

Speech

Held

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Republic of Kosovo

*On the occasion of Good Water Neighbors Conference
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In the framework of the UN International Year of Water Cooperation
The Urgency of Shared Water Issues - Water Can No Longer Wait
Herzilya, Israel*

Thank you Friends of Earth of Middle East for inviting Kosovo/FIQ to this very important conference.

Republic of Kosovo is a small country, the youngest in Europe situated in the Western Balkans that experienced violent conflict during the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 90's. In 1999 the intervention of NATO troops ended the war between Serbia and Kosovar civilians.

In 2008 Kosovo declared its independence and so far 96 countries have recognized its independence. Perhaps this is a moment to express my concern that Israel and Palestine have not recognized yet the Republic of Kosovo. Understanding the internal issues and the political background affecting your countries decision with regard to Kosovo's status, but also given that so many people in this room value and promote peace holistically, I believe it is beneficial for citizens in my country to consider you as contributors to advancing peace in our region as well.

Coming back to your question Gidon, let me start by introducing 4 key words, wording which distinguish the work of FIQ in Kosovo and in the region.

FIQ is a Kosovar grassroots foundation with a clear mission centered on citizens and using a bottom up approach towards many challenges that our society faces in the process of reconstructing following the outcomes of the war.

Communication:

In post conflict realities one of the most needed ingredients for healing is **communication** and as such communication has to be rooted in the local people.

We come from grounded work and these pictures (another slide with pictures from different community gathered to discuss WB project, or protest against coal power plant projects, or

advocating against arms) just one among many others indicating the type of work we do with local community in building trust, connecting with our citizens, sharing their concerns with regard to many development peculiarities such as human security poverty, environment, migration, corruption etc.

When we talk to mixed communities (Kosovar/Albanians, Kosovar/Serbs, Bosnians) about corruption, or pollution the feedback we receive from them are similar. Corruption has no ethnicity, and pollution affects equally communities in spite of their ethnicity.

In this context, our experience in working with different communities is that conflict partition occurs when there's lack of communication. And communication must be initiated at the heart of villages, neighborhoods.

Civil Society versus political pressure

We as civil society are not preoccupied with votes; we don't have to worry about **political pressures**. We can afford being in frontline of fighting corruption, promoting peace and development of our communities. Our only constituency is local people which are frustrated by the lack of visionary decision makers, lack of employment, lack of opportunities for their future. In this context FIQ as part of a larger consortium called KOSID (Kosovo Civil Society Consortium for Sustainable Development) works to promote Sustainable Development at local level. KOSID is a unique establishment in its own because it comprises think tank organizations, grassroots, investigative media and other CSO's working jointly to raise important debates in Kosovo.

Sustainable development concepts

As foundations we push for social change, given the growing demands of people and shrinking of natural resources and governmental capacities to meet citizens need we are facing quite a contradictory reality. In this context FIQ works to break down the concepts of Sustainable Development for ordinary citizens which are worried and concern about high level of pollution coming from existing coal power plants, or high levels of unemployment among citizens (40% unemployment among 20 – 40 years old people) and migration as the only escape from the existing situation.

Diversity:

We also work to break down the importance of diversity. FIQ doesn't see diversity from an abstract level, but we are trying to adopt this concept to our national system of values. I am not sure the audience has ever heard, or read about the Albanians Code of Honor or the "Besa" a value that puts upon the Albanians the heavy load of treating the friend as a king. This is our system of values upon which we try to add the diversity, because we believe that diversity helps us, makes us stronger, richer. International community has its own place in Kosovo, and during

the post conflict years, but the country is ours, natural resources are ours, therefore the decisions must be for us to take. Emphasizing the importance of the diversity in our work adds up to our belief that in order to have a healthy democracy and development in harmony with our natural resources the government must consider us a credible civil society and a strong partner which complement each other's work.

Similar Experiences between regions:

The Balkans and the Middle East are regions in the world with a reputation for conflict. Yet **communities in these regions share much experience on how to overcome conflict**, be they through focusing on **shared environmental resources** or in **advancing community safety** programs.

FoEME's experience is that shared resources are opportunities to generate cooperative interactions for positive, "win-win" benefits to communities. Rather than perpetuate conflict, **cooperation on the environment can advance peace-building and promote reconciliation**. FIQ has developed community safety programs that focus on the failure of the rule of law and law enforcement to be the basis of inter-ethnic community cooperation.

Kosovo has insufficient water resources only 1600 m³ per capita, and in the near future water will be a limiting factor for economic and social development of the country. **There is no discussion in Kosovo about water and only limited public awareness among citizens about careful use of drinking water**. There is no institutional engagement to protect water and environmental resources. FIQ would seek to adapt FoEME's experience in environmental education programs, mediation and dialog between different ethnic communities over shared water issues as an additional focal point for engaging communities and institutions in Kosovo.

Gazivoda lake issue:

- Inherited issue from the time of SRY
- Its administration is assumed to become a substantial question in relation to the future status of Kosovo.
- A coal-fired power plant and expanded mining operations will draw water from the Iber-Lepenci canal, which is already considered "severely stressed." The canal is the economic heart of the Kosovo, conveying water from the Gazivoda reservoir in the north to support households and agricultural activities
- Lack of a strategic planning, resources and experiences to carry out management, control and development of water resources by the MESP

