



**EcoPeace Annual Conference 2019**  
**Dead Sea, Jordan**  
**November 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> 2019**

**Summary of Proceedings**

Celebrating 25 years since the founding of the organization, EcoPeace held its annual conference on the shores of the Dead Sea in Jordan with the participation of 170 people, including Jordanians, Palestinians, Israelis and Internationals. The gathering was an inspiring event where the achievements of EcoPeace were celebrated and key discussions held on lessons to be learnt to meet the ever-growing challenges facing the region, both geopolitical and climatic.



## **EcoPeace Middle East Annual Conference 2019 Summary**

Tuesday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019:

### **Opening and Welcoming Remarks**

- EcoPeace Middle East – Celebrating 25 Years
  - On behalf of EcoPeace, Yana Abu Taleb, the Jordanian Co-Director, gave a speech about EcoPeace’s accomplishments and how the continued focus on cooperation, diversity, and adaptability has allowed EcoPeace to succeed these past 25 years and will continue to succeed in the future
  
- HE Raed Abu Al-Saud – Jordanian Minister of Water and Irrigation
  - On Behalf of His Excellency, the Minister of Water and Irrigation, Eng. Raed Abu Al-Soud, the Secretary General of the Jordan Valley Authority, Ali Al-Kouz, spoke about the challenges facing the Jordanian water sector due to climate change and other geopolitical factors and acknowledged the important role of EcoPeace in promoting sustainable development in the Jordan Valley and regional cooperation, which aligns with the wider strategy of the Ministry.
  
- HE Erik Ullenhag – Ambassador of Sweden to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
  - His Excellency, Erik Ullenhag, spoke about Sweden’s partnership with EcoPeace, and EcoPeace’s importance as one of the only remaining organizations that continues to foster cross border communication in a tension filled region. He congratulated EcoPeace on how far it has come over the past 25 years, in terms of gender equality, and on its recognition of the threat of climate change to the region. He closed by promising Sweden’s support for EcoPeace’s future projects and the continuation of this important partnership.
  
- HE Birgitta Siefker-Eberle – Ambassador of Germany to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
  - Her Excellency, Birgitta Siefker-Eberl, spoke about the success of EcoPeace, despite growing tensions, to continue to protect the shared environment. She also stressed the importance of EcoPeace’s work in addressing the nexus of climate and security that Germany is also focused on. She said Germany will continue to fund meetings to foster cooperation on water, energy, and climate change issues in Jordan, Palestine, and Israel. She ended by thanking EcoPeace for its continued work to promote peace in the region.

### Ceremony of Waterkeeper Alliance and EcoPeace Middle East

- The Waterkeeper Alliance, a global network of grassroots organizations working to protect everyone's right to clean water, was introduced, and announced its new partnership with EcoPeace, which has become the official Jordan River Waterkeeper. The introduction to the ceremony explained how this partnership will further support EcoPeace's efforts to rehabilitate the Jordan River and promote the needs of local communities.
- A plaque was then presented to the president of the board of the Waterkeeper Alliance, Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

### Keynote Address: Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

- Robert Kennedy Jr. then gave a passionate keynote address detailing the importance of conserving water globally. He spoke about how pollution in the Hudson River sparked the creation of the Waterkeeper Alliance, which has now expanded globally to provide support for organizations working to protect water sources and the environment in their communities. He then expanded upon the importance of the Jordan River to history, culture, society, the economy, the environment, and to future generations. He called upon conference participants to remember how vital our natural environment is to humankind and the world, especially the Jordan River. He finished by praising EcoPeace for all their accomplishments towards achieving the vision of a free-flowing Jordan River through cross border cooperation.

### Panel Discussions

After the opening speeches the conference shifted into two panel discussions: one about youth and climate change, and the other about women and environmental leadership.

- The first panel was titled: **Climate Change, Youth, and the Future - Robert F. Kennedy Jr. with Youth Leaders from the Region**. This panel included young leaders from Palestine, Jordan, and Israel who talked to Robert F. Kennedy Jr. about his work to find out how he thinks the next generation can be climate leaders. He was hopeful their generation would be the one to take real action on climate change and gave them advice about the importance of developing unique strategies for each region experiencing water scarcity and conflict, because each region has specific problems. He also stated that it is vital to focus on climate change, but it can be overwhelming for people to think about such an enormous issue, so it is best to reframe the problem and ask people to help revitalize the Jordan River, which will aid in efforts to fight climate change. This panel demonstrated that there are youth in each country who are committed to being environmental leaders now and into the future.

- The second panel, **Women Leading the Change**, featured Dr. Sinaia Netanyahu from Israel, Ghada Abu Ta'a from Palestine, and Dr. Ghaida Abu-Rumman from Jordan as panelists, and Katrin Aidnell as moderator. They shared their perspectives on women's involvement in environmental policy making, business, and education, respectively. They responded to questions from the moderator, as well as the audience, which allowed them to share their experiences as women in their field, including the difficulties they faced and the strategies they used to combat these challenges. They focused on the importance of having a space for women to discuss what they are experiencing and provide support for each other, so their voices can be heard as leaders. This panel also focused on the unique role women have in sustaining peace and leading environmental change because they are the ones dealing with the effects of climate change firsthand. They are also the ones predominantly raising children, so if women are educated on sustainability and conservation, they can teach this to their children, creating a generation that is committed to mitigating climate change.

Wednesday, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019:

### **EcoPeace's Approach – Past and Present Strategies and Achievements**

The second day of the conference specifically focused on the past, present, and future work of EcoPeace. It started with brief plenary presentations of EcoPeace's past and present approaches and achievements in the three core programs: Bottom-Up, Top-Down, and Sustainable Development and Economic Opportunities. This information was delivered in PowerPoints and provided background information for the following parallel breakout sessions.

### **EcoPeace Towards the Future – Parallel Breakout Sessions**

After the plenary presentations, participants chose from one of three breakout sessions; each explored a different topic and was structured differently according to the content. The following is a brief summary of each presentation and the discussions that followed the presentations.

### **Summary of Bottom-up Break Out Session on Education and Constituency Building**

**Yana Abu Taleb**, the Jordanian Co-Director, moderated the session along with representatives of the educational teams from the three offices and representatives of the youth and young professional programs.

### **The EcoPeace Model of Environmental Peacebuilding:**

For two decades, EcoPeace has recognized the necessity of a bottom-up approach that complements its top-down initiatives because only with knowledge, awareness and advocacy at the grassroots level, do governments feel the pressure to make meaningful agreements, and take

environmental decisions needed to build the trust required for lasting peace. In order to have the most effective strategy, EcoPeace continues to read regional indicators and adjust their implementation to current events. As a result, Phase IV of the award-winning Good Water Neighbors (GWN) program is focused on a shift from cross-border communities at the preteen level, to the development of youth leadership in high schoolers, university students and young professionals. Both the new high school and the young professional programs, emphasize the development of leadership skills as well as a more sophisticated understanding of water issues, including the connection between water security and national security, the potential for climate change challenges to bring cooperation, and the Food-Water-Energy nexus. GWN Phase IV promises deep and continuous engagement during the formative leadership years, providing fertile ground to develop leaders that see cooperation over water issues as promising, necessary and preferable to the status quo. To complement this, both the curriculum and teacher-training programs incorporate educator feedback, to empower teachers to utilize the active learning framework in their classrooms.

### **Part 1- Panel of Youth Trustees and Alumni:**

Three youth from Jordan, Palestine, and Israel reflected on how EcoPeace contributed to their personal development and informed their thinking about environmental issues, conflict, and possible solutions through its focus on regional cooperation.

### **Highlights from the Discussion**

The youth leader from Palestine spoke about how he has been active in EcoPeace for over seven years, as was his older brother. He feels EcoPeace has developed his confidence, interests and capabilities. The youth leader from Israel spoke of her journey from being active in a peacebuilding movement to becoming an EcoPeace Youth Trustee due to her growing interest in environmental issues, which allows her to engage her peers through Summit Days about global and regional environmental issues. The alumnus from Jordan spoke about how EcoPeace led to his commitment to advancing sustainable development and his profession in agrotechnology.

### **Recommendations:**

- Ongoing workshops and opportunities to meet and learn, would bolster confidence and engagement.
- Develop the capacity of Youth Trustees to reach their peers through inter-school and community-based projects and Summit Days.
- Teachers, students and experts identified and discussed the strengths and opportunities of increasing engagement in interactive environmental education. Educators asked for continued expansion of the active learning models for environmental education in school.

### **Part Two- Panel of Young Professionals Track:**

The second part focused on the status of the new Young Professionals programming with its two tracks: Water Diplomacy and Green Social Entrepreneurship. Staff introduced progress made, as well as the objectives, content and the vision of creating a young cohort of cross-border leaders who are enthusiastic about working to fight climate change and the current water realities.

### **Highlights from the Discussion:**

Water Diplomacy Program participants from each of the countries spoke about their experiences, which then inspired three different participants from the audience, with different stories and backgrounds and a shared passion for a better region, to speak. An agronomist and two engineers shared their view of what they have so far experienced with EcoPeace in the first national workshop, as well as what they were hoping to achieve and learn by participating in this program. The speakers shared their personal hopes: promoting conservation; focusing engineering efforts on renewable energy; informing the engineering community about the possibilities of cross border collaboration and EcoPeace's activities; and accessing schools in their own communities to work with youth. The constructive dialogue sparked the interest of the attendees who reflected on how young professionals can steer our future to be greener and more sustainable. They discussed the roles and opportunities for young professionals of both genders in the transition towards “Green Growth” and adaptation to climate change.

### **Recommendations:**

- Bring different community members together to create synergy across different age groups and promote learning.
- An Israeli educator asked young professionals from the three countries to take part as judges in a debating event her school is holding on water diplomacy.
- A young professional in the audience suggested the promotion of sustainable development in Gaza as well.

### **Part 3 - Constituency Building:**

The Education portion was followed by a PowerPoint presentation on constituency building, which provided a holistic summary of EcoPeace’s bottom-up approach, including information on Good Water Neighbors, Faith based initiatives, and Eco Centers. This presentation allowed the participants to see the commitment of EcoPeace over 25 years to promoting cooperation between communities with shared water resources, including the continued importance of the Good Water Neighbors Program and newer strategies that encourage cross border communication. Participants were then able to discuss these constituency building initiatives and gain a better understanding of EcoPeace’s Bottom-Up programming.

### **Highlights from the Discussion:**

Teachers, students and experts identified and discussed the strengths and opportunities of increasing engagement in interactive environmental education. Educators asked for continued expansion of the active learning models for environmental education in schools.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Bottom-Up approach, particularly focused on education, should continue to be an EcoPeace priority.

## Summary of Top-Down Break Out Session on Policy Change Approach

**Gidon Bromberg**, Israeli Co-Director, moderated the Top Down - Policy Change Approach session together with **Anwar Abu Hammour, Bashar Al Shawa and Uri Ginot** from the Jordan, Palestine and Israel offices respectfully.

The objective of this session was to discuss the methods and strategies that led to past achievements from top-down advocacy and to outline EcoPeace's current and future efforts in revitalizing the Jordan Valley, the Water Cannot Wait initiative, and Climate Security. EcoPeace developed these top-down programs through research, publishing policy briefs, and holding events that highlighted the mutual gain of EcoPeace's policy recommendations for decision makers at the regional and international levels.

### **Highlights from the Discussion:**

The roundtable session focused on the policy work of EcoPeace, with a concerted effort to balance comments made according to nationality and gender. Discussions started on the Jordan Valley and included very current concerns related to annexation proposals of the current Israeli government. For both Water Cannot Wait and Climate Security, the unique opportunity awarded to EcoPeace to present these topics before the UN Security Council and the UN Climate Summit did not go unnoticed. Participants included high level officials, think tanks, academia, activists and mayors from the three countries and the international community.

### **Recommendations:**

- Continue to fill the political void with a positive policy approach focused on sustainability and win/win policy approaches.
- Partnering with World Bank, Quartet and UN Special Envoy advances a practical policy agenda.
- Aim for further involvement of Foreign Ministers in the policy work of EcoPeace.
- Moving forward on an Israel/Palestine water agreement is a desired policy approach, based on policy support for increasing water abundance and obtaining Palestinian water rights and their timely, unimpeded implementation on the ground.
- The targeted, balanced and practical manner of past and present policy approaches of EcoPeace have proven to be uniquely effective.
- Enlightened self-interest of each country, on the one hand, expresses the practical nature of the work, and mutual gain, on the other hand, expresses the regional balance always needed.
- It was effective to have a security policy paradigm, including climate security, as relevant for each country's audience.
- Environmental sustainability interests should supersede at times the national policy considerations of all three countries.
- The synergy produced by the Bottom Up approach was considered essential to create public support for the Top Down policy measures being advanced.

- It was smart to look for technological innovation as a game changer.
- The international community is increasingly skeptical of progress in the Middle East and wants to see practical results of policy approaches taken.
- There are bilateral, trilateral, broader Arab world and China related policy opportunities to consider.
- Being determined and persistent with the policy approaches is essential for the long-term interests of the region, even if actions on the ground (i.e. while opposing Jordan Valley annexation) appear to be going in the opposite direction.

### Summary of Sustainable Development: Investment Track and Water Energy Nexus

**Nada Majdalani**, the Palestinian Co-Director, moderated the session along with representatives of the finance teams from the three offices

#### **Part 1 – Investments in the Region**

The first portion of this session focused on Investments in the Region. The team presented the concept of attracting investment from the private sector, while at the same time working on building political will for the implementation of the Jordan Valley Master Plan. Thus, EcoPeace focuses on environment, energy, water, food and agriculture technologies and environmental tourism. In the current program EcoPeace is looking into identifying and facilitating the implementation of 12 business ideas, of which at least 2 should be regional and an additional 5 each in Jordan and Palestine. Project concepts have been identified in the agriculture, water, tourism and renewable energy sectors. After the presentation for this portion concluded, there was an opportunity for discussion. Participants provided the following recommendations, comments, and feedback:

#### **Highlights from the Discussion:**

The participants expressed the need to establish details on the potential project ideas, including developing a list of needs, success factors, challenges, and main regional blocking stones such as political will, accountability and governance. It was indicated that an early on definition on the impact potential for each project is of high importance. The UN SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) were given as an example of a well-established tool for mapping projects.

This project identification process could be facilitated by establishing unified criteria, addressing common interests for maximum impact, and assessing the potential risks. The projects to be identified should meet the desire of achieving profit while having a local socio-economic and environmental impact, so ideas should be prioritized that are able to balance environmental investments with basic needs of communities in the Jordan Valley.

There are projects with similar goals running in the region, where there is great potential and good will for cooperation with EcoPeace. Funding and access to finance, even from local banks, for such projects is available and attainable in the region. Investment rates are low, and investors are looking for venues to engage in impact investments with a reasonable ROI. It was advised by various participants to connect with local banks as well as with international finance agencies, such as IFC, EBRD, and the Green Climate Fund. SIDA is also implementing a bank guarantees program for SME projects in Palestine which can be utilized. The use of local banks is important and their willingness to cooperate is key to the success of project funding.

The projects in the Jordan Valley are by nature fit for impact investment. To attract investors, the project impacts should be clear, and the risk and concerns need to be identified. Various challenges have been presented, including the daily hurdles that are faced by Palestinians in Area C, particularly in the Jordan Valley, such as blocking permits for solar projects by the Israeli authorities, restricting access to water, and delaying the shipping of agricultural produce. The current conditions and political developments that could lead to the annexation of the Jordan Valley are hindering any real attempt or progress to promote agricultural and environmental projects. This issue must be contested in order to succeed.

On the Jordanian side of the Jordan Valley, the private sector requires that projects be profitable. Climate Change is global and thus de-risking its associated impacts should be funded by the international community, not solely by developing countries who are most affected. The Jordanian authorities are not capable of providing these funds for risk sharing. However, the Government is willing to support and endorse these projects if externally funded.

Since the political risk is too high, the way to work around it is to either focus on small projects that are “under the radar” or very profitable ones that the private sector will be eager to support regardless of hurdles. Some participants also stressed Small and Medium Businesses (SMBs) are easier to establish and the younger generation is more flexible and willing to engage.

### **Recommendations:**

- EcoPeace should continue working on both channels – advocacy and promotion of the investment projects.
- Many of the participants thought that if we keep doing what we are doing, engaging the private sector, young entrepreneurs, and trying to open up bureaucracies through the established advisory councils at the national level, support will come from the investment community and NGOs in the field.
- EcoPeace regional capabilities are useful to mitigate the risks and ease the introduction of impact investors to the region. EcoPeace could provide a “virtual political platform” for the impact investment community. It is an enabler, rather than a project manager, by providing knowledge transfer, regional support and reducing barriers to enter the region.
- EcoPeace should seek to solidify partnerships at local and regional levels with NGOs that have the willingness and the interest, such as Portland Trust and others.
- The key to success is to start with pilots in order to create successful precedents and to encourage more private sector investors, which is exactly what the EcoPeace program, facilitated by SIDA, attempts to do.

## **Part 2 – Water Energy Nexus and the Private Sector Aspect**

The second portion of the session expanded on the current status of the Water Energy Nexus and the role of the private sector in this project. The team presented the concept of the WEN, highlighting the potential economic benefit for each country. They explained that the current focus is proving the concept of PV power transfer from Jordan to Israel and Palestine. This portion was also followed by a discussion period.

### **Highlights from the Discussion:**

Many members stressed that while the concept is clear, the political will required is a significant barrier. However, Jordan has excess energy today, so there may be openness to sell to Israel. Thus, a precedent and proof of good will is important to get the private sector on board.

Additionally, Gaza's current energy shortage is causing desalination plants in Gaza to operate at low capacity and lack of political will and infrastructure issues mean desalination plants for Gaza's needs are 10 years or more away. So, Gaza as a source of desalinated water is a great challenge, as local consumption is not yet available and energy shortages and conflict are stopping progress in desalination.

### **Post Conference Survey**

A survey was distributed to conference participants at the end of the conference and attendees responded to various questions, including: **How will you make Change in your own country?**

The following are some of the common responses to this question, which indicate the impact this conference had on people's desire to support EcoPeace's efforts in any way they can:

- Most participants reported that they will work on changing mindsets in their own communities.
- Most participants reported they will raise awareness in their communities by focusing on environmental issues, especially among youth and students.
- Most participants agreed on the importance of investing more in education by conducting more initiatives to deliver important topics to the next generation, including students in marginalized groups in the region.
- Most participants reported they will support EcoPeace in its activities and implementation, including lobbying and advocating in their community.
- Most participants reported they will introduce EcoPeace to their community, share more of EcoPeace's activities and implement what they have learned.
- Most participants agreed on the importance of raising awareness of economic issues, water and climate change.

Less common responses were also given, demonstrating the unique ideas people have based on different backgrounds and specialties:

- Some Israeli participants reported that, as members of the private sector, they will seek more relations with the private sector members across the border to maximize value and gain more opportunities for development.
- Some participants highlighted the importance of facing the regional challenges by approaching global funds, having discussions with key political representatives and partnering with other civil societies.
- Some participants highlighted the importance of water harmony by using events and media platforms to highlight this new story and potential new framework for peace.
- Some participants reported they will create more initiatives for environmental engagement in early education.
- Some internationals reported they will raise awareness, in Europe, of EcoPeace work and communicate new approaches to address the issues.

The content of this summary is solely the responsibility of EcoPeace Middle East and does not necessarily represent the opinion of our funders and supporters.

Words of Gratitude:

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