

## *Himalayan Water Conference Speech*

- Honorable Governor, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am honored to be here with you today. I am here on behalf of His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan. His Royal Highness sends his regards and his regrets that he couldn't be here with you.
- Since our earliest days, our ancestors have recognised water as a key part of life. The Old Testament begins with: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the water".

- The point I am trying to make is that God created the heavens and the earth – but there was already water. It was there, essential for creating Life.
- Be it in the Euphrates, or Tigris, the Ganges or the Brahmaputra, we seem to have carelessly neglected water, or worse, even abused it. We have destroyed what we in my part of the world call “hima” – the sacred bond between human and environment.
- Our newspaper headlines often talk about arms being an important strategic resource for India, Pakistan and China. However, what will be the most important strategic resource is the surface water of these lands,

and the associated groundwater the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra, which provide water and sustenance for well over a billion people.

- Many of the countries in this part of the world are already experiencing physical water scarcity. Existing water stress and projections of population growth have led to concern over possibilities of negative impacts from changes in the availability of water supplies in the coming decades.
- The World Health Organisation estimates that a person needs 1,000 cubic meters of water every year, and uses the number as a benchmark for water scarcity. Jordan, Gaza and the West Bank (that have 100 cubic meters of water/per year) and Israel (300 cubic meters) are far

below this benchmark. To put these numbers in context, Sweden has 20,000 cubic meters of renewable water per person annually.

- In addition to depletion of water resources due to natural reasons, it will not be possible to use the available water resources because of pollution and losses caused by inefficient management.
- I'd like to go very briefly into the four areas that, we, at the Majlis El Hassan feel are critical to the responsible conservation and management of water around the world. These approaches have been derived by the close collaboration of the Majlis El Hassan, the Strategic Foresight Group in India and many interested parties in the world.

- First, I'd like to talk about Intersecting Circles of Cooperation: Circles of cooperation enable seamless collaboration across a number of areas, and across the borders of all the countries of our region.
- For the concept of the Circles of Cooperation to work, the scope of each circle needs to go beyond the sharing of technical and scientific expertise.
- Instead, to quote from the document laid out by the Strategic Foresight Group, "each circle has to have a political mechanism to define a common vision, identify priorities to translate that vision into a reality and

identify an institutional architecture to follow up and implement decisions at the policy level. “

- The second point I would like to make is the importance of the preservation of groundwater: When it comes to water, there’s **a lot more to it** than meets the eye.
- The third point I’d like to focus on are the effects of migration. In recent years, millions of people have been displaced within their countries or crossed into new countries due to violence or the effects of climate change.

- Approximately 3,000 Syrians cross into Jordan every day. Aid agencies in the Kingdom estimate that the number of refugees in Jordan alone will reach a million people by the end of the year.
- There's little point thinking of these refugees as a Syrian problem. Ladies and Gentlemen, can we afford to keep thinking of these people as Syrians? Should we not take a regional perspective and come up with a unified policy to make the displaced people of our region self-sufficient?
- Lastly, I'd like to talk about empowerment. We have to move away from solutions that treat people as objects. Instead we need to focus on solutions that

empower people and make them part of the solution.

Only then can we arrive at truly sustainable solutions.

The joint ownership of water by residents that live along the Danube and the rice farmers in the Australian outback are great examples of getting local stakeholders to take ownership of the water solutions.

- I wish you peace. As we say in my part of the world, I bid you Salaam. Thank you for the important work you do. Let's continue this important work and repay our debt to the most ancient civilizations in the world, be it the Indus Valley or Mesopotamia.

- Thank you for your time. Have a productive conference. Thank You.