

A “green-blue deal” for the Middle East

ALTHOUGH THE Middle East peace process might be blocked, the path remains open to building trust by achieving progress on the environment in 2022. Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians can unite to fight our common climate-change Armageddon.

Call it a “green-blue deal”.

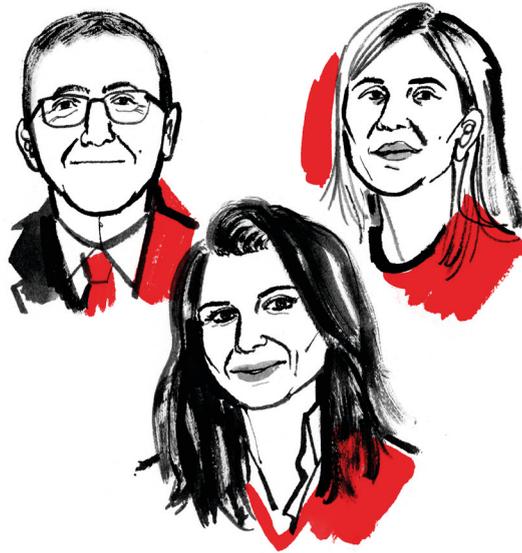
Climate change is hitting the Middle East hard. Temperatures are soaring—since the 1950s, they have increased along the eastern Mediterranean coast by more than 2°C and an additional 4°C of warming is predicted by the end of the century. The “green” part of our green-blue deal targets cleaning up Middle Eastern energy supplies to reduce climate-changing emissions.

Meanwhile, water in the region is scarce and becoming scarcer. Climate models warn of a 40% decrease in rainfall by the end of the century. And when it does rain, it will pour, leading to potentially deadly and damaging floods. The “blue” part of our green-blue deal aims to bring water security to our parched region.

First, some background. For many Middle Easterners, life outside is already unbearable during the long summer months. Turning again to those climate models, the number of days with high summer temperatures is predicted to increase by 50% by the end of the century. Our governments are already struggling to cope. They fail to provide the most basic services of water, electricity and food for too many in our region. Given the Middle East’s political instability, it is easy to see why the region’s climate crisis is often described as a threat multiplier, fuelling conflict and state failure.

Amid these threats, however, we see opportunity. Our experience shows that it is possible to work together to confront these environmental threats. Our organisation, EcoPeace Middle East, brings together Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians. Since our founding in

Climate can trump politics, say Gidon Bromberg, Nada Majdalani and Yana Abu Taleb, Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian co-directors of EcoPeace Middle East



1994, we have worked to attract investment critical to rehabilitating the Jordan river. We have helped advance more than \$100m in investment in sewage treatment to clean up its waters, and we were the lead advocate responsible for fresh water being released into the river again from the Sea of Galilee.

Inspired by the participation of young people in efforts to clean up the Jordan river, Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian local leaders have come together. One of our proudest moments was a meeting at which mayors from all communities held hands and stood in their swimming trunks in a cleaned-up portion of the river. The mayors are not best friends. But despite the animosity between them, these local leaders realised that they would all be losers if they allowed the despoiling of the river to continue.

The time is now right for bigger, bolder action. That is why we are

calling for a region-wide green-blue deal in 2022. Recent technological advances in solar energy and water desalination offer bright prospects, and provide the scope for an agreement that benefits all parties.

Jordan, with vast desert areas, enjoys a comparative advantage over the Israelis and the Palestinians in the production of solar energy. For their part, with access to the Mediterranean coast, they both enjoy a comparative advantage over Jordan in the production of fresh water via desalination. As well as meeting domestic needs, Jordanian solar energy could be sold to the Israeli and Palestinian grids. At the same time, solar-powered Israeli and Palestinian desalination plants could boost local supplies while also helping to ease Jordan’s water shortages. For the first time, each party to the deal will have something to buy and something to sell.

Instead of fighting over scarce supplies, desalinated water can help Palestinians draw their fair share of natural water, improving their livelihoods. New Palestinian and Jordanian waste-water-treatment plants, solar-energy farms and climate-smart agricultural techniques could lead to a dramatic increase in food production.

Water good idea

This win-win deal will require investment and co-operation. The progress we have made in the Jordan Valley shows that Middle Easterners can work together on practical solutions. By co-operating against climate change, we can build trust from the bottom up, and keep the two-state solution alive.

From our offices in Tel Aviv, Ramallah and Amman, we call on the public, and especially young people across the Middle East, from Rabat to Tehran and from Beirut to Abu Dhabi, to join our activists in 2022 and hold Middle Eastern governments to account. We need a region-wide green-blue deal. Our common survival depends on it. ●

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