



COVENANT FOR THE JORDAN RIVER

We recognize that the Jordan River Valley is a landscape of outstanding ecological and cultural importance. It connects the eco-systems of Africa and Asia, forms a sanctuary for wild plants and animals, and has witnessed some of the most significant advances in human history. The first people ever to leave Africa walked through this valley and drank from its springs. Farming developed on these plains, and in Jericho we see the origins of urban civilization itself. Not least, the river runs through the heart of our spiritual traditions: some of the founding stories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are set along its banks and the valley contains sites sacred to half of humanity. By any measure, this landscape must be counted as part of the heritage of humankind.



But over the past 50 years, the Lower Jordan River has been destroyed. 96% of its historic flow has been diverted. What little water remains is polluted with saline and effluent, including untreated sewage. The valley's wetlands have dried up, its springs are failing, and half its biodiversity has been lost. This is not just a tragedy for wildlife: families have seen their fields turn to dust, not from a lack of water but from the injustice of its distribution.

The demise of the Jordan and the collapse of the valley's eco-system represents a failure of our most basic responsibility towards the species whose habitats have been destroyed and the ecological systems that sustain life on earth. It is a neglect that leaves us impoverished, that cripples the growth of an economy based on tourism, and that exacerbates the political conflicts that divide this region. It also exemplifies a wider failure to serve as custodians of the planet: if we cannot protect a place of such exceptional value, what part of the earth will we hand on intact to our children?



We have a different vision of this valley: a vision in which a clean, living river flows from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea; in which the valley's plants and animals are afforded the water they need to flourish; in which the springs flow as they have for millennia; and in which the water extracted for human use is divided equitably between the nations that share the valley and the people who live here.

Realizing this vision will not be easy. But difficulty cannot be an excuse for inaction. We therefore call upon the governments of the countries that share this watershed to make a serious commitment of resources and political capital to the rehabilitation of the Jordan River. As individuals and organizations, as members of civil society, and as religious or community leaders, we also affirm that this is a landscape of universal ecological, cultural, and spiritual importance, and commit to work towards the vision expressed in this covenant.