

Red Sea-Dead Sea Water Conveyance Concept
Feasibility Study and Environmental and Social Assessment

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Thank you very much for the invitation to this conference, in which I am very pleased to participate and express views on this subject on my personal capacity, as a former director of a think-tank and an academic.

First of all, this project seems to engulf a number of direct and indirect merits and favourable implications. One of them should be to save a tourist and recreational centre, now on the verge of disappearance. There are numerous archaeological and historic sites around the Dead Sea, which I myself entertained in the late 90s, and on which the UNESCO has started to undertake initial reviews.

Secondly, as some papers suggest, the project could provide electricity to the region through hydropower generation making use of the flow of water from the Red Sea at the sea level to the Dead Sea 400 meters below the sea level. The generated electricity should be conducive to the economic and industrial development of this region.

Thirdly, if desalination of the conveyed water from the Red Sea could prove economically viable, making use of the electricity generated through the above mentioned hydropower generation, potable water would help to increase agricultural production, and could even lead to the expansion of agro-industry in this region. This, together with the electricity generation, should open a window of the opportunity of turning the desert into a model industrial centre of this region.

Fourthly, if the participation of the Jordanian, Israeli and Palestine authorities in this project bears, in the end, precious fruit which benefits all of them, this should open a door for co-operation among the disputing three parties in this region, which could even augment economic their benefits, and convince them of the significance of collaboration. This should certainly have symbolic implications upon the peace process in the Middle East, contributing highly to the peace, security and prosperity of the Middle East as a whole.

The World Bank invited international consultants to bid for the feasibility studies, (a) on the environmental and social implications of this project, and (b) on its comprehensive economic viability, bearing in mind all relevant aspects, including the technical, economic, financial, environmental, and social factors. Of the estimated total cost for the feasibility studies around 15 millions dollars, Japan has already committed itself to 2 million dollars, together with some other donors. Our government has already decided to issue grant aid for the demining of the stretch of land planned for the construction of conveyance system, necessary for the safety of its construction.

Some questions have been posed from various angles. For instance, whether the sea water from the Red Sea could mix smoothly with the hyper-salted water of the Dead Sea is one question. The failure of this should create a dichotomy, allowing lighter Red Sea brine to float over the denser Dead Sea Water for many years, causing damages to the tourist attractions. Whether the cost for pumping Red Sea water to some height before running down to the Dead Sea might outweigh the energy gains from the hydroelectricity generation is another. Those questions, as well as many others, ought to be answered through the feasibility studies.

This project goes along with the proposal of the Japanese government already made public for establishing co-operative joint economic development activities in the region among the conflicting parties, near the Dead Sea, more specifically in the Jordanian River Rift, for the purpose of creating confidence in this region, and of realising sustainable peace in the whole Middle East.

In July last year, our government issued a proposal, called “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity”, in which Japan would offer assistance to the key three plays in this region, i.e., Palestinians, Israelis and Jordanians, in materialising collaborative projects which should lead to the promotion of sustainable economic development, more concretely establishing an agro-industrial park in the West Bank and facilitating the transportation of its products to the regional and world markets.

In this proposed project, Japan would be ready to offer assistance to Palestinians, Israelis, and Jordanians, first, to set up an agro-industrial park in the Jordanian River Rift. Secondly, products of the park would be transported to a distribution centre to be built on the Jordanian side, through which to be shipped out to regional and global markets. The private sector is, of course, invited to participate in the activities in this project.

The role of Japan is to prepare a feasibility study of this project, and, based upon it, to provide its official development assistance for the whole project, which includes the financing for the facilitation of transportation of products, produced in the agro-industry park to the distribution centre.

On 14 March of this year, the four parties' representatives already held its kick-off high political level meeting in Tokyo, and agreed on this project, now titled "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity project". Deputy Prime Minister of the State of Israel, Mr Shimon Peres, Head of the Negotiations Affairs of the PLO, Dr Sa'eb Erekat, and Special Advisor of His Majesty King Abdullah II of the Hashmite Kingdom of Jordan, Mr Farouk Kasrawi, participated in the meeting as well as the Japanese Foreign Minister, Mr Taro Aso on the hosting side.

The participants agreed at the meeting that they should maintain high political interest in promoting this initiative; they should focus their attention on supporting the activities of the field study missions; and they should initiate technical-level meeting as early as June this year.

The basic concept of this project is as follows. The path towards creating peace between Israel and Palestine still faces serious challenges. The government of Japan believes that the two-state solution should be the only way-out. Co-prosperity should open paths for co-existence. For this, it is crucial to establish a viable state for Palestinians accompanied with sustainable economic development through the strengthening of their partnership with their neighbouring states, Israel and Jordan.

The role of the private sector, coupled with the development of the public-private partnership should be critical in achieving sustainable economic development. In the West Bank, agriculture and agro-industry seem to be a driving force for the sustainable economic development.

Not only will the outcome of the project be important, but so is also the process in terms of fostering confidence among the participating members for the peace and stability of the whole Middle East.

Japan stands ready to consider various ways and means of financing the project. This proposal represents a commitment of the Japanese government for engaging in the peace-building process of the region, thereby serving to the sustainable peace in the whole Middle East.

The political atmosphere has been improving for the last one year, (a) the cease-fire agreement made on 25 November 2006 between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert; (b) the establishment of the unified government in Palestine. For the last half a year, more hopeful events have followed, such as: the Arab League Meeting in Riyadh which reissued its 2002 call for normalisation of relations with Israel.

The situation is still very precarious, but we hope that such projects should pave the way for the sustainability of peace and prosperity in this region.