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Bernard Barraqué: “Any water diversion is an artificial work and can be considered abuse”

Experts in water policies and management analyze the actions that could improve border water zones and how to contribute to peace. Bernard Barraqué, Gustave Tchoue, Kamel Mahadin, Ousseni Diallo, and Yousef Anwar Awayes have participated in the Dialogue “Water for Life and Security” moderated by professor Laurence Boisson.

The professor of the National School of Bridges and Paths of France, explained in the session on “Integrated management of border water zones: a tool for peace”, that water diversions are “artificial works that can be considered abuse and therefore need to be controlled.” Barraqué added that these actions end up being “very burdensome and not cost effective in the long-run.” Along these lines, the scientist explained that one way to solve the lack of water and what this can lead to in regards to harvesting, would be to subsidize farmers to replace lost crops.

Barraqué proposed the creation of a hydric forum in which a common vision of the problems with basins could be established as well as agreements in regards to this subject. The French scientist gave the example of water management in border countries such as Germany, Switzerland, and Belgium, in which the responsibility of management is not a national competence, but rather one of the communities, or the Federate states, that is based on norms that regulate the use of international waters. This deals with managing the territories “for their excess or lack of water.”

Yousef Anwar Awayes of the Palestine Water Authority, referred to the status of water as a resource in Palestine. Anwar explained that “the construction of the wall, under the pretexts of security, according to Israel, has led to Palestine’s loss of access to forty productive wells, which supposes 33% of the water that the country can access.” Anwar pointed out that this conflict from water raises the level of conflict that already exists in the zone and asked the international community and the State of Israel for a change in the management of this resource.

Kamel Mahadin, former minister for water and irrigation of Jordan, also pointed out the abuse committed by Israel, as they use between 60 – 70% of the water resources. In this respect, Mahadin regretted that “although there is an ongoing dialogue with Israel, we have been unable to agree on a project involving our two countries”. The former minister believes that education could be a good battleground where the community of Jordan could see prospects for change while he appealed to international aid in order to recover the dignity of the people of his country.

The director of project planning and implementation for the Niger river, Gustave Tchoue, spoke of the experiences of water treatment along its 4,200-kilometer course across nine countries of Africa. Tchoue reported that the river basin is affected by climatic change and demographic pressure. For this reason, a Niger Basin Authority has been recently established in order to foster cooperation, an enhanced use of the water resources, and the exchange of information between the countries that receive the river’s waters. Tchoue pointed that “there has been progress made, with the creation of documentation centers and the adoption of measures that specifically protect the environment”.

Ousseni Diallo explained the actions foreseen in the “Water for Peace” project with regard to lake Volta (the world’s greatest artificial lake) in Ghana, which also supplies water resources to neighboring countries like Benin, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. Green Cross is working on this project, which lacks a proper management structure, and is helping to create tools and documents that will contribute to prevent conflict between the countries involved in the Volta project.

Green Cross gives high priority to citizens’ participation in the project of lake Volta. They have promoted the drafting of a Basin Declaration that sets the principles of sustainable management and have created awareness-raising documents aimed at improving communications. “It is important to be in contact with the people who live in the basin, and know first-hand what are the problems they face. But we do not have access to the Internet and other resources that are usually available in the North. That is our sole obstacle”.

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