



Women, Water & Youth: Perspectives from the MENA Region

Delivered at the

**Women, Water & Youth Conference
Kempinski Hotel, Amman, Jordan**

on the
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Opening Session (Day Two)

**Founder and Chairman's
Welcome & Keynote Remarks**
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Founder & Chairman
Arab International Women's Forum

Opening Acknowledgements

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good Morning,

It gives me great pleasure, both personally and as Founder & Chairman of the Arab International Women's Forum, to welcome you all this morning to the AIWF / CMI Joint High-Level Conference on *Women, Water & Youth* conference in Amman, held in partnership with the Center for Mediterranean Integration.

We are proud and honoured to welcome you all to the second day of this important conference and to continue our discussions on key development challenges as well as opportunities for economic growth and progress benefitting women and young people in the Arab world.

Yesterday, *Women, Water & Youth* broke new ground by taking a unique intersectional approach to three of the most critical development challenges in the MENA region – water scarcity and food security, women's economic participation, and youth unemployment.

As Founder & Chairman of AIWF and Co-Chair of the *Women, Water & Youth* conference, it gives me great pleasure to open today's conference by welcoming our Guest of Honour Keynote speakers:

Dr Fares Braizat, Chairman of NAMA Strategic Intelligence Solutions. Dr Braizat, we are honoured to have your presence with us today for this important initiative and we greatly admire your longstanding dedication to addressing critical development challenges in Jordan and the wider Arab region through strategic socio-economic development projects benefitting all sectors in Jordan. We are all very much looking forward to your distinguished keynote address this morning and we thank you for accepting our invitation to be with us today.

We are also very proud to welcome **Tessa Terpstra**, the first ever MENA Regional Envoy for Water and Energy Security for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, based in Amman. Over the past two years, Tessa has been engaged in outreach and policy dialogue on resource efficiency and climate change with governments, private sector, civil society and donors in the Arab region. We are all looking forward to hearing about the Ministry's important work in the EU and globally to raise awareness of water sustainability challenges and about the unique role of the MENA Regional Envoy for Water and Energy Security, working across all levels to find innovative solutions that deeply impact us all.

I take this important opportunity to reiterate the deep appreciation of AIWF to the **Center for Mediterranean Integration** as joint conference organising partner, and to the **Union of Arab Chambers, PepsiCo, PwC Middle East** and the **Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (CIHEAM)** for their valued confidence and support as Conference Supporting Partners for *Women, Water & Youth*.

Our great appreciation and warmest welcome is extended to all our distinguished Guest Speakers today. We thank you for your presence and participation representing our distinguished partners at the CMI and the World Bank, as well as the International Labour Organisation; the United Nations Development Programme; the Palestinian Water Authority; the Mediterranean Youth for Water Network; Yarmouk University in Jordan; and the University of Kassel, Germany; among many others. I also extend our warmest welcome and thanks to AIWF Board Members and Guest Delegates, and all AIWF Global Partners.

As we commence our second day of discussions, we look forward to a key panel on the critical impact of water scarcity on the refugee crisis and to hearing the diverse reflections of global leaders on water scarcity, sustainability, environmental and development challenges in the MENA region.

As we all know, armed conflict in the region and the resulting refugee and internal displacement crises have created unprecedented strain on land and water resources in many Arab States, as well as on the infrastructure and resources of receiving countries such as Jordan, the second largest refugee-hosting country in the world when compared to the size of its population, according to UNHCR.

In this light, this morning's first panel session will bring together leaders in public service and global advocacy to discuss the impact that the refugee crisis in the MENA region has had on water scarcity, food insecurity and future environmental stability in the region, and to provide insight into how these challenges can be overcome or mitigated through multi-level engagement and dialogue.

Our final panel of the conference will invite thought leaders and innovators to share reflections of leadership and common motivating factors as well as differentiating challenges in launching initiatives, projects and campaigns that directly address water scarcity, sustainability, food security, environmental and social development challenges in the MENA region.

The panel elaborates on the role and importance of leadership and innovation in addressing critical sustainability challenges and highlights the essential role that women and young people play in the development of sustainable approaches to natural resource management, stressing the need for women and young people to be empowered and to participate in environmental and sustainability decision-making at all levels.

These are the core themes of our conference and are at the heart of what AIWF has been doing at the Arab and international level for over 17 years as a development agency, invested in creating a better future for women and youth in the MENA region and internationally through economic development, diversity and inclusion.

AIWF has long been committed to raising awareness of critical development issues that impact women and youth in the Arab world, and we are exceptionally proud to be working with all our world class conference partners today to bring key sustainability issues to the top of the Arab development agenda.

It is only by working together within the region and with global partners that we can ensure sustainable growth and development for our young people, laying solid foundations for peace and progress in the Arab region and beyond. With your valued support and encouragement AIWF will maintain the course as we move forward into 2019 and beyond.

‘Haseel for Sustainable Agriculture’: Introducing the Chairman’s Harvard ALI Special Project

Distinguished Guests,

The issues and topics covered by our rich conference programme today resonate very personally for me and inspired me last year to take action and to launch my own sustainable agriculture social enterprise right here in Jordan, which I believe will be of great interest to many of you here today in your respective sectors, development interests and research areas.

In addition to my leadership of AIWF, I was appointed in August 2017 as a Commissioner of the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work and also last year completed the Harvard Advanced Leadership Initiative. As a Fellow of the Harvard ALI, I had the pleasure of spending 2017 in Cambridge, MA to undertake the intensive year-long Fellowship at Harvard as one of 46 global leaders selected for an intensive, multi-disciplinary program and yearlong Fellowship to research and address significant social problems.

A key outcome from my year at Harvard is my sustainability enterprise project which I have launched in pilot phase in Jordan as an innovative solution to key food and water security challenges in the Arab world. The project will deliver an innovative model for sustainable development through agriculture across the MENA region, and will introduce modern 21st century technology and innovation to the agricultural sector, aiming to enhance food security, conserve scarce water resources, and create job opportunities for local communities for men and women, including refugees.

As a social enterprise, the project aims to establish a farm of one hectare in the Jordan Valley area producing high yield fruits and vegetables and opening new markets for export. It will provide jobs for youth in entrepreneurial and technology-based agricultural enterprises, create economic opportunities, and importantly it will foster equilibrium between rural and urban communities which is vital for social cohesion and stability.

The project will use both new technologies such as Hydroponics and vertical agriculture as well as traditional agriculture methods. We save 60% water in using this new technology. The project in Jordan is meant to be scaled-up and replicated across the wider MENA region in the years to come, maintaining focus on sustainable agriculture and food security.

Importantly the project can act as a driver for change, demonstrating new models and inspiring others to invest in smart agriculture. The project is already delivering jobs for women, young people and refugees working on the land, and we are developing a training centre on the ground to inspire youth about agriculture.

I see this model as providing not only a viable solution for water scarcity but also as a vital job creation initiative for women and refugees, as well as importantly – inspiring youth-led social enterprise and entrepreneurship which could open new markets in the agricultural sector whilst solving a critical regional development challenge. We will do this through extensive outreach to school and university students to inspire them to take action and train them in using new technology in smart agriculture.

I am proud to share that I have set up a non-profit LLC, **Haseel for Sustainable Agriculture**, and have signed an MoU between the Ministry of Social Development and Haseel for the land in the Jordan Valley Northern Aghwar. We will be creating fifteen jobs immediately from the outset and are working hard to implement all infrastructure in order to plant and yield our first harvest in the Spring of 2019.

The ultimate aim of this project is to inspire others to replicate the initiative in other parts of the MENA region, with a focus on sustainable agriculture and providing viable solutions to the Arab world's food and water security challenges. The strength of the project is that it is small, affordable, doable, scalable and actionable.

The project has already gained local support in Jordan from the Ministries of Water, Agriculture and Social Development, as well as local farming communities and multinationals such as **PwC** who completed all project feasibility studies; and **PepsiCo**, already deeply involved in sustainable agribusiness in the region. I am delighted to share that with the invaluable support of **Dr Hafez Ghanem**, the former Vice President MENA of the World Bank, I have also secured World Bank funding in the form of a grant to implement and scale this groundbreaking project in the MENA region.

In many ways the project directly addresses the challenges being discussed today and tomorrow at our conference and offers up one solution of many in saving water, creating jobs and empowering women on the land as well as exciting youth about working on the land, and investing their futures in sustainable agriculture.

I am greatly looking forward to learning from the wealth of knowledge and experience in the room, and especially to learning more about other projects and initiatives where the nexus between the three key challenges for today's conference – water scarcity, women's empowerment and youth mobility – have been successfully brought together.

Concluding Remarks

Distinguished Guests,

To conclude,

We welcome you all and trust that our conference discussions today, with your valued participation and contributions, will be a deeply enriching, informative, and truly productive experience for you, where we can all benefit from our shared exchange of ideas, culture, and insight.

Thank you for your kind attention. It is my great pleasure to welcome **Dr Fares Braizat**, Chairman of NAMA Strategic Intelligence Solutions, for his Guest of Honour Keynote Address.