European Commission - Press release

Hope for Gaza: EU creates broad international coalition to provide drinking water to 2 million people in Gaza

Brussels, 20 March 2018

Success of pledging conference marks the start of the biggest ever infrastructure project in the Gaza Strip

Today, the EU hosted a pledging conference on the Gaza Central Desalination Plant & Associated Works Project in Brussels. The conference, co-chaired by the EU and the Palestinian Authority, mobilised financial support of €456 million to this biggest ever infrastructure project in the Gaza strip, which will provide a minimum of 55 million m^3 of safe and clean drinking water per year to the people in dire need.

Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes **Hahn** said: *"This project will meet the most urgent water needs in Gaza, providing drinking water and at the same time contributing to economic growth, environmental sustainability and stability. I'm proud that the EU pledged €70 million for the desalination plant plus €7.1 million for management costs. Today's successful pledging conference takes us a step closer to making a reality of this project and to improve living conditions in Gaza, and remove obstacles to economic development there.*

Palestinian Prime Minister **Hamdallah** said: *"This conference carries a message of hope to our people in Gaza, stressing that the international community is not neglecting their suffering, but diligently working to design interventions to address the dire water situation in Gaza. The project will contribute to the political stability of the region as water scarcity can have grim repercussions and spark further tensions".*

Key outcomes of today's pledging conference include:

- **Reinforced support to the project**: 42 countries' delegations (including Israel and 20 EU Member States) and 8 institutions expressed their support for the project and underlined the urgency of making quick progress. The Union for Mediterranean, the European Investment Bank, the World Bank, Office of the Quartet and the Islamic Development Bank expressed their continued commitment to implement this key infrastructure project.
- **Increased financial assistance:** The total amount of pledges reached €456 million, of which €77.1 million alone from the EU. This will cover more than 80% of the total amount needed (€562.3 million).
- **Moving ahead:** Thanks to the financial support committed, the European Investment Bank will now launch the tendering procedure on 15 April. During the conference, the

European Investment Bank and the Palestinian Authority also signed a Letter of Intent, to ensure the further successful preparation and implementation of the project

Background

Currently 2 million Palestinians in Gaza rely almost exclusively on the coastal aquifer as a source of drinking water. The capacity of this aquifer is 55-60 million m^3 per year, whereas total water demand is 180 million m^3 per year. Only 3% of the water pumped from the aquifer complies with World Health Organisation drinking water quality standards, posing significant health risks for the Gazan population. The expected population growth in Gaza (+3.2% per year) is exacerbating the already dire drinking water conditions in Gaza.

To deal with this water crisis, the European Commission and the Palestinian Authority, together with the European Investment Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and the World Bank decided to construct a large-scale desalination plant.The project includes the desalination plant itself, power supply installations to cover energy needs (15% renewable) and the construction of a North-South carrier that will distribute fresh drinking water across Gaza. The overall total cost is €562.3 million.

Today's pledging conference was held back-to-back with the meeting of the international donor group for Palestine, the so-called Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, which have widely discussed measures to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza through targeted financial aid.

For More Information

Opening remarks by Commissioner Hahn and Ms Kherieh Rassas, Advisor to the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, Rami Hamdallah, Palestinian Prime Minister

Doorstep by Commissioner Hahn

Factsheet on the Gaza Central Desalination Project

The Office of the European Union Representative (West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNRWA)

EU cooperation with Palestine