Thank you Gidon, hello to everyone, I will speak in Hebrew because it’s such a difficult period and every word said in this time has to be understood to the fullest and influence in the right places. My friend H.E. Saed Abu Hammour, the most important person we have in the relationship between Israelis and Jordanians, the man that walks everywhere to make this relationship a practical relationship, and I want to thank you very much as you are one of the people whose actions will influence what happens in the Middle East, you deserve a “well done!” To Yousef Awayes from the Palestinian side your presence here surely represents a great hope for great possibility and I am happy you are here. To my friends in the organizations who are partners in this event, EcoPeace and other organizations, and that made a big effort to carry out this gathering, my friend from the Ministry, the CEO and other dignitaries; Israel’s Ambassador to Jordan, Parliament member Bar-Lev, former parliament member Orit Zouratez, others.

We came here today to talk about how we can turn a river, who is not just a river, it’s also a symbol for a long history and hope for a completely different future. We came to talk about issues relating to the environment; water purification, air purification, but today I think the most important thing to talk about it how the connection between this river that is so symbolic and holy to so many people in the world and the need to “clear the air” because clearing the air these days is the most important thing that we need to do. I came here today, and it wasn’t easy, as you know I have a few more hours as the Environment Minister.

At 7 pm I finish my job but I came here especially. From here I’m going to another place, where I will finish my job, the Bedouin community in the south to for the inauguration of one of the more beautiful environmental projects, there we will, for the first time, we will implement my belief that social justice, environmental justice and peace are three elements that go hand in hand, you cannot separate them, you cannot have one without the other, because what is the environment if not a breaker of borders between peoples. And we, for the first time, are going to inaugurate a household device that turns garbage to gas. There are many such devices/facilities on a larger scale but this is a household device and I am happy about this because it’s the embodiment of the connection between social and environmental justice. Tonight I’m going to drink Bedouin coffee that was heated using gas whose origin is garbage, there is no bigger evidence than this, that you can do extraordinary things when you bring people together, but we are in very sensitive times.

And I of course, as someone who is committed and is a Minister in this government, I will try hard to be restrained because the things that I think about how our internal systems function I say in Israel but I certainly think that that this project that speaks of the Jordan River, especially how the government should start to support this project in the south part of the Jordan River, I hope it comes into fruition and that enough money is found for it and the political will to move forward also in the other areas which are close to the Jordanians, the Israelis and the Palestinians, but today we concentrate on this one are which is very important. Why do I stress this so much? Because one needs to know how to use such symbolic places for the benefit of cooperation between people.

And I say that the whole of this area, of the holy basin in Jerusalem is holy to the three religions and is one of the most sensitive areas in the world, and is one of the areas which it is easiest to instill
extremism in, on all sides, and I call here to all the relevant bodies, you cannot let this happen under any circumstances, to talk about changing the status quo in the Temple Mount and the holy basin. We must keep the status quo which was agreed upon in accords by all sides so we will not be part of a crisis that will become a religious crisis, national, nationalistic which we cannot control. I come here and say this as someone who has spent all his life in the peace process, as far back as `84 I thought that the decision to create an independent Palestinian state is one that will benefit Israel first and foremost and we need to courageously speak of this message, because the easiest thing to say is that we have no one to speak to and there is no chance for reaching a resolution, all sides can say this but where will this lead? What is the hope that this message can give to the young people growing up in this region. The Middle East can become one of the most thriving areas in the world if we can overcome the political problems, there is no reason to continue and pay the price of the radicalization that exists on all sides, because since the dawn of time an extremist on one side serves an extremist on the other side, and the decent people in the middle should take the real power to stop the extremists on both sides and tell them that we will not let you dictate the future of the Middle East, we will courageously stand in front of you in this time where each person who has the spirit of reconciliation in him, every person who thinks that from cooperation you can achieve so much more than from conflict, and I don’t think any of intend to let extremists or terror groups or religious extremists to dictate to us. There is no correlation between me thinking that peace is the solution than me thinking that where you need to fight terror you must fight terror, these are two things that don’t contrast each other. When you must fight terror you must fight terror, but you should not lose the prospect of peace and the chance to move processes.

I was in the government and for a long time I very much hoped that we will reach an agreement that will change our reality, because I believe leaders shouldn’t just manage reality, it’s their job to change the reality, to set a new reality that doesn’t only serve the short term interests, but also the more long term interests of a better future. This is being said by someone who has gone through difficult periods; I was seriously injured in the Israeli army, but at this situation, laying in the hospital for two years, I thought the most important war I need to take part in is the war for peace. This should be the conclusion of everyone that pays a personal price for what happens in our region. I condemn everyone who hurts other people, and I send my condolences to the families of those who paid the ultimate price, those innocent people who were standing on the sidewalk or waiting for the bus and became victims of this growing violence, not, under any circumstances, not fight to defend the life of the citizens of Israel, it is a very important task, but at the same time we will continue fighting for peace.

I think that this project that you are all taking part in today, and it’s a highly important project, it’s not only an environmental project, it is a project that can act as a common ground for everyone in the region who see cooperation in the region as a calling for all of us. I have no doubt that these meetings are meetings that bring down walls and bring down tensions, everyone here today knows there is no reason to lose hope. I personally, as you know, live in Sderot, the closest place to the conflict with Gaza, and it is not an easy thing, but I am happy to say that me and the whole of my family believe that in this area, our southern front, at the border with Gaza you need to believe that a political solution is the only way.

I want to congratulate the Kingdom of Jordan and the King who does everything to make sure there is a good atmosphere for everyone living in the Middle East. You now I was born in Morocco and as a little 4 year old boy I came to Israel, but it turns out that despite having few years there the emotional bond stays. I was a guest of the Kingdom of Morocco many times and I know very well that Jordan and Morocco are two countries that in very difficult times, in times of great crisis were the countries that were a meeting point between the Israelis and other actors in the region and gave a chance to create a
new atmosphere and a new process. Everyone remembers that our prime ministers would hold negotiations in the US and then on the way back stop in Morocco and then Jordan, it wasn’t a coincidence, and I believe that in this time, because of the changes taking place in the Muslim world, that things that we took as plain fact, that we always divided the Muslim world to Sunni and Shia, it turns out that things are very different and that now we must change everything and look for opportunities to create a large common ground between moderate Arabs and Muslims who want to further the process in the region. I think that the Arab League Initiative can be the basis for the future of the peace process in the area and an attempt to reach a permanent accord.

I personally know that when I speak to my children and grandchildren I will never give up on the chance to reach a diplomatic solution. I believe that when we stand up to terror, which we do, but we cannot give up on the diplomatic prospect, therefore here, on Jordanian land, I would like to call on all the moderates in the region let’s do something, lets create a new process, let’s not let the extremists on both sides dictate our future because the future is in our hands and so it should be.

Thank you all, I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak and as you know you are one of my last meetings as the Environment Minister but I hope to return after we sign peace agreements in the entire region. Thank you very much.