Water Proposed as First Final Stage Issue in Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process

17 Jul 2013 - 10:02 by OOSKAnews Correspondent

TEL AVIV, Israel

Israel’s Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) and Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) have put forward a joint proposal to tackle water as the first final status issue to be negotiated in peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

All relevant bodies, including Israel’s Prime Minister’s Office, Ministry of the Environment, the President’s Office, Energy and Water Ministry, the Palestinian Water Ministry, the international community and US Secretary of State John Kerry’s team, are considering the proposal, according to FoEME Israel director Gidon Bromberg.

"We are coming and saying that water is being held hostage, and we are all paying the price for that. What can we do to move forward?"

The current water agreement that Israel has with the Palestinian Authority was negotiated under the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1994. It was intended to be an interim agreement, but the peace process has since stalled, leaving Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza with a steadily increasing population but the same access to water they had almost 20 years ago.

All efforts to revive peace talks, including Kerry’s current efforts, are based on solving the most contentious final status issues – Jerusalem, borders, and refugees – simultaneously. Bromberg said that after in-depth discussions and a simulation held in conjunction with INSS, he believed the best chance of reviving the defunct peace process was by first tackling certain “easier” issues, particularly the issue of water.

"It’s a real opportunity to strike a final agreement on a final status issue. If we can reach a final accord on one final status issue, what then it should give confidence to the public on moving forward on other final status issues."

The FoEME-INSS plan suggests goodwill mechanisms to build trust. Israel would immediately provide an additional 30 million cubic meters of water to the PWA at no extra cost to the Palestinian Authority. In return, the Palestinian Authority would announce that the World Bank-led sewage treatment plant currently planned for the city of Hebron will be expanded to include the treatment of all Palestinian domestic and industrial sewage, which at present crosses over to Israel via the Hebron Stream. The Palestinian Authority would require an estimated additional $30 million USD contribution from donor states to be able to undertake this effort.

Following this, the parties would announce negotiations towards reaching a new water-sharing agreement to replace Article 40 of the Oslo Accords, and mediators would suggest negotiations to be complete within six months.

The plan is to be discussed at Israel’s Parliament – the Knesset – within two weeks.