

## **"Industry Receives Dead Sea Waters for free. This Situation Cannot Go On"**

**Saad Abu Hamour, the Jordanian government representative in the Ashdod Sustainability Conference, and Gidon Bromberg, Israeli Director of Friends of the Earth Middle East, presented creative environmental and regional solutions**

Gidon Bromberg, Israeli director of Friends of the Earth Middle East – a cross border Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli environmental organization – held a discussion with Saad Abu Hamour, the Jordanian government representative in the Israeli-Jordanian Joint Water Committee, who arrived to Israel to participate in the Ashdod Sustainability Conference.

The discussion dealt with water resources shared by the two countries, the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. Bromberg launched the discussion by declaring: "Nature knows no limits", as Mr. Abu Hamour nodded consentingly. To Bromberg's question regarding the nature of the Jordanian water economy, he replied: "Jordan is sustained by rainfall therefore there are storage tanks on almost every roof in the country. Water supply in Jordan is irregular, in some areas water runs in the taps only once a week and citizens often use self-harvested rainfall".

In the passing year, the general water shortage in Jordan was worsened by over a million Syrian refugees crossing the border following the war raging in their country. They live in refugees' camps in Northern Jordan and are also in desperate need for water. "More and more refugees arrive each day, and it makes it hard for us to supply them with water", said Abu Hamour, "We hope that our neighbors and the UN would assist us. No one can foresee what will happen in Syria over the next month, and currently it seems that this deluge of refugees will go on. It will make it even harder for us to supply water both to the refugees and to our own citizens".

At this point, Bromberg asked about the cooperation between Israel and Jordan over water-related-issues, and mentioned that 95 percent of the water in the Jordan River is diverted with the remainder polluted and not usable both for humans and nature. Abu Hamour surprised all by saying that "the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan is kept by both sides and we are in contact on a regular basis in order to try and solve our joint water issues. It should be noted that this agreement was signed over twenty years ago, and water-related segments must be renewed and adapted to current needs, particularly in light of global warming and developments in the water field".

And what about the Dead Sea? "There is no other way to say it, the Dead Sea is Dead", Abu Hamour declared. "Water level drops one meter every year. Jordanians, Israelis and Palestinians have already agreed that the rehabilitation of the sea should be a regional project. Industry in both countries is supplied with water from the Dead Sea for free, and this situation cannot go on". These words drew the audience's applause and Bromberg added: "The industry must pay for the water it consumes the same way citizens do".

Abu Hamour also mentioned a creative solution agreed upon by the Joint Water Committee in 2010, which is now underway: Lake Tiberias, it was decided, will sell drinking water to Amman while Aqaba will sell drinking water to Eilat, a solution geographically effective that would benefit both countries. The audience applauded again and Bromberg summarized the discussion: "This is an incredible example for joint outside-of-the-box thinking. Perhaps we sometimes disagree, but there is a constant dialogue and the cooperation is environmentally crucial".