



# Response to Mideast water security decried

By Ross Jackson  
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The significant decline in Middle Eastern fresh water sources, such as the Jordan river, the Tigris and Euphrates and the mountain aquifers shared by Palestine and Israel, has been met with an inadequate response by governments, a session at the Doha Forum was told yesterday.

"This decline is very much linked to the other kind of decline that we have been talking about in the last day and a half in the Doha Forum (on democracy, development and free trade), and that is the decline in political wisdom. It's the depletion of mutual trust, it's the depletion of mutual co-operation, the depletion of capacity to govern. All that is linked to the depletion of water resources, and if we allow the situation to continue as it is, in the next 20 to 30 years we will face a cri-



Panelists at a discussion on Water Security in the Middle East. From left: Sundeep Waslekar, Yasar Yakis, Selim Catafago, Raad Jalil, Jean-Daniel Ruch, Francois Munger.

sis," said Sundeep Waslekar, president, Strategic Foresight Group, India, speaking at a panel discussion on Water Security in the Middle East.

Selim Catafago, president of Litani Water Authority, Lebanon, said progress had been slow due to the pursuit of individual interests by the 27 countries involved in this issue. "There is no climate of confidence...or trust" between parties, and while there have been initiatives by non-governmental bodies they lack political mech-

anisms. "Without political will," said Catafago, there "will be no positive result."

Since 2008, Turkey and Iraq have begun to co-operate over their shared water sources. Raad Jalil, director general, Ministry of Water Resources, Iraq said the Euphrates River has seen a 50% decline in volume mainly due to climate change and a lack of rain, as well as upstream use. Basra and the Shatt al-Arab regularly face water shortages and poor water quality, and would have seen massive

migration if rains had not fallen a few weeks ago.

While Iraq is hoping for better co-operation with Turkey regarding information on upstream river flow in order to determine its policy, this partnership is slow in progressing and technical calibration may take years.

Jean-Daniel Ruch, special envoy for the Middle East, Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland, said that any unity and mutually beneficial resolution in achieving water security must

involve Israel, as water security is at the heart of many of the political conflicts with its neighbours. Both Palestine and Israel depend on mountain aquifers and the Jordan river for fresh water, while Israel continues to occupy Lebanese territory due to water concerns, with knock-on affects with its relations with Syria.

Ruch concluded: "We are at a crossroads between the technical and the political, and if the ambition is to optimise the efficient use of a strategic resource that is water, then we have to look at it both through technical means and through political will."

Ruch highlighted the public's responsibility towards and the democratic nature of public water resources by telling a story about his home town in Switzerland, which recently voted to increase the price of water. By increasing the price, said Ruch, they intended to protect the quality and supply of a crucial resource.