

Roundtable on Water:
*The role of science and technology
in projects of peace*

Geneva, 23 May 2016

Concept Note

At its most recent session held in Lusaka in March 2016, the Committee on Middle East Questions adopted the Terms of Reference for a regional Roundtable on Water. This is not intended to be part of the final stages of political negotiations between Israel and Palestine, or indeed between any other countries. Members of the Committee are imminently aware that it is not up to parliaments to negotiate peace, let alone sign peace agreements. The Committee concluded its discussion of the recommendations of its last mission to the Middle East in January 2016. It considered that the global parliamentary community should invest in establishing projects of peace that could transform elements of conflict, such as water, food, and power, into factors of co-existence that could create an atmosphere that is conducive to peaceful political solutions. The Committee agreed that science is the most neutral umbrella for spearheading the collective regional efforts aimed at addressing this regional challenge.

At its session held in Geneva in March 2014, the Committee debated a number of possible topics for its dialogue sessions and ultimately selected water, and its different dimensions, for the first session. It also decided that a roundtable approach would be the best format to encourage inclusive and effective exchanges on water. Given WaterLex's expertise in this area and the fact that it has collaborated with the IPU in the past, this organization is seen as a natural partner in the roundtable.

The European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) has worked on science for peace projects for over 60 years, delivering the message of the enormous potential of science as a driver of peaceful relations among cultures and nations, and as a force for sustainability and in tackling the major challenges facing society today. CERN conducts scientific research programmes on particle physics, with the added benefit of promoting the importance of science for society, including peace. This model includes a number of training and educational initiatives for international students, as well as training schools for high school teachers. These initiatives are not intended exclusively for students and teachers from CERN Member States, but also to those from non-Member States, with particular attention to developing countries or countries belonging to sensitive areas, including the Middle East.

Another organization working in the field of science and technology is the Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME), a regional scientific laboratory that hosts members from a wide variety of countries in the region, ranging from Arab States, Iran (Islamic Rep. of) and Turkey, to Israel and Palestine, and European States, on a platform that provides an example of co-existence. Jordan plays host to SESAME, as well as a number of other national and international scientific research institutions.

Objectives and expected outcomes of the roundtable

The aim of the roundtable is to foster discussions among MPs, scientists, and experts from the region and the regional exchange of scientific experiences and projects on addressing the water issue between the countries involved. The roundtable will aim to develop a tailored cooperative project involving scientific research teams composed of young scientists and regional experts to deal with the water issue. The discussions will elaborate on testimonials from relevant existing models in the region, such as SESAME. Through the creation of common projects related to water, this controversial issue can be transformed into a factor of co-existence which can in turn revive other projects of peace.

The roundtable will aim to explore means of bringing science closer to people, by literally helping to bring water to the table in a region that faces water scarcity, and to countries that face drought or a sudden surge of water consumption due to the increased flow of refugees. Parliaments have a responsibility for representing their people, protecting them and meeting their basic needs and aspirations, including their

desire to live in peace. The roundtable discussion will provide inspiration for the establishment of an action plan. The Committee will submit a report on the roundtable to the IPU's governing bodies at its next session in October 2016.

Format

The roundtable will consist of interventions by relevant experts followed by presentations by MPs of their country's relevant experiences. A concluding session will be held on the last day and will provide an opportunity for the participants to develop a plan of action and consider future roundtables.

Venue and dates: IPU Headquarters, Geneva, 31 May to 2 June 2016

Participation: The roundtable is open to the members of the IPU Committee on Middle East Questions, the parliaments of Arab States as observers, as well as experts from CERN, SESAME and WaterLex.

Languages: The working languages will be English, French, Arabic and Spanish.