

Journey



Beginning with the historic Peace Treaty signed by Israel's Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin and Jordan's King Hussein (October 1994), Jordan has been a leader in recognizing the potential benefits of a regional, science-based approach to chronic

regional problems. The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities' own involvement dates back to the first meeting of the Scientific Academies of the Middle East Region (SAMER), convened under the auspices of the U.S. Academy of Sciences in Washington in September 1994. Official representatives of the Israel Academy, Jordanian High Council for S&T, Jordanian Royal Scientific Society (RSS), Egyptian Academy of Scientific Research and Technology, the Palestinian Health Council and other interested parties met to discuss ways to promote regional scientific cooperation. This historic meeting and its aftermath clearly demonstrated the catalytic effect that relatively modest investments by private foundations can have on international scientific relations. The gathering was funded by the C. H. Revson Foundation of New York.

In discussing priorities for future joint research, Dr. Said Alloush, Vice President of the Jordanian RSS, quoted Jordanian Crown Prince Al-Hassan's keynote address to the International Symposium on Water Resources in the Middle East (October 1993): "Since most countries of the Middle East share a common problem... represented by the triangle of water, environment and energy, it is only natural that cooperation in facing the challenges imposed by such problems be sought and pursued." Child health and nutrition and arid land agriculture were other areas singled out for attention.

Crown Prince Hassan, Honorary Head of the Jordanian RSS, and Dr. Hani Mulki, RSS President, hosted the Second Meeting of the Scientific Academies in Amman, Jordan, in September 1995. The Israel Academy was well represented (see photograph below). Dr. Mulki reemphasized the need for regional research to create new water supplies through improved water harvesting, recycling, treatment and desalinization techniques. The participants established an expert Water Study Panel to produce, with the assistance of the U.S. National Research Council, a joint report on "Sustainable Water Supplies for the Middle East." The original panel consisted of three Israelis, two Jordanians, two Palestinians and an American Chairman (Dr. Gilbert White). Crown Prince Hassan personally attended the final session and further stressed the importance of regional scientific cooperation.

The panel's work is well under way, supported by a \$600,000 allocation from the U.S. National Academy of Sciences. They have already met in Washington D.C. (February '96), Amman (June '96) and Haifa (September '96). Their final meeting has been scheduled for April 1997 in Washington D.C.; and their final draft is due in December 1997. The Yad Hanadiv (Rothschild Family) Foundation has also been encouraging Israeli-Jordanian cooperation in water research. Under its auspices, representatives of the Water Research Institute (Israel) and Jordanian counterparts have already identified several priority topics for joint cooperation. Funds from private foundations will be essential for these and similar research initiatives.



to Jordan

Since Israel, Egypt and Jordan meet at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, it is natural that they collaborate in research on the Gulf's complex ecosystems and their future. This point was reiterated by 250 regional participants at the Second International Conference on the Ecosystems of the Gulf of Aqaba (Eilat, February 1995), cosponsored by Israel's Interuniversity Institute for Marine Sciences and the European Union's Peace Campus Program. Both there and within other frameworks, marine scientists have been discussing regional cooperation in areas ranging from coral reef and physiochemical studies to environmental protection, mariculture and tourism.

Israel's universities have been pioneers in promoting active, concrete Israel-Jordanian scientific cooperation. Professor Joseph Schlein, of the Hebrew University Hadassah Medical School, has been studying the epidemiology and transmission of leishmaniasis with colleagues from Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon as part of a MERC (Middle East Regional Cooperation) project sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Since leishmaniasis, a protozoan disease transmitted by sand flies, is an endemic problem throughout many less-developed areas of the Middle East, it is an excellent topic for regional scientific cooperation. There are also many cooperative activities, such as regular joint workshops,

recent field work in Morocco and recent Jordanian visits to Israel, which help promote cooperation and understanding.

Under another USAID grant, Ben-Gurion University Professor Joel Margalith, the discoverer of a particularly potent yet ecologically safe biopesticide (BTI), has been working closely with Jordanian and Palestinian colleagues on the control of disease-carrying flies and mosquitoes in the Jordan Rift Valley (JRV) and Gaza Strip. A recent USAID site visit to Israel, Jordan and Gaza documented the major scientific and interpersonal successes of this Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian project and continuation to 1999 seems likely. Prof. Margalith recently submitted another joint Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian proposal with the Director General of the JRV Authority (Jordan) and colleagues at Jordan University, Mutah University and the Aqaba (Jordan) Governorate Authority.

If recent experience is any guide, scientific cooperation, based as it is on personal competence rather than politics, may be the best possible way to form linkages between Israel, Jordan and other countries in the region. The ever growing number of Jordanian and Israeli scientists seeking to cooperate, despite political fluctuations and the scarcity of concrete funding, suggests that this is indeed an area worth watching closely. Peace is in progress.



and Palestinian delegates to the second SAMER meeting in Amman (September 1995).