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Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

(f) **Second Roundtable on Water: From words to actions** (IPU Headquarters, Geneva, 6 - 7 July 2017)

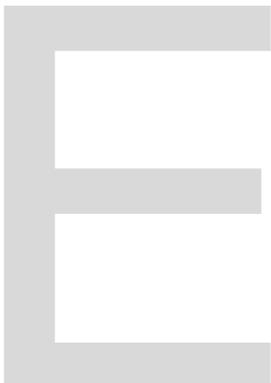
The Roundtable was attended by five members of the Committee on Middle East Questions (Canada, Chile, Egypt, Israel, Palestine) and its proceedings were chaired by its President. Experts from CERN, WaterHub, WaterLex and the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace provided inputs. Delegations from the Arab IPU, Jordan, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates shared their national experiences.

The meeting reiterated the desirability of pursuing the roundtable approach to sensitive issues that were common to all countries in the Middle East region. The event focused on turning words into actions through the neutral lens of science. The discussions were aimed at depoliticizing the issue of water and would be applied in future to other issues such as food and energy.

The former Director-General of CERN stressed that science could help build confidence which had brought together nations that were in conflict with the aim of solving scientific challenges. He underscored that water projects were long-term and parliaments could help provide more continuous and enduring solutions. Scientists could work as mediators to bring different ideas together and propose solutions.

Representatives from WaterLex stressed that access to water and sanitation was both a human right and covered by SDG6. The role of parliaments in implementing that Goal was to enact ambitious legislation, allocate sufficient funds, hold the government to account and monitor commitments to achieving the Goal. A programme of action had been developed that would include the establishment of the Parliamentary Network on Water (PNoW) to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences and identify pilot countries to share information and good practices through baseline research for water governance.

The representative of WaterHub contended that water conflicts were among the most impactful global risks in the world. Political and social tensions and power asymmetries could be factors leading to water conflicts. At the same time, water could be a powerful tool for cooperation. He stressed that the Geneva WaterHub was an organization working on hydro diplomacy. It also supported the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace, chaired by Mr. D. Türk, that had met in Switzerland, Senegal, India, Costa Rica and it would formulate proposals for addressing and preventing water-related conflicts.



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The Chair of the High-Level Panel on Water and Peace said that the Panel's mandate was focused on the nexus between water, peace and security as previously that link had not been prioritized. The Panel was preparing a report on the issue with proposals to be presented to the UN Security Council. He outlined the chapters of this report, including water in armed conflicts, prevention of water-related conflicts, water quantity and quality and financial innovation. Transparency and data sharing were essential in order to adopt an intersectoral approach at the global level. One of the main objectives was to stimulate relevant stakeholders, including MPs, to join the efforts and prevent water-related conflicts. In his view, water should be considered as an ethical issue, not a technical one. Parliamentary diplomacy might be useful in stimulating cooperation and the participation of relevant stakeholders at a first stage.

WaterLex proposed ways of promoting more effective management of water through economic development across regions, contending that MPs could translate SDG6 into actionable legislation. There was a need to establish an enabling environment to define a common programme for implementing SDG6. It was also necessary to define the legal framework in order to increase financing. In addition, it was necessary to increase capacity enhancement to handle technologies, managing resources, among others. It was evident that human rights and development were inextricably linked.

The participants proposed the establishment of guiding principles to govern the transfer of technology. They also considered that governments should be responsible for making the private sector contribute to society. Others argued that some water issues were considered a matter of national security and therefore data-sharing was limited. There was also a technology gap among countries.

A presentation was made by a water expert on "Making the water pie bigger", which proposed different forms of new water, such as waste water treatment. Integral to that approach was a proper mapping of country expertise, initiatives and institutions. Some participants pointed out that the reuse of waste water sometimes proved problematic from a purely cultural perspective for some countries. The Israeli delegation invited the participants and all interested persons to WATEC Israel 2017 in Tel-Aviv from 12 to 15 September 2017. It was felt that Israel and Palestine should have direct channels to share knowledge and information through the corresponding parliamentary committees.

The representative of CERN gave a presentation on models from the world of science that could be used to foster intercultural dialogue and serve as a basis for the establishment of Science for Peace schools. While science itself could not bring about peace, it was deeply entrenched in the search for excellence through mutual trust and this brings about inclusivity, understanding and compassion without encroaching on the minefield of politics: key components for achieving peaceful collaboration and a fertile starting point for any initiative.

WaterLex underscored the need for technology transfer to take into consideration the human aspect, including the political framework, social values, training of human resources and application of new technologies.

The delegate from Morocco stated that his country wished to benefit from the experience of other countries of the region. He stressed that 95 per cent of Morocco was arid land. Relevant legislation and national plans on water and adequate sanitation had been upgraded in 2014. He said that Morocco had 100 per cent access to water in urban areas and 96 per cent in rural areas. In addition, access to sanitation reached 76 per cent in urban areas but in rural areas was only 10 per cent. The reuse of waste water was in its infancy but was expected to reach 40 per cent.

The delegate from the United Arab Emirates said that his country had to deal with water shortage and poor water quality. A number of laws had been adopted to improve the water supply and encourage more efficient agricultural processes. In addition, dams had been built to collect rainwater, reservoirs had been constructed for groundwater and a number of measures had been taken for creating rain in dry zones. The country had drawn from experiences for better water management in different countries.

The delegate from Jordan asserted that his country was the driest country in the world, with less than 100 m³ of water available per person, which was far below any international standard. Jordan was embarking on a project to desalinate sea water from the Red Sea, which was very costly. The new technologies would bring those costs down, but due to the politics in the region, the country did not want to rely on technology from other countries. He proposed Jordan as one of the pilot countries, stressing that a depoliticized enabling environment was a prerequisite for carrying out such a project.

The Committee member from Egypt proposed Cairo as the venue for the next roundtable.

Recommendations:

- Establish a Parliamentary Network on Water (PNoW);
- Adopt a parliamentary plan of action on SDG 6;
- Identify pilot countries in the Middle East for the country mapping exercise;
- Set up Science for Peace schools in interested countries in the region;
- Identify donors to fund the PNoW and its activities.