
“Water Diplomacy: Building Bridges for Lasting Peace” Geneva Peace Week Conference

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9:30 - 13:00

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

PRESENTATIONS ABSTRACTS

An Integrated Water Management and Peacebuilding Story from North Darfur: Wadi El Ku

Atila Utras, Sudan Country Programme Manager for UN Environment

El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur State, a regional trading hub and home to large populations of IDPs, was facing an increase in the demand on land and water beyond the carrying capacity of the environment and the planning capacity of the government. This, combined with the ongoing conflict, has resulted in degradation of the environment, including deforestation, erosion and soil fertility depletion, and haphazard water management. Livelihoods have in turn been weakened, setting in motion a negatively reinforcing relationship between environment and economic recovery.



UN Environment secured funding from the EU, with the objective to demonstrate how this negatively reinforcing relationship can be halted and eventually reversed. The project aimed at showing how effective and inclusive natural resource management, based on UN Environment’s experience in Sudan on integrated water resources management and community-based natural resource management, can enable sustainable increases in agriculture and related value chain productivity.

Wadi El Ku, which is located very close to El Fasher was identified as project area for implementation. It is a large inland seasonal river running through North Darfur, with a catchment area of some 27,000 km².

The project has made substantial headway in promoting sustainable water harvesting practices as well as erosion mitigation measures in the project area and has demonstrated how more efficient use of rainfall protects people from the vagaries of climate.

The project has created a model for inclusive and effective catchment management that can be scaled up and replicated elsewhere in Darfur. This model included establishment of Community Based Organizations, developing Community action plans and also establishing a state level Water Forum.

International Water Diplomacy and the Role of International Water Law

Attila M. Tanzi, Full Professor of International Law, Faculty of Law, University of Bologna

International water law provides, at one and the same time, the framework and the tools for water diplomacy, i.e. for dispute prevention and management, and possibly water cooperation. Political history shows that international water agreements - particularly at the bilateral level - whilst representing a law-making phenomenon, usually also mark the negotiated settlement of a water dispute. Safe for radical change of circumstances, such instruments lay down agreeable standards by which conflicts of interests are managed so as to prevent future disputes and possibly by way of cooperation with a view to optimising the use of transboundary waters. The first of a long string of such instruments, the Convention on the Equitable Distribution of the Waters of the Rio Grande of 1906 between Mexico and the US, was precisely the result of six years of painstaking negotiations which ended a major water dispute, while setting the framework for dispute prevention in the years to come. Similarly, as emphasised by the Deputy Secretary-General at the High-Level Panel on Water Diplomacy of the 2018 Stockholm World Water Week, “[t]he 1960 Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan has survived disputes between the two countries, providing a framework for resolving disagreements over water use”.



The provision of a legal framework for water diplomacy is all the more apparent in the multilateral water conventions. That was the case of the 1923 Geneva Convention relating to the Development of Hydraulic Power Affecting More Than One State. Its Preamble sets out as its aim precisely that of “promoting international agreement”, which is further emphasised by the 1992 UNECE Water Convention and the 1997 UN International Watercourses Convention. Apart from the institutional framework provided by the former, such instruments consolidate the normative tools for water diplomacy. Namely, the due diligence water law rules and principles of equitable utilization and harm-prevention, mitigation and restoration, taking into account hydrological, geological, economic and social factors, on a case-by-case-basis. Practice shows that the application of such rules and principles on the adjudicative level may be complementary, rather than alternative, to diplomatic settlement of transboundary water disputes.

International Mechanisms for the Settlement of Water Disputes

Lucius Caflisch, Honorary Professor, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies

Watercourse conflicts oppose neighbouring States and are particularly threatening to the maintenance of international peace and security. They can be settled, under Article 33 of the UN Charter, by a series of diplomatic means, by recourse to an international management organism enabled to settle disputes, or by submission to compulsory jurisdictional methods (arbitration or judicial settlement by permanent tribunals such as the International Court of Justice). The diplomatic means listed by the Charter are useful but ultimately insufficient and should be complemented by providing for recourse to jurisdictional methods leading to settlements which are final and binding and, generally, based on rules of international law.



International Sava River Basin Commission as an instrument of peace and stability

Aleš Bizjak, Slovenian Water Agency

The Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin (FASRB, 2002), enabled by political framework set by Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe (1999) and signed in Kranjska Gora, Slovenija, by main Sava river basin countries Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, is the first multilateral agreement oriented to sustainable development after the signing of the Agreement on Succession Issues (2001). Among other issues, the FASRB determined also establishment of the International Sava River Commission (ISRBC) (est. 2002) as an executive body to the FASRB supported by the Secretariat (est. 2005). The ISRBC is the only functional multilateral body engaged with sustainable development in the international Sava river basin. Furthermore, it is considered as a model and promotor of post-war cross border institutional integration and regional sustainable development. As such, it supports the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace thesis A Matter of Survival, and vice versa. Recently, the ISRBC has adopted the Joint Plan of Actions for the Sava River Basin (2017), which served as a basis for the development of a transboundary river basin development scheme, provided by the World Bank as the Sava – Drina River Corridor Integrated Development Programme (draft, 2018).

