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Cooperation Helps Make the Desert Bloom

October 21, 2005 - Californian Joseph Hess has been to Israel many times, but this past trip was different. In summing up the events of the International Arid Land Consortium's (IALC) recent trip to Israel and Jordan he simply said: "I saw cooperation in making the desert bloom."



From September 17-23, 26 participants visited the forests, the Negev Desert, saw the Hula Valley, and Lake Kinneret in Israel. In Jordan, they went to Petra and the surrounding areas and met with the Royal Scientific Society.

"I've been to Israel many times," said Hess, vice president of Governmental Affairs for Jewish National Fund, an IALC member, "and I've seen what can be accomplished. But there we were in Petra, Jordan, surrounded by desert and stone and nothing else and in the middle of it all was Wadi Mussa, a water treatment plant, funded originally by the U.S. Forest Service. Here, in an area that was once desolate was this project, this plant. And then next to it was this demonstration farm where people planted crops and greenery and a nursery to grow crops for export. It was just fantastic."

The IALC was founded in 1989 and currently involves researchers from the University of Arizona; Desert Research Institute - Nevada; The Higher Council for Science & Technology Jordan; The University of Illinois; Jewish National Fund; Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation Egypt; New Mexico State University, Texas A&M University Kingsville; and South Dakota State University. It was created as a mechanism for supporting multi-lateral research focusing on water, land and climatological change in the southwest United States and the Middle East-- two regions of remarkable similarity. JNF provided invaluable seed funding for the IALC and, more importantly, shared the practical experience it has gained from its century of experience in reclaiming the lands of Israel. Research bodies from the countries of Jordan and Egypt, along with the Desert Research Institute-Nevada, have since joined the membership ranks of the IALC.



Congress authorized the IALC for these purposes beginning in 1990 with the leadership of Senator Tom Daschle, former Congressman Mo Udall, former Senator Dennis DeConcini, Congressman Jim Kolbe, Congressman Ed Pastor and Congressman Joe Skeen. As that program has grown and expanded, the IALC has undertaken critical work affecting the prospects for a sustainable peace and economic cooperation between Israel and her neighbors. By sponsoring cooperative research between Israeli, Jordanian, Egyptian and American scientists, the IALC has made important contributions to the body of knowledge affecting water supply, desalination, rangeland use, and desert agriculture while bringing together Arab and Israeli

minds in an atmosphere of peaceful cooperation.

In its second decade of hard work, the IALC's impact continues to expand. Since its inception the IALC has funded and implemented 121 research, demonstration, and special initiative projects, allocating over \$8.5 million in federal funds.

The IALC board meets twice yearly and has grown in scope and attendance since its inception. "This was the first time we went to both Israel and Jordan in the same trip," said Dr. Jim Chamie, IALC managing director, "and a real willingness to collaborate permeated the meetings."

The meeting's outcome included the possibility of Australia, Spain, India and China joining the IALC; a rejuvenation of Egypt's membership; and a focus on areas of global interest identified as agribusiness technical assistance, horticulture production and marketing, and social economic and cultural areas. But perhaps the most interesting piece was the evolution of project that would involve Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority a joint effort for a sustainable development opportunity. A planning meeting is in its inchoate stages.



Additionally, at its 58th session, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution A/Res/58/211 which declares 2006 the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. As such, the IALC has agreed to sponsor a symposium in Israel in November 2006 on forest operations in arid zones.

Captions: Top photo: Southwest of Tiberias, the IALC Group: Top Row (L to R): Steve Pueppke, Halley Freitas, Bob Freitas, Peter Ffolliott, Chuck Hutchinson, Jim Norwine, Allen Rasmussen, Itshack Moshe, Pat Mitchell, Omri Bonne, LeRoy Daugherty, Don Caccamise, Ami Uliel Bottom (L to R): Gill Atsmon, Colin Kaltenbach, Diane Rickerl, Joe Hess, Rita Caccamise, Mike Auerbach

The other photos are taken at Wadi Mussa, the water reuse project in Petra, Jordan.