



*Lebanese Republic
National Assembly*



ASSOCIATION OF THE FRIENDS OF
IBRAHIM ABD EL AL

Official Report

Parliamentarian's Water Forum in the Arab World and Surrounding Countries (Turkey and Iran)

Beirut, 13th - 15th of May 2010

Day 1

Introduction:

Under the Patronage of His Excellency the President of the Lebanese National Assembly, Mr Nabih Berri, and in collaboration with the World Water Council and the Association of the Friends of Ibrahim Abd El Al, the Parliamentary Committee for Public Works, Transport, Energy and Water organized a Parliamentarians' Water Forum in the Arab World and Surrounding countries (Turkey and Iran), on the 13th and 14th of May 2010. Participants undertook a field trip to the Litani River projects on Saturday the 15th. Parliamentarians and representatives from the following countries participated in the forum: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Irak, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen. The Secretary General of Parliamentary Union of the Organization of Islamic Conference Member States and the Secretary General of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union also participated in the forum.

Day one was devoted to critical water issues in the region and included presentations by Lebanese and international experts on water policies, laws and conventions. Day two provided an opportunity to consult participants in detail on the establishment of a Parliamentarians' Helpdesk for Water on the initiative of the World Water Council.

Opening session:

Mr Kabbani, President of the Parliamentary Committee of Public Works, Transport, Energy and Water opened the forum with a message from the President of the National Assembly, Mr Nabih Berri. He spoke about the natural challenges affecting water resources in the Arab world and of the need for Arab countries to collaborate to ensure their water security, including through establishing better water management policies, seeking new sources of water, and working under existing International Conventions. In order to ensure a common position on water issues, Parliamentarians should seek the support of an interactive data base on legislation and scientific information provided through a Helpdesk.

Mr. Hachmi Kennou, Governor of the World Water Council, read a message on behalf of the President of the World Water Council, Mr Loic Fauchon. He stressed the role of Parliamentarians in law making and in contributing to new, open perspectives that can ensure sustainable and coherent future water policies. He stated that parliamentarians had played a key role in the political process leading up to the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul which had brought together an unprecedented 250 parliamentarians from more than 50 countries to address water issues. This symbolized the

starting point in a true partnership between the water community and parliamentarians and from the forum in Istanbul had emerged the idea of a Helpdesk, providing an informational and networking tool which would assist Parliamentarians in tackling water issues. Mr Hachmi Kennou concluded the President's intervention by noting that the 6th World Water Forum, which would be held in Marseille in March 2012, would be devoted to the achievement of solutions to water challenges.

The Minister of Energy and Water, His Excellency Mr Jibril Bassil, attended the morning session and presented on the situation facing the Lebanese water sector. He stressed the misperception that Lebanon was a water-rich country and noted that water shortages occur. In providing an overview of the country's water strategy he outlined the reforms that were taking place to laws and the institutions, including the creation of an integrated administration. Campaigns were required at all levels, he said, in order to raise levels of public awareness on critical water issues facing Lebanon. The Minister also outlined the importance of international rivers to the country and the role that Lebanon could play in managing these key resources.

Technical papers were then presented by Dr Wajdi Najem, Dr Youssef Karam, Dr Hammou Lamrani, Dr Alejandro Iza and Dr Mark Zeitoun. These papers covered water demand management, water quality, water resources management, and international water law and water conventions. Issues stressed included the need to establish better data sources on water, and stronger definition of water demand in relation to availability. There was also a critical need to reduce wastewater production and to establish a master plan to protect water resources. More reuse of recycled water could take place in irrigated agriculture, industry and in other sectors. Lebanon, it was noted, would benefit greatly from a more functioning sanitation network.

Overall there were challenges, but also important assets available. These could be harnessed to plan sector development, and to value water resources more accurately. One important policy issues was how best to establish joint public-private management arrangements. There was general agreement that ways existed for parliamentarians to catalyze change in water sector and that they should play such a role including support to awareness-raising campaigns, and in establishing more effective cooperation arrangements. There were major challenges at a regional level. These included achieving a more structured benefit-sharing approach to allow optimal benefit sharing arrangements to emerge from enhanced cooperation, for more coherent environmental diplomacy within the region and for greater importance to be attached to International Water Laws and Conventions.

Day 2

Helpdesk

The President of the Association of the Friends of Ibrahim Abdel Al, Mr Nasser Nasrallah opened the session by describing the Water balance in Lebanon showing clearly and scientifically that the water needs will exceed its availability. He talked about the link between the topics discussed the first day and the Helpdesk concept. Moreover he stressed on the need to build a strong and sustainable relationship with the World Water Council, on a regional and international basis and he highlighted the importance of tackling water issues fairly.

A facilitated dialogue took place on the concept and process of developing and establishing a Water Helpdesk for online support to parliamentarians. Dr Alan Nicol, Director of Policy and Programmes at the World Water Council, outlined the origin of the idea and how such a Helpdesk might function. Following this three parallel roundtables addressed core questions and then during a plenary session a synthesis was made of the output and the following recommendations were agreed upon:

What content should the Helpdesk provide?

- Each country's main details and challenges, including water resources assessments per country and shared water resources information (such as water quality, quantity, rainfall, population needs, wastewater/pollution, scarcity)
- Existing research on water resources in the Arab countries, Turkey and Iran
- Events taking place in the region and at a global level (conferences/seminars, etc)
- Past and present treaties, conflicts and ethical issues (multi-, bilateral and between groups of countries)
- Information must be verifiable and credible (i.e. properly sourced/referenced), and there should be avoidance of duplication
- Information should be included which is published by states themselves (and by specific initiatives taken by the League of Arab States)
- Common terminology and definitions should be adopted and used
- Information should be included on the Occupied Arab Territories
- The Helpdesk should include information on sources of pollution and actions taken

In what ways should the Helpdesk function (from being static to being more dynamic)?

- It should both raise awareness and provide public information
- Help parliamentarians to solve the water problems they face
- It should not be used to impose or take positions on issues at any level
- It should enable use by independent institutions
- Academic institutions should also be able to use the Helpdesk
- It should provide links to Civil Society Organisations
- The Helpdesk should call on states to provide and update information
- The Helpdesk should have a capacity to exchange data
- It should link to official websites (to further enable access to information)
- Move gradually from being more static to being more dynamic
- Provide a blog facility for parliamentarians (which is password protected)
- Enable opinion pieces/position papers to be posted
- Include a password-protected section for specific use by parliamentarians

If there are any major constraints foreseen, how may these be overcome?

- The Helpdesk function will be for the Arab countries, Turkey and Iran
- How the desk will be hosted and managed needs to be addressed
- There is a need to plan proper funding for the website (due to anticipated costs / sustainability issues)
- There is a need to maintain an interesting website to which users will continue to be drawn
- Information should be user-friendly (including capacity for non-expert use)
- Languages used should be Arabic (official), plus other (English, Francais, Espanol)

A suggestion was tabled to host the focal point of the Helpdesk for Parliamentarians (Arab countries, Turkey and Iran) in Lebanon.

A vote of thanks was given to the three organizing institutions and the meeting was concluded.

15th May 2010