Adi Ashkenazi, Director of the Economic Research Division of Israel’s Office of Regional Cooperation

[Transcription] First of all I want to thank you for inviting us, and the minister, the deputy minister, the new deputy minister, and I think that we learned a lot from our staying here, and we met a lot of people and we met a lot of good will.

As you know I am not a politician – I am a professional official. The most important thing that we learn from what we saw here is the great willingness and the commitment of the people that came here from all parties – the Palestinians, the Jordanians, and also ours, our people in Israel - to rehabilitate this river. This river is important for all of us – it’s a river, as all of us know, it a river that concerns - all around the world [people are] speaking about [it], and a lot of traditions, stories, and issues around this river.

Just an anecdote, I remember myself visiting the Jordan River in a delegation with Mr Tony Blair, who was heading it. It was his first time coming to the river, and then I saw him standing like this, waiting to see something, and then asking “where is the river? Have we reached the River, or not yet?”. Afterwards he told us the story of when he was a child in London when he learnt the Bible and they spoke about the Jordan river he imagined himself a big river like the Thames, which great ships are shipping in the way of the river, and people are waving – there was something very romantic about this River – and you could see on his face the great great disappointment of what he saw. So this story, this little story I want to show you how much important[ance] for the world, all the world this river [holds]; and of course for us,

For Israel, as it was already said here, has a master plan of a part, of the northern part of the river, between the sea of galilee to the Bezeq River in the South, and we already started rehabilitating the river bank on the Israeli side. Treatments plants were built, freshwater was, this is maybe the second year already, streaming 9 million cubic meters of freshwater from the Sea of Galilee – and we see the results, we are very happy in what we see, and there is a big co-operation, the fruitful co-operation with our partners in this region – it’s only the Jordanians on the other side – and a great partnership there – of course we hope to have partnership with the Palestinians in the River issue, but not only the river issue, in all issues because we live in the same area and we want to be good neighbours. We want to be good partners in all our assets – not only water – trade, anything else, in the industry, anything that you can imagine - we want to be part of good neighbourhood policy in our region. There are a lot of urgent issues that have to be dealt with, in this issue of the River Jordan we are speaking about sewerage and solid waste – but these are the tip of the iceberg of the issues that we have to deal with. In the water they are the very important and one of the most important things that we have to deal with issues.

So I won’t take your time, I think that everybody is getting tired now I want to thank you for hearing me and I want to thank you for coming here and I had the opportunity to meet you – I will take with me your enthusiasm about this plan and we will examine it and hopefully implement part of it with coordination, with cooperation with all the stakeholders in the area. Thank you very much.