



Friends of the Earth *Middle East*



MEDIA RELEASE

"BIG JUMP" TO CLEAN UP HOLY RIVER

Palestinian, Jordanian and Israeli mayors to jump together into the Jordan River as they join forces to highlight the river's desperate plight

July 1, 2005: In a first-ever event for the Middle East, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian mayors will jump into the Jordan River together as part of a campaign to clean up the dying river.

Dubbed the "Big Jump", the event will be held on Sunday July 10 at the Yardenit site from 2:30 to 6:00pm.

The Yardenit area is the last short stretch of the Lower Jordan River where clean water still flows. Fifty years ago, some 1.3 billion cubic meters of clean water flowed through the lower Jordan each year. Today, only 50 to 100 million cubic meters flows through the river, much of it either sewage or diverted saline water.

Massive water diversion programs, closed borders and sewage discharge have almost completely destroyed the natural and cultural heritage of the Lower Jordan.

The 2005 Big Jump event seeks to highlight the similarities with European efforts to rehabilitate the Rhine River and Elbe River.

The Rhine River was once a river dividing countries at World War I-II (France, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands) and also very polluted. Today, the Rhine River is a river bordering peaceful countries and relatively clean. The Elbe River, in 1989 (Reunification of West and East Germany) is the example for best practice. The clean up process has been completed in only 15 years ! Today , both rivers are in fact clean enough to jump into.

"The European experience can be applied to the Middle East as our rivers too were once war zones and heavily polluted," said Roberto Epple, director of European River's Network and the founder of the European Big Jump Campaign which began in 1995. "Its events like these to be held on the Jordan that can force decision makers to wake up."

Organized by **Friends of the Earth Middle East**, a regional environmental organization that focuses on trans-boundary environmental issues, the event will bring together the head of the Jordan Valley Regional Council, Yossi Vardi; the mayor of Jericho, Hassan Saleh and governor of Jordan's North Shounei Valley, Nayef Al Momani.

All three men have promised to jump into the river. Mr. Epple, representing the Big Jump Project , will join the mayors in jumping into the river.

"If we need to literally jump into the water in order to bring government attention to the sorry state of the Jordan River then we will do it," said Gidon Bromberg, the Israeli director of Friends of the Earth Middle East.

"The local communities as represented by the mayors are with us in the fight to make the respective water authorities have to stop treating the Jordan River as a sewage channel."

If you wish to attend the event and/or need driving directions, please contact Mira Edelstein, 03-5605383 ext. 3, or 054-6392937, mira@foeme.org

**NGO in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations*

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