Eng. Saad Abu Hammour, Secretary General of Jordan Valley Authority

[Translation] In the name of God, may peace be upon you, good morning. First of all let me extend the apologies of minister of water and irrigation Dr Hazim bin Nasser for not being able to attend as he has other commitments today at the lower house. I am participating as his deputy. I have not prepared anything to say, but I hope we are here to talk about important things and wish to welcome our guests, including our Israeli guests, and I want to extend my thanks as well.

This slogan on rehabilitating the Jordan River is important. We have attended many conferences on this subject. We hope that this plan should be flexible and for implementation any plan would require funding. I am talking here about the national plan. Here the Master Plan is for NGOs. We welcome any NGO that will help rehabilitate the Jordan River. Therefore we at the Jordan Valley Authority have made long strides to rehabilitate the Jordan River. We work with the Israeli side seriously to stop the deterioration of the JV. How can we stop the Jordan deterioration? We have to give the credit to the right people. I think about 10 years ago FoEME initiated this effort – now they are called EcoPeace. Thank you for advocating for the River. We thank all the sponsors of this conference. Through the Joint Water Committee and in my capacity heading the Jordanian side, and the Israeli side held a regional conference and we attended and invited EcoPeace. We also presented our Jordanian viewpoint. There were plans to implement a set of projects and we have begun on those plans which will cost around 20 million JD. I am talking here about negotiations on the Jordanian and Israeli border, but we want to start working with Palestine. We hope to negotiate with Palestinian neighbors to talk to them. Sometimes people say there is no Palestinian part to negotiate with.

We are working on this issue. We work on the Lower Jordan River. They have implemented a number of projects. Farmers can see the difference. We started by managing to stop with wastewater and sewage seeping into the River. Even Christians who go to the baptism side had difficulties finding clean water. After the implementation, the water quality there has improved. It was a need by the end. There is a set of other projects to be implemented. By the end of 2017, we agreed that the Israeli side will provide us with 30 million cubic meters of water. Historically speaking, this amount of water is not enough. We hope that the Israeli side will increase the amount of water provided to Jordan.

We have a problem regarding the part between ourselves and Palestine. We still face salty water and deterioration. So the lower part, near Al Bakoura, and the type and quality of water deteriorates as you go down the River – it becomes more salty. There are activities that further this degradation; it should be stopped. We can talk about the improvement of water quality at this conference and we hope that this conference will help reach an agreement with the Palestinian side to start official negotiations.

In Jordan, we lack sanitation systems at the border with Syria; we have two treatment plants, one donated by Sweden and one by USAID. The septic tanks are still there and the local people know about this. This was addressed at the regional conference last month. We should rehabilitate the Jordan Valley in general and this conference will address the lower part of the Jordan Valley.
We are talking about the transboundary waters. We are talking about billions of dollars. It’s a long term plan which will end in 2050 so we are talking about over 30 years ahead; we are talking about an ambitious plan. Of course there are many donors who are supporting the water sector. We are hoping that for meeting donors we can market this plan – and we as the Jordanian side will do our part. By different means we hope to align ourselves with developments on the western side of the river. The Israeli side also holds responsibility for degradation, as well as the Syrian side, by establishing an excessive number of dams - instead of 26, now 46 dams and 55 wells. This has led to a drying up of the Yarmouk River. We have diverted some of the rain water to use for recharge there.

We don’t have a sea to use for desalination in Jordan. The Gulf of Aqaba is far away for us. We need water for different purposes. Our dams will never reach their full capacity in Jordan – that is 140 million cubic meters – and we reached 16 million cubic meters. We will not have the same capacity as the 3 Syrian dams.

The Jordan River is shared and we should all hold responsibility for protecting the river. Hopefully, there will be official communication between the Israeli and Palestinian side. A special unit established between the three parties: The Lower Jordan River development unit have technical committees that develop studies and we had a look in the field last month. We hope that there will be a new plan by the Israeli side to provide us with more clean water. We hope that we will always meet for the benefit for our nations and that such a conference is for the public interest. We are talking about people who think that the Jordan River is a sacred river, and they have proposed many ideas to revive it. I hope that holding such conference will strengthen stakeholder resolve, and we are looking for further cooperation between people to rehabilitate the Jordan River.