



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Report of the Committee on Middle East Questions Roundtable on Water

Geneva, 31 May to 2 June 2016

The Roundtable

For the first time in the history of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Committee on Middle East Questions convened parliamentarians and scientific experts (from WaterLex, the European Organization for Nuclear Research - CERN - and the Synchrotron-Light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East - SESAME) to discuss water as a potential platform for creating an environment which is conducive to peace in the Middle East. The roundtable was organized as part of the Committee's efforts to pursue parliamentary projects of peace in the region, which first began in October 2013. The Committee and the IPU Secretary General's most recent visits to the region (in January and March 2016) confirmed that political leaders from the region were committed to reviving this approach and thus led to the first roundtable taking place at IPU Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, from 31 May to 2 June 2016.

The discussions at this roundtable focused on the issue of water management and the role that science can play in facilitating dialogue and cooperation among countries which face similar challenges. They involved the input of three scientific institutions which are composed of politically diverse countries and have experience in implementing peace projects, including in the Middle East. WaterLex, CERN and SESAME all presented models for scientific and technological cooperation on the issue of water as an essential element of human life and dignity that transcends political disagreements and is relevant to a broader development agenda.

The meeting addressed the importance of investing in water cooperation opportunities on the basis of specific models presented by WaterLex and the exchange of experiences from the region. Several participants highlighted the challenges their countries are currently facing with respect to water, including: water scarcity, water pollution, environmental degradation, inequitable access to water resources and the lack of implementation mechanisms for existing water agreements. This led to the notion of "making the pie bigger" to increase resources available for both domestic consumption and irrigation purposes through concrete proposals such as wastewater reuse, desalination plants and inter-basin transfers. Particular emphasis was placed on the fact that water is a transboundary issue which, combined with environmental concerns, offers the opportunity to create "green jobs." Given the crucial importance of water for agriculture, there is a definite need to support scientific and technological innovation in the Middle East.

The meeting further laid emphasis on the role of science and technology in promoting dialogue and peace. Representatives from CERN and SESAME presented ways in which science can act as a neutral umbrella that is conducive to peace and spoke about specific initiatives that have been or are currently being implemented in the region. The discussions then shifted to the idea of collaborating with these scientific institutions on scientific teacher training programmes and periodical lectures as a way of increasing awareness among youth. Science can be used as a tool for dialogue and cooperation through the establishment of a research center and the utilization of modern technology to share water-related knowledge, experiences and good practices. The scientific experts reacted positively to such proposals. CERN and SESAME constituted ideal platforms for such projects. They also highlighted the role that parliamentarians can play in convincing legislative and executive authorities to agree to and to fund such projects.

The meeting also discussed some concerns about persisting challenges regarding water dependency and the lack of political will to implement peace projects in the Middle East. The participants unanimously supported the concrete proposals on water and agreed to follow up on the roundtable by communicating among themselves via a WhatsApp group and further interacting with the scientific community. They also discussed the idea of creating a working group to pursue the discussions and

lead to concrete outcomes. The IPU concluded by indicating that it would continue to set the stage for such cooperation and organize future roundtables on matters such as energy and food.

The road ahead

The participants at the Roundtable underscored that access to water is a fundamental right and that equitable use of water resources is crucial to peace.

Given the positive atmosphere that prevailed during the roundtable, the participants agreed to cooperate in order to support the IPU's vision of "turning words into action" through the establishment of an implementation plan. Members of the Committee will work hand in hand with the IPU, WaterLex, CERN and SESAME to take concrete action on the basis of the following recommendations:

Political:

- Turn the current dialogue within the Committee into active regional cooperation, by working on "new water" resources with the help of science and technology, and sharing regional experiences;
- Establish projects of peace that could transform elements of conflict, such as water, into factors of co-existence;
- Increase equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all in the Middle-East;
- Promote integrated water resources management at all levels in the Middle-East, including through transboundary cooperation;
- Expand capacity-building support to members of parliament in the Middle-East and to all relevant stakeholders in water-and sanitation-related activities and programmes.

Technical and scientific:

- Improve water quality in the Middle-East;
- Increase water-use efficiency and reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity in the Middle-East;
- Advocate for the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems in the Middle-East;

The goal of this action will be to empower parliamentarians from the region to improve water governance and implement water-related projects through the input of scientific expertise. The IPU will continue to collaborate with WaterLex, CERN and SESAME in order to lead to concrete outcomes that will be conducive to peace in the Middle East. This will be done with greater involvement of youth and the support of new technologies that will allow for innovative solutions. Ultimately, this action will be aimed at establishing long-term cooperation on the issue of water as a means of contributing to a broader peace agenda.

As will be discussed at the forthcoming IPU Assembly, this roundtable will be followed by additional roundtables on energy and food, both of which are also inherently linked to basic needs. Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, was proposed as a potential venue for the next roundtable to take place and this will be discussed in the Committee on Middle East Questions' meetings. The IPU will pursue its approach of turning elements of conflict such as water, energy and food into elements of peace and coexistence on the basis of science as a neutral umbrella.

Participants

Committee members:

Ms. Denise Pascal-Allende (Chile)
Ms. Christiane Vienne (Belgium)
Ms. Chantal Guittet (France)
Ms. Ntlhoi Motsamai (Lesotho)
Mr. Azzam Al-Ahmad (Palestine)
Dr. Mohammed Al Mehrzi (United Arab Emirates)

Parliamentary delegations:

Mr. Osama Al Khaja (Bahrain)
Mr. Mohsen Al Bakry (Bahrain)
Mr. Hamad Al Khalifa (Bahrain)
Mr. Abdel Baky Mahmoud Tourkeya (Egypt)
Mr. Hussein Hassan Khater (Egypt)
Dr. Mohamad Ahmed Elakad (Egypt)
Mr. Alaa Eldin Mohamed Waly (Egypt)
Mr. Mohamed Hamdy Elmolla (Egypt)
Amb. Oded Ben-Hur (Israel)
Mr. Erel Margalit (Israel)
Mrs. Ksenia Svetlova (Israel)
Mr. Oded Distel (Israel)
Mr. Walid Assaf (Palestine)
Mr. Bilal Qasem (Palestine)
Mr. Ibrahim Khreisheh (Palestine)
Mr. Bashar Al-Deek (Palestine)
Dr. Nidal Salim (Palestine)
Ms. Natasha Karmi (Palestine)

Experts:

Dr. Maurizio Bona (CERN)
Prof. Herwig Schopper (SESAME)
Ms. Amanda Loeffen (WaterLex)
Dr. Florian Thevenon (WaterLex)

IPU:

Mr. Martin Chungong (Secretary General)
Amb. Mokhtar Omar (Secretariat)
Ms. Sharon Varturk (Secretariat)

Accompanying others:

Ms. Jaqueline Peillard Garcia
Mr. Abdelrahman Al Shehhi