



## ***Best Practices in Water Management: A Study Visit to Senegal for Officials of the State of Palestine***

**21-25 October 2019**

**Dakar, Senegal**

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### **CHAIR SUMMARY**

The **Study Visit to Senegal on Best Practices in Water Management** was held on 21-25 October, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP), in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Senegalese Abroad (MFASA), Ministry of Water and Sanitation (MWS) of Senegal and the Organization for the Valorisation of Senegal River (OMVS). The five-day study visit was an initiative of the Senegalese Government, as the Chair of the Committee, to enable Palestinian hydrologists and officials from the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates working on the issue of water resources learn directly from Senegal's experience in water management. The host government provided a platform for sharing of international best practices in the domain as a contribution to the capacity building programme of the Committee for staff of the Palestinian Government, and in light of its crucial role within a regional water management structure, the OMVS, and its experience in water, peace and security at the UN Security Council.

The study visit provided the participants with an overview of the legal and institutional framework of the Organization for the Valorisation of Senegal River (OMVS), its main achievements and challenges, among them environmental, in addition to a guided tour of the OMVS High Commissariat in Dakar. The presentations also covered the different OMVS community structures as a means to bring together riparian communities from neighbouring countries. The seminar in Dakar was followed by a field visit to northern Senegal, including the Diama Dam and Djoudj National Birds Sanctuary, in addition to meetings with OMVS sub-offices in Saint Louis on archiving and documentation and the development and exploitation of the lands and valleys of the Senegal Delta for best practices on irrigated areas. The final session, again in Dakar, provided feedback from the Palestinian participants and a discussion on ways forward in terms of technical cooperation on water management between the two countries.

At the opening, **Mr. Mamadou Diaby**, High Commissioner of OMVS, outlined how the Organization, initially founded in 1972 by Senegal, Mali and Mauritania – later to be joined by Guinea – to respond to the needs of riparian population in water resources and currently running

an extensive programme of infrastructure projects and hydroelectrical dams, should be an inspiring case study for Palestinians, as it is based on the concept of resource sharing among users and not administrative entities. **Mr. Youssoupha Kamara**, Coordinator of the National OMVS Monitoring Unit at MWS, related the situation at the Senegal River to the case of Palestine at the climate and geopolitical levels. **Mr. Sonar Ngom**, Deputy General Secretary at MFASA, situated the visit within the framework of the Committee's mandate and South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC). **Mr. Safwat Ibraghith**, Ambassador of Palestine in Senegal, lauded the host country for its consistent positions, since its independence, vis-à-vis the question of Palestine and its struggle for the inalienable rights of its people. He highlighted the role of Palestine as one of the first countries to address the needs and challenges in water resources, in terms of quality and quantity of potable water, existing infrastructures and wastewater treatment.

Representatives of OMVS, including legal advisors, gave presentations on the mandate of their organization, the legal context and its governance and institutional mechanisms aimed at achieving food sufficiency of riparian communities, reducing the vulnerability of the four countries' ecosystems and improving their economic growth. In addition to the establishment of specialized companies managing different infrastructure projects (e.g. SOGED for Diama Dam) under the auspices of the High Commissariat, the Senegalese experts presented on country-level cells implanted in the national Ministries of Water to interface between the national technical services and organs of OMVS. Furthermore, **Mr. Amadou Diallo**, Coordinator of the Office for Planning, Coordination and Follow-up of Programmes at MWS, detailed the OMVS roadmap for the establishment and implementation of the organization's programmes on good governance, integrated management of water resources, access to potable water, sanitation and management of rain waters and outlined how OMVS' multisectoral policy was articulated in line with SDG 6 on "Guaranteeing access to water and sanitation for all and ensuring the sustainable management of water resources".

Experts also highlighted the participatory approach used to involve different actors and beneficiaries of the Senegal River, in the framework of a large-scale project on the Integrated Management of Water and Development Resources for the Multiples Users in the Senegal River Basin. **Ms. Amy Kebe Mane**, expert in gender and public participation at OMVS, shared with the Palestinian audience the different phases of a US\$240 million project among the four countries, which uses a multisectoral approach for OMVS members' regional integration and improvement of the living conditions of their populations, as it covers the institutional support to OMVS and its agencies, sustainable management of lands and of aquatic plants in the Senegal Delta, among other sectors. The main coordination mechanisms to ensure the involvement of users from the riparian communities include local coordination committees, water user associations and cooperatives of user committees. These mechanisms allow for better information and ensure the implementation of projects in an effective manner, while involving all community components.

The seminar also included discussions on constraints and challenges posed by the management of the Senegal River as well as pilot projects put in place by the regional organization, including the above-mentioned structures, to counteract environmental problems. **Mr. Amadou Amine Ndiaye**, environment and sustainable development expert, spoke of the

degradation of lands leading to the salinization of soils in areas of high agricultural activity, erosion and sanding causing hydraulic axes to be obstructed, degradation of river banks endangering villages, and proliferation of aquatic plants such as typha affecting the ecosystem. With regards to the conservation of environment and biodiversity, OMVS highlighted the need to control the impact of major structural projects for water management (dams, irrigated perimeters) as well as training and sensitization of local populations on the sustainable use of resources, particularly in outlying areas of parks and nature reserves. The visit to the Djoudj Natural Bird Sanctuary served to illustrate one of the best practices in conservation of natural habitats in the framework of a large-scale project in water management. Onsite presentations demonstrated to the Palestinian participants how a regional structure such as OMVS serves to address in a concerted manner global environmental challenges including the gradual disappearance of large wildlife, shoreline erosion, anarchic deforestation, high population growth and changes in economic activities.

The experience of the Senegal River management has contributed to make Senegal a global player in the water sector, as explained by **Ambassador Abdoulaye Barro**, Deputy Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations. Senegal identified water, peace and security as one of its main priorities during its third Security Council mandate 2016-17, while focusing on the preventive aspect in the context of water-related conflicts. Ambassador Barro referred to the Security Council "Arria-formula" Meeting of 22 April 2016, chaired by President Macky Sall, as a strategic step to showcase Senegal's vision and gauge the positions of Member States, notably the P5. This helped Senegal to advocate for cooperation and concerted action among states with shared water basins as a preventive measure and for the model of OMVS to be viewed as a successful one in the "inevitable race [of States] to control water, which has become more than just a natural resource, a product clad in a geostrategic and security challenge."

Throughout the five-day visit, the Palestinian officials, representing their Ministries of Water, Agriculture, Environment and of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, shared their experience and compared the challenges highlighted by OMVS experts with those in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Participants underlined that in the oPt water was a political, not a management issue. Israel has full authority over water resources in the oPt and must consent to all projects for its exploitation. In recent years, the Palestinian Government had launched several initiatives, and even opened partnerships with the private sector but investment companies continue to face administrative challenges from the Occupying power. In consequence, Palestinians suffer from a substantial shortage of water. In addition to withholding and controlling its water resources, Israel treats all used water from the oPt, including the one from the illegal Israeli settlements, and sells it back to the Palestinian Government at exorbitant prices.

Despite the challenges emanating from the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian state has developed an unprecedented expertise in water management and irrigation techniques and excels in overcoming the endless bureaucratic barriers put forth by the Israeli occupier. The Palestinian participants considered the study visit as a stepping stone to develop technical partnerships between the State of Palestine and Senegal. The tours to the OMVS High Commissariat and regional offices, in addition to the different presentations from the Senegalese counterparts, have shed light on documentation and archiving techniques as well as planning and coordination

methods that were worth to further investigate, particularly as documentation was a tool to prove the share water resources due to Palestine.

Another benefit would be further exchange on irrigation techniques, considering the role that agriculture plays in Palestinian daily life, and the role that land plays in the Palestinian identity and political struggle. Palestinian representatives also appreciated the likeminded approach of the two States to the conservation of natural reserves and biodiversity. Although the West Bank and Gaza represent a smaller space in comparison to Senegal, Palestine also has nature reserves that are important for the migration of birds and thus it could benefit from the experience in administrative strategies of Djoudj National Birds Reserve, while Palestine could provide expertise in surveying techniques of fauna and flora.

In his closing remarks, the **Ambassador Ibraghith** highlighted the evolution of bilateral relations in recent years in the framework of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), contributing to show the State of Palestine in a more favourable position, rather than solely a victim of Israeli occupation. **Mr. Diallo** encouraged the Committee and the Palestinian delegation to continue working on cross-border cooperation and water management. Capacities would need to continue to be built despite of the status of political processes and opportunities for SSTC needed to be seized.

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*Note: This Summary attempts to provide an overall picture of the deliberations of the Seminar. A detailed report, including specific questions that were addressed during the interactive discussions, will be published by the Division for Palestinian Rights in due course.*