[Translation] Greetings. I am speaking as one of the three directors of EcoPeace. I was asked to speak about the past and the reasons why the situation in the Jordan River is such. People may find this difficult, but if we don't acknowledge the reality, it will be difficult to deal with it.

Thanks to Jordan for the hospitality. I am proud to be amongst friends and brothers and sisters in Jordan. I agree with what Lahlouh said, speaking about the inalienable rights of resources of the Jordan Valley for Palestine or the Lower Jordan River, which we will talk about today. The last 60 years of this region were negative for the Jordan Valley. The region used to attract many people and birds. The Yarmouk River was providing a lot of energy to the region. Then everything changed and peace was replaced with conflict and occupation. The water of the Jordan River was diverted and it is now only a small stream of polluted water. The trees were replaced by tamarisks. The fish, which were an important resource for those living by the river, vanished. The freedom to access the river and cultivate its shores was replaced with Israeli settlements and military barracks. The flowers were replaced by land mines. A lot of people in this area were displaced. Economic growth became high unemployment and poverty.

To those who don't want to see Palestine on the western shore of the Jordan River, I say that your heart is blind. We share over 100km on the shore of the river. We can't forget Syria and Jordan and hopefully we can go back to how it was before and make it even better. I hope that one day all riparians can work together. The Jordan Valley can become an economic machine to improve the situation and living standards of all people of the region.

The plan is clear, based on equal rights for everyone, including the Palestinian people on the border of 1967. This land should be free of Israeli settlements. I call on all to adopt and implement this plan as it gives hope for the peace that we desire. I call on representatives from Israeli side to support this regional Master Plan in order to enhance a comprehensive and fair peace. Let's end the occupation, be free to work together and serve our people. Let's give our people hope back – hope of a dignified life. Let us plant plants and not landmines.

I would like to reiterate my thanks to Swedish government and its people for their recognition of the Palestinian state and the EU who recognize us and support our work. Thank you all for your presence.
Munqeth Mehyar, Jordanian Director and President of EcoPeace Middle East

Well Thank you very much Nader - that was a good [light] shed on our situation in the past and I keep remembering why I dislike politics so much. But my role here on this panel is to really talk about what we have achieved in the past 20 years of work in this organization, in this region. You have heard about the problems. I think their excellencies, their speeches, the Israeli Deputy Minister, Saed Abu Hammour, and his excellency Abdulla Lahlou gave a good background on our problems in this region but also gave a kind of vision for the future. And some of that vision we really have already achieved through the work of the organization among these years.

One of our major achievements, I think, that we, at a certain point, we stopped blaming each other, especially on the environmental degradation of the region and we started to really look at what happened, what's happened to these magnificent ecosystems, the Dead Sea, the Jordan River, to find out that yes, it's our doing. But it's not like in the region before; that I always blamed the Israelis on everything. Yes they have their Lion's share of the problems, of creating them, but we also had a share too. And only then we were able to address each other and ask each other to go forward; because I recognize what I did. They recognize what they did, and we started to work together.

Palestine had the major role, of course, in the whole process. They were not a major partner in demise of the river, but they also have a role in polluting the river. Of course, we can go back to history and start talking about why they cannot really treat their sewerage water which reaches the River – I don’t need to repeat because Mr Lahlou already talked about that at length. Like I said, today we start with the responsibilities, and our personal responsibilities.

Major achievements: we succeeded in pushing the governments to take out the sewerage out of the river. Mr Saed Abu Hammour was so vocal about saying that there is no smell in the river any more. It's because we built, we pushed governments to build, water treatment plants in the area of Beit She’an and the area of Shouneh Shamaliyia in Jordan. And from the Jordanian side - a thank you for the efforts of USAID who supported and financed that particular water treatment plant.

Achievement: we also achieved in putting fresh water into the river. And that gives great hope; in the future that yes, we can do something with this river, and to the region in general and develop the different sectors for the benefit of the people themselves. Another achievement really is the committee that has been established, a joint water committee, focusing on the rehabilitation of the river in particular which is a sub-committee from the joint water committee between Jordan and Israel.

And now what we will be hearing more and more today is the Master Plan. We come to the real work now. Also all our politicians said, that we did the research, the studies, the feasibilities. It's all here now; we have a number of interventions that we believe will develop the whole region, on all countries that is adjacent to the river. I think only now we are starting to perhaps understand that we can turn things around. We can turn things around to a win-win situation wherever you go. And we are really looking forward. I will leave it to Gidon to tell us how we can get there.
[Transcription] Good morning everyone and thank you. Thank you again Your Excellency for allowing us to be here with you, Saad Abu Hammour, and all our other European sponsors, who have enabled, particularly the European Union through the SWIM Programme, to enable this vision to move forward.

So, what is the next step? What is really the vision that we are talking about? We are talking about changing the way that we look at the River and looking at the River as the natural water body that moves water down the Valley. Stopping the River being a sewerage and nothing but a border with fences and barriers to a river that supplies multi-purposes, multifunction water needs for Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians together. A river that becomes the economic engine for the Valley; an economic engine for tourism, for agriculture, for trade. Because it's only when we see the integration of the communities and of the economies, on all banks of the River, does the master plan actually show us that we have the potential to really turn to a win-win-win scenario.

Now some people say that we are naïve. That there is no hope, that there is no trust so nothing will move forward. Well, we answer, and in fact, the NGO Master Plan answers this extremely well in the baseline. It comes, and shows that it's the status quo that is not sustainable. That it's sustaining a dead river that leads to massive unemployment. The mayors of the Jordan Valley, Jordanians, Palestinians, and Israelis are here not because they are best friends. Because they have massive unemployment in their communities. They've perhaps stood up first because they feel the pain. There is up to 40% unemployment today in the Jordan Valley. That is completely unsustainable. So we say to those that see the plan and this momentum is naïve: we say that it's naïve to think that the status quo can continue. That's why we are here today. That's what the Master Plan has in its vision. It's to reverse the status quo. To create the needed economic engines through a healthy river.

The Israeli Deputy Minister of the Environment I think also touched on a very important thing. The rise of further fundamentalism, both within and from just near our borders. 150 kilometers from here is the turmoil of Syria and Iraq. What speaks to the hearts and minds of the young unemployed who live in this Valley? Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli? Within the young we are talking about rates of unemployment of over 50%. Will fundamentalism brainwash their minds? Or efforts to move forward through a healthy River, through integration of our economies and our communities, Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian together. That's what's going to capture their hearts and minds because that's what's going to create the economic engine to improve their livelihoods. That's the vision of the Master Plan.

The Jordan River is holy to half of humanity because the Jordan River has been a place of miracles for Jews, for Christians, and for Muslims. The Jordan River today is no miracle, it's a disgrace. And it's our job, not to wait for the US administration or the United Nations or the nations of greater Europe to champion the cause. It's our job to champion the cause. And therefore we also congratulate the ministerial level participation. Despite all the difficulties that we have, we have ministers or ministerial participation from all three governments here. That's a statement that they are at the table.

The momentum is to move beyond of course the table. And we call on the creation, in the Master Plan, of, at this state, informal working groups to work based on a clean river, a rehabilitated river on tourism, on agriculture, on trade, to take on the task, to take on the interventions and many of them are implementable tomorrow. So we call on you to assist us in this effort to move these interventions forward so that the miracle of the Jordan River really rises to its true feet and we stop this horrible demise of both nature and livelihood that is before us. We thank you again very much for your participation.