



מכון ון ליר בירושלים

THE VAN LEER JERUSALEM INSTITUTE

معهد فان لير في القدس

The Forum on Environment and Regional Sustainability

In early 2008, The Forum on Environment and Regional Sustainability was established in the Mediterranean Neighbors' Program at The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. The Forum seeks to introduce a new conceptual framework and to develop regional cooperation that will enhance regional sustainability.

The underlying rationale of the Forum is that "Nature Knows No Boundaries," thus, conflicted parties are more prone to work together on environmental issues and problems. We see the joint striving for regional sustainability as an essential tool towards cooperation, reconciliation and peace. It is our belief that coping with the shared critical environmental issues cannot be postponed to the day after resolving the political conflict.

The Forum creates a space for shared thinking on cross-border environment, for acquiring knowledge, practical tools, new environmental concepts and activities as well as encouraging regional networking. The Forum aspires to place environmental issues at the forefront of political negotiations and to initiate regional cooperation in environmental and sustainability projects.

To achieve these goals, the Forum works on three areas of research simultaneously: intellectual-theoretical research, applied research and policy oriented research.

The Forum is comprised of five professional groups with a total membership of more than 150 Israelis and Palestinians.

Intellectual-Theoretical Level: Environmental History

Two groups of experts are studying the "environmental history" of Eretz Israel/Palestine, within the borders of Mandatory Palestine. The groups started their work in early 2010 and are expected to produce, in addition to their research, a Hebrew-Arabic textbook on environmental history for students and the general public.

The Environmental History group is a forum for researchers from a variety of disciplines including history, geography, environmental studies, and law. Participants study the classical literature of Environmental History theories focusing on both methodology and specific themes so as to develop the field in Israel. A highlight

was an enlightening meeting with Azariah Alon, one of the founders, in the 1950s, of The Society for Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), who provided insight into the foundation of the movement and the development of environmental concepts in Israel. **Dr. David Schorr** and **Ms. Carmit Lubanov** head the group.

The History of Water group is a forum for researchers from disciplines such as policy-making, geography, hydrology, and history. Discussions have included periodization of the history of water in the region, the history of Mekorot, Israel's National Water Company, the story of the Hula Wetlands, the history of Hamovil Ha'artzi, Israel's National Water Carrier. Research is done in cooperation with IPSO (Israel Palestine Science Organization) and Al-Quds University. **Prof. Eran Feitelson, Dr. Maya Duani and Dr. Assaf Zelzer** head the group.

Israeli-Palestinian Environmental Studies group on cross-border environmental issues, a group of 24 university students of environmental studies, met to learn about their common environment and its challenges paying special attention to cross-border issues. The group brings together active and involved Israeli and Palestinian students to study a shared topic of great interest and places the issue of regional environment and sustainability on both sides' national agendas.

Policy-Oriented Level: Israeli-Palestinian Experts on the Environment

A group of Israeli-Palestinian environmental experts met regularly during 2008-2009 to study the cross border environmental problems and the political situation in regard to the environment; to develop ideas for joint projects; and to discuss the possibility of using the environment as a mechanism for peace building. The group developed a joint vision of regional sustainability that should serve the well-being of all residents of the country (see box below).

Other discussion groups were:

A group of young Israeli and Palestinian **environmental activists** studied environmental problems within the context of the conflict.

A **Discussion and Dialogue** group of Israeli peace, human rights and environmental activists in NGOs discussed the connections between environmental issues and peace.

Shared Vision for Regional Sustainability

Israelis and Palestinians live securely, side by side, in a socially and culturally diversified region as good neighbors with mutual respect, while their different needs are realized in accordance with the principals of sustainable development.

The development, consumption and allocation of physical, social and spiritual resources are realized in a long-term vision crosscutting time and space. Resource use and management, and conserving the natural resources and landscapes are coordinated, taking into consideration the interests of each side. Special emphasis is placed on human resource development as well as on environmental conservation and restoration.

We believe that collaboration and just management of the environment, with respect and conservation of the ecological systems, encourage stability, peace, and sustainability now and for future generations.

Applied Research Level: The Renewable Energy Group

This group, headed by **Dr. Isaac Berzin**, assembles Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian experts working together to identify and develop ideas of cooperation in the field of renewable energy between their countries. The participants are from different fields including chemistry, agriculture, physics, renewable energy, environmental policy. The group focuses on unique solar energy technology. In 2010 a pilot project of covering greenhouses with thin-films that produce electricity coming from solar energy was initiated at 4 different sites. Its main goal is to investigate the possibility of "harvesting the sun twice" and use this technology for both agriculture and energy

production while exploring the added value of regional cooperation.

The group met several times, including a two-day meeting in March. The group visited the ecological greenhouse in Kibbutz Ein Shemer, and learned about its educational cross-national environmental work. Dr. Ibrahim Yehia, head of the Kfar Qara R&D Center, and one of the leading participants in the project, hosted the group and showed a model of the small greenhouse that he built and discussed the technical aspects of the project. The main partners in this project are the HPS organization (Ramallah) and Masar (Jordan).



Dr. Ibrahim Yehia showing the greenhouse



A visit to the Ein Shemer greenhouses

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