Friends of the Earth Middle East
جمعية أصدقاء الأرض الشرق الأوسط
ידידי כדור הארץ המזרח התיכון

EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East – "Good Water Makes Good Neighbors" project

FoEME is a unique regional organization that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli environmentalists to promote sustainable development and advance peace efforts in the Middle East. FoEME's three co-Directors were honored for their unique environmental peacebuilding efforts by TIME Magazine as Environmental Heroes of 2008, were granted the prestigious Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship in 2009 and in 2010 awarded the Euro-Med Award for Dialogue and the Aristotle Onassis Prize for the Protection of the Environment.

Environmental issues ignore political boundaries. In order to sustain and manage natural resources, or mitigate environmental impacts, parties must work together. Vital environmental issues - such as water – are simply too important to fight over.

The "**Good Water Neighbors**" (GWN) project was established by **EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East** (FoEME) in 2001 to raise awareness of the shared water problems of Palestinians, Jordanians, and Israelis. The GWN methodology is an original idea that is based on identifying cross border communities and utilizing their mutual dependence on shared water resources as a basis for developing dialogue and cooperation on sustainable water management. The project has created real improvement within the water sector by building trust and understanding that has led to common problem solving and peace building among communities even in the midst of conflict.

Despite limited cooperation between the region's governments on some aspects of water allocation; sustainable management of water resources has not been achieved in the Middle East peace process. Lack of sewage treatment, over-pumping of aquifers, excessive diversion of surface water flows, and difficulty in implementing critical water-demand management policies threaten scarce water resources. These circumstances pose environmental and health hazards to communities, and can be a significant source of cross-border tension and pollution. EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East took the lead in localizing these water issues by focusing project activities on the community level, and fostering the cross-border relationships that are necessary to solve common water problems.

Initially the project began with 11 Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian communities. After further expansion, the project now includes 28 communities, supporting FoEME's efforts in all the region's shared water resources; the Dead Sea, Jordan River and the Mountain and Coastal Aquifers.

From the outset, the project has chosen a community to be partnered with a neighboring community on the other side of the border/political divide to work on common water issues. On the local level, the project works with community members to improve their water situation through education and awareness activities, and urban development projects. On the regional

level, the project works to encourage sustainable water management through information sharing, dialogue, and cooperative ventures.

Real progress has been made in the environmental awareness of communities and the development of cooperative initiatives. Significant advances were made in encouraging community leaders to develop common solutions to their water management problems.

Although FoEME focuses on shared water issues, the GWN project has instilled the trust between people and communities that have brought them to cooperate over issues beyond water as well. These include: joint campaigning together to protest against the building of the Separation Barrier between an Israeli and Palestinian community; selling Palestinian produce in Israeli co-op markets that benefits both people; promoting cross border initiatives such as the development of a Peace Park on the Lower Jordan River, to name just a few. These initiatives illustrate how water can create the initial trust that provides the basis for cooperative work beyond water issues, such as land use, economic and tourist development.