The First Palestinian Symposium on Water Rights and
Access to the Jordan River and Development Needs in the Jordan Valley
March 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2011
Intercontinental Hotel Jericho
**Scope of Report:**

- **Geographical area addressed** is from the point the Lower Jordan River (LJR) crosses ‘Green Line’ in the north to mouth of the LJR at northern head of Dead Sea.

- **Issues addressed** focus on:
  - Obtaining Palestinian Riparian Rights
  - Baptism Site
  - Dead Sea Tourism
  - Tourism in Jericho
  - Eco-tourism in Jordan Valley
  - Trade potential
  - Jordan Valley/Dead Sea as UNESCO Heritage Site

WEDO/Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME)
Obtaining Palestinian Riparian Rights

- FoEME believes concerted efforts should be directed towards establishing Palestinian water rights.
- Defined on a basis of equitable sharing to ensure the basis for sustainable management of these limited water resources.
- Needless to say, current restrictions on Palestinian water use do not meet the criteria for equitable sharing between riparians of the Jordan River basin.
- Requires a rehabilitation of the Jordan River to at least 400 mcm annual flow, increasing to 600 mcm annual flow.

WEDO/Friends of the Earth Middle East
(FoEME)
Baptism site on the River Jordan

- 9 kms from Jericho
- Site of religious and historical importance
- Potential to attract large numbers of religious pilgrims (local and international)
- FoEME envisions transboundary park, allowing visitors crossing at the Baptism sites

Bethany Beyond the Jordan

- 2008 – 142,419 visitors
- 2009 – 134,172 visitors
- Visitors charged 8JD
- Tourist village, complete with gift shops selling robes, videos, books, jewelry, etc

Bethany Beyond the Jordan’ baptism site along the Jordan River Photo Credit: Jesse Baltutis
Dead Sea Tourism Development

“Tourism is a strategic alley of the preservation of the Dead Sea basin”

- Offers unprecedented opportunity for growth in the Palestinian tourist sector
- Potential to develop roughly 10,000 hotel rooms in Palestine, creating 30-40,000 jobs (directly and indirectly) and generate roughly USD$900 million in revenue a year at 75% occupancy rate
- Tourists drawn by reputed therapeutic value of Dead Sea water, basins unique flora, fauna and desert landscape, year round warm climate

*The Dead Sea water levels have been dropping by over one meter per year*
*Photo Credit: Jesse Baltutis*

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(FoEME)
Tourism Development in Jericho

‘Oldest continuously inhabited city in the world’

- Huge potential for growth of tourism sector
- Close proximity to Dead Sea, Kaser el Yehud, Mount of Temptation, Monasteries
- Natural attraction of Wadi Auja, Wadi Qelt, hiking and bird watching

Increase in tourism provides justification for urgency of the rehabilitation of the Jordan River
Eco Tourism in Jordan Valley

- Eco tourism fastest growing trend in global tourism – yearly growth between 20-34% per year since 1990
- Auja Environment Center first in a proposed FoEME network of Palestinian Environmental Education Centers – geared towards educating visitors and students about the Jordan River and Jordan Valley

Planned Jordan River Peace Park
- North of Green Line
- Confluence of Yarmouk and Jordan River
- Important migratory flyway for birds between Northern and Southern Hemisphere
- Potential to act as a model of conservation and cooperation
Potential for Trade between Palestine and Regional Neighbours

- For a strong economy, it is essential to allow Palestinian products and produce access to international markets (via Jordan)
- Agriculture plays big role in Jordan Valley, with potential for growth.
- Requires land and water rights to be returned to Palestinian control

**Jericho Agro-Industrial Park**
- Proposal by Japan International Cooperation Agency to establish eco-friendly development zone in close proximity to Jericho
- In final stage of implementation, potential to contribute US$ 41.5 million to a year to Palestinian economy, as well as providing 3,790 jobs

*Photo Credit: Itamar Grinberg*
Jordan Valley/Dead Sea as UNESCO Heritage Site

- FoEME promotes registration of the entire Jordan Valley/Dead Sea basin as UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and/or World Heritage Site
- Could provide useful framework for cooperation between governments to develop and implement sustainable development plan with designated areas for conservation
- Palestinian support for UNESCO registration could very well be framework which equitable access to the area is established

*Proposed boundaries of a Dead Sea UNESCO protected site. Credit: UNESCO*
Next Steps…

- Publish study on economic benefits of a rehabilitated Lower Jordan River
- Establishment of Jordan River Council to oversee rehabilitation and development efforts
- Advance regional and international recognition of the critical state of the Lower Jordan River
- Work with tourism industry to ensure sustainable development of tourism infrastructure along the north-west shores of the Dead Sea
- Obtain equitable access to the waters of the Jordan River and valley for Palestinian use
- Develop Jordan Valley Master plan geared towards the growth of the Palestinian economy
- Invest in public education programs to promote awareness of water conservation and environmental issues in the Jordan Valley
Final Remarks

FoEME calls upon riparians of the Jordan River to:

- Partner together in a shared effort to rehabilitate the Lower Jordan River
- Allow water flows of 400-600 mcm annually
- Allow one minor flood annually to restore the river’s structure and function
- Allow biodiversity to recover and achieve a fair to high ecosystem integrity and health

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Join us in realizing our shared vision

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