Government in Uzbekistan, there is better understanding with Tajikistan. Various negotiations on water are taking place.

In Africa, the Congo Basin Blue Fund has been established. They are reaching the final stage of approving infrastructure projects. This Fund includes 10 countries in Central Africa. In West Africa, it is no longer only OMVS (Senegal River Basin Authority) that is cooperating strongly on water, but also OMVG (Gambia River Basin Authority), Niger Basin Authority, Volta Basin Authority. What started with Senegal is moving ahead.

In East Asia, there was a problem between China and lower Mekong countries, but now Lancang Mekong Commission has been established. This is working well.

There have been challenges in Nile basin. But even there, there has been progress in the last 6 months. President Putin hosted Ethiopia and Egypt and more recently President Trump hosted them to help move the discussion forward.

While there have been a few setbacks, overall, there has been considerable forward momentum.



The Paradox

There is a lot of dichotomy in the water sector.

- While there is no progress on SDG6, there is progress on trans-boundary cooperation.
- The UN Security Council is seized with the issue of water and peace, but public imagination is not.
- In times of weakening multilateralism, Blue Peace has made good progress. This is a good sign, but we need greater cooperation for the protection of water infrastructure.
- Private sector finance is playing a role in Climate Change including Green Bonds for water, but not in trans-boundary water cooperation.
- Countries now have data from technology, but data needs analysis and synthesis. There is a need to convert it into a useable format that can be disseminated to different stakeholders.
- We have national level data available, but data on a basin level is more important for better water management.

Key Challenges to Trans-boundary Basin Cooperation

1. There are legitimate competing interests, some rooted in national security, some in rights.
2. There is often poor data on resources of the basin. Poor data leads to mythology where countries believe that things are happening, without data to back it up.
3. There is a lack of institutions. This can prevent countries from talking to each other.
4. There is lack of availability of capital and financing. Earlier MDBs, would protect interests of all. Now you can go to many different parties, who may not all believe in the same principles of equity and protection.
5. Longstanding animosities exist between countries, outside of water.

Key Lessons Learnt from Trans-boundary Basin Cooperation

1. Process matters. The process of how you get to a solution can be more important than the solution itself.
2. Ownership matters. Countries must own the process to own the solution.
3. Institutions matter. There is a lot of talk about agreements. There is a need to be more transactional – dams, infrastructure, and projects are the way forward when you can have practical and focused discussions. There is a need to build up a series of cooperative agreements or projects.
4. We have to stop weaponizing water. This is using water as a weapon in a broader political dispute.



Data points

- 30 years back, we were complaining that we didn't have data – now we have too much data.
- Data science has improved dramatically. There are 26 satellites that provide hydrological data to the extent of 1 exabyte daily (Exabyte is approximately one quintillion bytes or one billion Gigabytes).
- Data secrecy will be gone soon due to technology.
- The available data is only to do with surface waters. We now have technologies to measure gravitational field of the earth. This can help track underground aquifers as well.
- It is tough to preach to nations to share data in the beginning. One idea that worked between Turkey and Iraq was the harmonisation and sharing of technology on how to generate or measure data.
- The training we need is to understand when data is useful for a political process and when it is not. The challenge for the scientist is what is the least amount of data that is necessary to make a political decision.
- Funding data is not sexy, but needed. Everyone gets excited when databases are new, but not excited to maintain and upkeep the databases and keep updating them.
- Often data that is gathered from and by the local population is most useful for making accurate models and building cooperation.
- A lot of dams are being built without historical data. They then become obsolete quickly.
- Water scientists and water politicians view data in a very different way.
- There is a need to talk about data accessibility rather than data sharing.
- There is a need to package data in a manner where politicians can understand how the data helps them, rather than fearing it.



How data can change mind-sets

- The Gaza strip- there was very little water, issues with sewage treatment or lack of it, leading to deep distress. For years, Israelis said that this was a Gaza problem. Then data showed that the sewage travelled to Israel and destroyed their beaches. The Israeli Government tried to keep this information secret, but then a US university built a real time tool and put it up on the web. Now Israeli public interest wants the government to act on this data and help Gaza sort out its water problem.
- Mekong River Commission (MRC) has an effective data mechanism by pointing out the gaps. Countries realized that they needed data when they wanted to show what impacts of big dams would have on other countries. MRC was useful in pointing out gaps in data, and how to gather the data by increasing knowledge on the dams and how they would impact. In some cases, MRC was able to push the country and dam developer to change the dam design, and to mitigate the conflict around it.

Media, Water and Peace

- The media faces a lot of political interference when vested interests regarding national interests are exposed.
- We need to move towards solution based journalism, which is a co-production of knowledge and stories. There is a need to build trust between scientists and journalists.
- People like to hear positive news.
- It is difficult to sell environmental stories to editors because they are not seen as sexy enough. A lot of the responsibility for covering these issues was given to freelancers, who didn't have the same resources as mainstream journalists.
- For a long time, security and water were separate tracks. Around 15 years ago, these two tracks converged.
- In the Middle East, terrorism is the story. Stories about local water issues are of interest, not trans boundary water.
- The water community is not always good with the media.
- Learning journeys to river basins helped policy makers, as well as the media persons communicate better on water issues.
- Some stories should be told- not about war and peace, but about humankind, like commercialization of water management. There are also stories that should not be told- for example on weaponization of water.

Recommendations for the Future

- Past modeling will no longer help future predictions. Need to now prepare for extremes and extreme events.
- Importance of youth to elevate the subject of water to the same level of public attention and urgency as climate change.
- Important to connect scientific and policy communities so that they speak each other's languages more and are better able to communicate. Packaging of scientific data is important to help policymakers understand easily, communicate it better, and make decisions.
- Data monopoly by governments is a thing of the past. Data is now widely available. Issues are now about an abundance of data, lack of understanding of the data, accessibility of data, and figuring out when to use data that is politically useful, and when to not.
- Need to move past existing paradigms on multilateral development banks and funding, and instead focus on innovative financing.
- Media has an important role to play. It is important for water to not only be covered only by water journalists, but by mainstream media. It may help to focus on solutions-journalism, where there is a positive bent to the stories by focusing on solutions that are being worked on. Stories can age
- A story can be interesting and front page, and then can slowly fade to the background. To keep a story in the front pages, it is important to attach life-and-death stakes.
- Social media is an inevitable part of media coverage of water resources. A 1-minute video is often the strongest way to engage people on social media.

In conclusion, we are seriously off track on SDG 6 at the global level and also within national targets. This is a major concern. Moving forward, there is a big challenge to clarify on how we can bring a stronger sense of urgency on the need to act. The policy framework and the action plans under SDG 6 provide a solid path to move forward with the Blue Peace process. Progress of Blue Peace will continue to require a strong commitment for multilateralism. In current times, when so many are questioning multilateral cooperation, Blue Peace provides a strong positive message.

There is a need for comprehensive master plans for river basin development, that would relate to participation of people and institutional development along with innovative approaches for financing. We have not yet done enough in pushing international financial institutions beyond their comfort zone. There is a need for the Blue Peace initiative to create and nurture a stronger, results-based approach.



List of Participants

Hosts

The Rt Hon Lord Alderdice, Director, Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflicts at Oxford University

Ms Eva Grosman, Co-founder and CEO of the Centre for Democracy and Peace Building

Swiss Agency for Development Coordination

Amb. Christian Frutiger, Assistant Director General and Head of Global Cooperation

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Ms Nadia Benani, Program Manager, Global Program Water

Mr Pierre Kistler, Program Manager, Global Program Water

International Experts

Prof Aaron Salzberg, Holzworth Distinguished Professor, University of North Carolina, United States of America

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Mr Ababacar Ndao, Secretary General, Gambia River Basin Organization, Senegal

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Prof Danilo Turk, former President of Slovenia and Chairman of Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace, Slovenia

Mr David Duncan, Founder and CEO of Ooska News, United Kingdom

Mr Dipak Gyawali, former Minister of Water Resources for Nepal, Nepal Academy of Science and Technology, Nepal

Mr Francois Muenger, Director, Geneva Water Hub, Switzerland

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Mr Frederick Mugira, Chairman, Water Journalists Africa, Uganda

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Dr Walid Saleh, Chief Technical Advisor, Food and Agriculture Organization, Yemen

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Strategic Foresight Group is an international think tank based in Mumbai, India. Since its inception in 2002, it has worked with governments and national institutions of 60 countries in four continents. It is known for conceiving several pioneering policy concepts to help decision makers to respond to challenges of the future in three spheres: peace and security, water diplomacy, global paradigm shifts.

Its ideas have been discussed in the United Nations Security Council, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Indian Parliament, European Parliament, UK House of Commons, House of Lords, World Bank, World Economic Forum (Davos) and other important public institutions. The initiatives and analysis of the Strategic Foresight Group have been quoted in over 3000 newspaper articles and news media sources from almost 100 countries in all continents.

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