

## World Leaders Conservation Forum

Dialogue 1 – Wednesday, 8 July 2015

Peace: Transboundary Conservation and Peace-building

### Moderator:

**Dr Anna Grichting**, Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, School of Engineering at Qatar University; and, Advisory Board Member, DMZ Council.

### Panel speakers:

**Prof Jae C. Choe** – President, National Institute of Ecology, Republic of Korea

**Mr Munqeth Mehyar** – President and Jordanian Director, EcoPeace Middle East

**Mr Jean-Paul Paddack** – Co-Chairman and CEO, WWF Korea

**Mr Kaveh Zahedi** – Director, Regional Office for Asia-Pacific, UN Environment Programme

**Mr Peter Shadie** – Director, Odonata House Consulting; Senior Advisor Transboundary Conservation Specialist Group

**Peter Shadie** kicked-off the Dialogue by outlining the new TBC conservation guidelines, which were released in May 2015, and giving some of the highlights from the Experts Session 4 on the previous day. During the session, participants discussed the latest trends and future vision for TBC. In addition, they heard a brief history on the DMZ from a South Korean perspective, along with a proposal on how the government could move ahead with establishing an Eco-Peace Park within the DMZ.

**Munqeth Mehyar** said his organization started with a focus on the environment in the Middle East, when a peace treaty was signed between Jordan and Israel. As environmentalists, they decided to keep an eye on the development in the region through an initiative known as EcoPeace. It did a lot of good work on the ground, but in 1997, it changed its name to become Friends of the Earth Middle East, which was better received at that time. Today, the organisation is back to its original name, EcoPeace, with offices in Israel, Jordan and Palestine. He said that he cannot stress enough the importance of maintaining an opening for dialogue. The Jordan River, where Jesus was baptised and Israelites crossed later to the Promised Land, is also important for Islam. But over time, it became a small, polluted creek, instead of a symbol of prosperity. This is why the three nations need to cooperate. Water and ecosystems have brought people together in the region, which includes more than four or five river basins that cross “state” boundaries. When you speak about water, you speak about nature, the economy, etc.

**Jean-Paul Paddack** noted that WWF works around the world. In 1999, WWF came out with a map of the world, where it identified the most important ecoregions of the world – ecoregions – not political boundaries. And, there are several lessons that can be drawn from WWF’s experience working at an ecoregional level, in particular in the Congo, the Carpathian and the Mekong.

For example, the Congo is home to the second largest rainforest in the world, and this is a heritage should be bestowed on future generations. Conservation at scale is complicated, but there are certain lessons that we have learned.

- One, the importance of having a large scale transboundary vision. In the case of the Congo, this is enshrined in the Yaounde Declaration with support from all heads of government, as well as broker countries and institutions. This shared vision contributes to the trust building that is essential.
- Two, local ownership and leadership are critical.

- Three, it is extremely useful is to have a platform for dialogue. In the Congo Basin, it is through Comefat and involves other countries, but the mechanism is also useful for dialogue and funding.
- Four, it is important that any sustainable initiatives consider sustainable financing and not only in respect to government funding but also in regards to innovative financing tools. In the Congo, Danube, Carpathian and Mekong, WWF found that the establishment of separate conservation funds was essential.
- Five, broker countries can play a crucial role as facilitator.

**Kaveh Zahedi** said this year marked the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations and last year marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNEP. For the first few decades, the UN's mission to promote peace and UNEP's programme for environmental cooperation were kept separate, but now there is a programme called Environmental Peace Building. Noting some conflicts are directly linked to the environment, he said there have been 18 conflicts over natural resource use alone since 1990. UNEP has been working on environment and peace, as well as shared natural capital – for example through the Regional Seas Programme and Regional Seas Convention. UNEP has also carried out this work in Afghanistan and Iran. Similarly, the Great Ape Survival Programme is another example where all of the different actors have come to the table to safeguard these natural assets. The moment is ripe for action, he said, and the unification of these two areas disciplines offers one of many solutions.

An ecologist by training from Korea's National Institute of Ecology, **Prof Jae C Choe** joined the Peace Parks Initiative after working for many decades on biodiversity. TBC is not easy and the case of the DMZ is no exception, he said. Unlike other TBC initiatives, however, the efforts in the Republic of Korea have one clear goal and that is reunification. There is a sense of urgency because if and when it does happen (like in Germany), Koreans must have a plan for the DMZ, and ultimately this initiative could be a new forum for environmental peace. In this sense, he said he is grateful that his government is trying to establish a World Eco-Peace Park, but he believes they can go further, protecting the whole DMZ as one large nature reserve.

**Mr Mehyar** noted his organization, Eco-Peace, started a Good Water Neighbour Initiative by reaching out to adjoining communities that were divided by water, which serve as the borders. This has involved facilitating conflict resolution on behalf of conservation, he said, providing an example where the group successfully stopped a wall being built that would have cut off another community's irrigation.

**Mr Padack** added that co-created conservation initiatives can certainly help sustain peace-building. In the experience of the Carpathians, for example, new countries were able to sign a declaration. In the case of the Korean peninsula, he suggested that it might be advantageous for fostering dialogue and science if South Korea took a more scientific approach to preserving the entire natural transboundary area - or ecoregion – defined by nature. This way, South Korea could work with other countries to create a shared vision for the region, and this could include broker countries and other organizations, which could help implement a conservation plan and facilitate greater unification.

It was noted that this builds on what Ms Park's presentation in the Expert Session the day before, and focuses on a step by step approach, stitching together many different initiatives and "wounds".

**Mr Shadie** said TBC usually falls into two categories: one is where there is active conflict; and, the other is where there has been a conflict. He questioned whether this was more of a negotiation process or a proposal for collaboration.

Participants suggested it may be useful to look at how World Heritage and Ramsar sites have been established in North Korea, and see if these examples provide any insight on how to approach advancing the DMZ proposal.

At the UN Convention on Biological Diversity meeting hosted by the Republic of Korea last year, **Prof Choe** said the country proposed establishing a joint eco-peace research institute inside the DMZ. One way or another, he said the region needs to be restored. Biodiversity has been destroyed in the north because of the demand on resources by the poor, and in the south it has been destroyed because of prosperity. The DMZ's future is critical, and if this research institute could come together, it could produce results for conservation and development, so this is why he prefers to include the name Eco in front of the peace park.

It was also noted that greater collaboration between scientists and artists is also important, and could help foster communications at the international and national levels.

**The Moderator** then read out questions from the audience. **Is tranboundary conservation cost-effective? And, what are the drivers behind it?**

**Mr Zahedi** responded by saying in some cases yes, and in others, no. Kava said UNEP has collected some 120 case studies on environment and peace, and the commonality is not only the co-creation, but the opportunity to focus on one single environmental issue or concern, and then that sometimes can become a stepping stone for something bigger. The aim of the exercise should be at an eco-regional level, whether or not the countries are unified. Then, one could look at the enormous benefits and partnerships, which allow such initiatives to progress. Also, ecological solutions are more economical in the long term, and perhaps we need to better communicate the value of these projects, he added.

**Mr Mehyar** noted the income of the farmers in Israel near the river in the north comes from ecotourism, but tourists can't approach the river because it is a military zone. Even with the devastation, where 96% of the water has been diverted, he said he is certain communities in the north would welcome the additional income from ecotourism. He suggested that this issue could perhaps serve as a catalyst to open a dialogue.

**Prof Choe** noted a recent smaller institute (not far from the DMZ) is a good example of what could be possible. As a result of some local communities fighting the government's plan to destroy some mud flats, they built an exhibition and education centre. It succeeded in attracting more than a million visitors in its first year of operation, and this included being closed for two and half months because of Avian fever. So, he says this indicates that a research centre inside the DMZ could attract eco-tourists, explaining the history and conservation of the area, while generating funds that could be used in North Korea too.

**Mr Mehyar** said the key issue that his organization has found working on the Jordan River is that they must involve all stakeholders. This can happen through the involvement of international organizations that can serve as hosts and/or partners (like WWF or the UN).

**Dr Gretching** suggested that the International Crane Foundation, for example, could be invited to be a partner in the new institute, as they are already working this region.

**Mr Paddack** said WWF carried out a cost benefit analysis and it found that for every dollar invested in conservation, the economy was getting two dollars back from ecotourism, so whatever is planned, these arguments can be documented and used to help make the case.

Munqueth underscored the role of local people is crucial, as they are the only ones who can move things forward. But they need to be empowered, especially in regards to how to

approach the central government and national politicians. He cited another example, which showed how they can become real champions.

Another question from the audience asked: **It is vital to achieve a partnership with the North, so how can we engage our neighbours?**

**The Moderator** asked the panel to respond in their concluding remarks, noting sometimes it is easier to talk about ecology or collaboration instead of peace.

**Mr Shadie** noted that IUCN has been invited to North Korea before, and understanding the issues is a key. However, it is also important that any support is unconditional to elevate this understanding, so something can happen. Is the word “peace” an incentive or a disadvantage in what we hope to achieve there? From his perspective, the word “peace” can be a problem, so it comes back to what is the most compelling package that can be used to sell the idea.

**Mr Zahedi** said decoupling the peace and ecological aspects could take a lot of weight off the process. But taking into account the whole eco-zone, the ecological assets of both countries -- and the value of these assets -- is probably the best starting point. Once we have a convincing case, it is easier to talk about a shared asset rather than peace, he said, noting he will be travelling to North Korea in a few months’ time.

**Mr Paddack** said he preferred keeping to the language of nature, which includes the DMZ but is not solely focused on it.

**Mr Mehyar** reiterated the need for all parties to feel co-ownership over the process, and this can happen through science and research to help bring people together. For example, publishing a book that highlights the strength and beauty of the DMZ for the public, not just the politicians, will show them what they are missing and could motivate politicians to take action as well. An eco-park will also attract school children and future leaders. He recommended not debating over the word “peace” too much. Sometimes, in such cases, it is best to set aside such differences, so you can reach your goal, he said.

In closing, **the Moderator** summarised some of the main points from the dialogue as follows: it may be worthwhile to put the word “peace” aside and focus instead on conservation strategies for the region. Decoupling is another idea for engaging both North and South Korea. The benefits of eco-regional based conservation, based on a shared vision, could eventually be considered as a “Gift to the Earth”. Co-ownership is important, as is introducing children and future generations to nature, so they work together to support these conservation goals. Finally, while it was acknowledged that building an eco-peace park could help advance peace in the region, it might take altering the vision and/or tactics to find a way forward.

**Dr Gretching** concluded, saying she hoped this was just the beginning of much more collaboration on these issues.