

Study on Water Security in the Middle East
Speech by Mr Martin Dahinden, Director General of the Swiss
Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) of the Federal
Department of Foreign Affairs
February 15 2010 at the Montreux Palace

His Royal Highness **Prince Hassan** of Jordan,
His Excellency, Ambassador **Juhlin-Dannfelt** of the Swedish Ministry of
Foreign Affairs,
Mr **Laurent Wehrli** representing the mayor of Montreux,
Dear Colleague, Ambassador **Thomas Greminger**, Director of the
Political Division for Human Security in the Swiss Ministry of Foreign
Affairs,
Dear participants in this workshop on finding ways of bringing water
security to the Middle East,

On behalf of our Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Mrs Micheline Calmy-Rey**, I
would like to warmly welcome you to Switzerland, and especially to
Montreux.

Montreux, a city:

- where politicians have met in the past and are meeting today to
find solutions to critical situations,
- where decision-makers of all professions run their congresses to
exchange and find common and innovative solutions,
- where the impossible is made possible: like last year when the
Chinese piano virtuoso **Lang Lang** made his first appearance
teaming up with veteran **Herbie Hancock** in an audacious show
blending classical and jazz music.

We invited you here, persuaded that this environment will inspire you to
do great things for the Middle East and the entire world, as water is
currently one of the major concerns of our time.

Switzerland and Sweden have similar ideals for our planet, where
peace, human rights, economic growth and environment play a key role.
Both countries have a strong record of solidarity and active peace efforts;
this is why it is a particular pleasure for us to have Sweden and
especially the Swedish International Development Agency as a partner in
this initiative, launched by your countries and implemented by **The**
Strategic Foresight Group of Mumbai, which has raised high
expectations regarding the future of water and peace in the Middle East.

The **Strategic Foresight Group** led by **Sundeep Waslekar** and **Ilmas Futehally** can rely on our trust and respect.

I am sure the results of your working together will exceed even our keenest expectations.

I believe that because I am aware of the collective knowledge, expertise and years of experience gathered here before me. I know that many of you work day in, day out, on projects to improve water management in your countries, in the region and around the world. This makes me confident that such a concentration of expertise is bound to devise fresh, innovative and feasible solutions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you well know, water is essential to maintaining our health, to producing our food, and to sustaining and improving our quality of life.

We drink it, we generate electricity with it, we irrigate our crops with it and there is no industry which doesn't need it.

But water is a resource under mounting stress from population increases, rapid urbanization, and the accompanying demands of industry and agriculture. Climate change is worsening the already dim picture.

It is estimated that by 2025, 4 billion people - half the world's population - will live in areas where there is insufficient safe water.

The SDC, through its bilateral and multilateral agreements, invests annually close to 100 million Swiss Francs in water projects in its partner countries. The results of this cooperation have been published in the first report on effectiveness of Swiss Cooperation. This report shows that each franc invested in water has an impact for people living in poverty worth more than 3 - 5 times the investment!

Former United Nations Secretary General **Boutros Boutros-Ghali** warned bluntly that the next war in the Middle East will be over water.

Like you, Switzerland realises that water can indeed be a source of conflict.. At the same time, we believe that water will become a new common challenge, which will bring people and governments together to find solutions to this life-threatening situation.

In fact, history has shown that shared water resources at times encouraged cooperation between states, even where there was great

tension. Some of you have been key actors in similar situations, showing that strong relations and mutual recognition exists among high level water professionals across boundaries.

The Peruvian agronomic engineer **Alex Dourojeanni** goes straight to the point, saying: "Water management by definition is conflict management". This highlights the importance of your work and your success!

Now I would like to take you to a place where scarce water and distribution problems influence the life of human beings. I would like to show you how **Switzerland** - and in particular the **SDC** - can contribute to the solution of the resulting conflicts:

Central Asia has rich water reserves. These are, however, very unequally distributed: 90 per cent of the water reserves are in the springs, in the snow and ice masses of the Pamir and the Tianshan mountains of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The conflict around the water takes place on two levels:

- First of all, between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which are situated in the upper river course and use the water in the winter for electricity production, and Uzbekistan, situated downstream, needing the water in summer for agriculture.
- Secondly, in the individual agriculture zones, where a constant fight between the farmer families for this indispensable resources is taking place.

In Central Asia, the **SDC** supports the project "Integrated Water Resources Management" in the Ferghana valley, in order to support the improvement of the water distribution. Local water user committees manage the distribution according to the principles of equity. The **women** play a decisive role here

Political conflicts, in particular between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, are still a sad reality. Nevertheless, the commitment of the **SDC** in the Ferghana valley has produced impressive results:

- 680,000 farmers produce high value products with less water and without the danger of increasing the salt content of the ground;
- Those water distribution systems which are well and transparently organized allow the farmers to save up to ten hours of time, because they do not have to wait for water or because they have to defend the water they are entitled to.

- The conflicts between families because of water theft have decreased. The health and well-being of human beings has improved. The women no longer have to wait entire nights at the edge of fields for the water.

Sharing a water resource can foster trust between stakeholders which can go beyond water issues and be the sound basis of a good relationship, preventing future or potential conflicts related to water management. Water management negotiation platforms can thus encourage dialogue between conflicting parties, providing a neutral topic that allows parties to sustain communication.

I would like to illustrate this potential with an example.

The **Rhine Basin** is an interesting case for the development of shared river management after World War II. The Rhine River is used intensively for shipping, drinking water production, industrial water supply and nature purposes. After the Second World War, growing awareness of pollution problems led to the establishment of the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR). The members of the ICPR are Switzerland, Germany, France, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and, since 1976, the European Commission. The management of natural disasters (like floods or droughts), including the responsibility to absorb part of the consequences, is also regulated by the commission.

This is an initiative which clearly highlights the potential for professionals from the water sector, together with politicians and civil society, to contribute to creating a peaceful world. The key is **Collaborative Integrated Water Management**.

After the dinner, Professor Jean Bernard Lachavanne from Geneva University will show you the example of the wonderful **Lake Geneva** and its region, where transboundary integrated water management led to one of the most peaceful places on Earth. I hope that you will enjoy this place during your stay.

When I saw the number of specialists, decision makers and high level participants registered for this workshop, I knew that there is a tremendous awareness among you about the critical water situation in the Middle East. So there is no need for me to stress the importance of awareness among you. But we all together need to raise awareness of governments and people in the affected countries to the fact that they all are on the verge of water bankruptcy.

We have to help them open their eyes, like **Nelson Mandela** did, when he said at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002: “**One of the many things I learned as president was the centrality of water in the social, political and economic affairs of the country, the continent and the world.**”

Switzerland, with its network of embassies and cooperation offices in the region, will do its best to support you in the difficult task of awareness raising. But we need proposals for constructive solutions. That's why we are all here.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Where there is no water, there is no development. You are here to avoid this, and we are all with you to help you. And I know that if you combine your efforts, you will find the road to success!

You will come up with a regional policy paper, which will allow the integration of all ongoing national, bilateral and multilateral efforts in the water sector of the Middle East.

You will come up with innovative solutions for all aspects related to water.

You will come up with concrete proposals for a collaborative management of the water resources in the region.

You will come up with communication strategies and awareness-building strategies.

Switzerland, through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SDC, PD IV, Embassies), its State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), its universities and its research and industry can provide you with support and additional knowledge and technologies.

I wish you success and I am totally committed to helping you resolve the water security problem in your region and around the world.

I wish you fruitful and positive debates and an excellent dinner this evening.