



## **Global Water Alliance conference on Water & Peace emphasizes need for collaborative and sustainable water management**

On September 24, 2020, the Global Water Alliance (GWA) hosted its 13<sup>th</sup> annual conference titled, “Water & Peace: Promoting Security through Equitable Policy, Governance, and Technology.” Over one hundred water experts, researchers, students, and other professionals gathered virtually to learn and discuss strategies for managing water conflict and promoting peace. A history of water use without proper planning and stakeholder involvement has often led to conflict and inequality. Strong, collaborative leadership that considers all stakeholders is increasingly important for effective peace building. To draw out these lessons, the Water & Peace conference brought together national and international water organizations and individuals to identify best practices to lay the foundation for a modern toolkit for water management with an eye to peace.

Keynote speaker, Clive Lipchin, director of the Center for Transboundary Water Management at the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, kicked off the event with a case study from the Middle East to demonstrate paradigms of watershed management that promote peace in times of conflict. Focusing on the Jordan River and Dead Sea Basin watersheds, Dr. Lipchin addressed the ways transboundary dynamics can turn water into a political issue. In the Middle East, climate change and growing water demands have exacerbated water challenges for communities in the area that already experienced preexisting political tensions. Lipchin encouraged stakeholders to break out of political rhetoric, work through problems at a regional level, and find common ground between “water needs” and “water rights” narratives.

Following the keynote, the first conference panel explored successful water management methods in support of peace. Moderator, Charles Iceland, Director of Global and National Water Initiatives at the World Resources Center and Professor at the University of Pennsylvania led the panel in discussing case studies across the globe to demonstrate scientific, political, economic, and governance approaches to facilitate difficult but necessary solutions on global water challenges.

Carol Collier, Professor at the Academy of Natural Sciences at Drexel University, discussed ongoing management of the Delaware watershed, a water system shared among four states (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Delaware). Collier underscored the importance of grounding work in scientific research, applying a bottom-up approach (local to national), and building collaborative networks.

Shanna McClain, NASA Earth Science Divisions Global Partnerships Manager and Applied Sciences Advisor on Risk Reduction and Resilience, presented on *Mercy Corp*, a humanitarian organization working with NASA to plan the development of two large-scale hydropower dams in Mali, which will improve the quality of life and economic growth in the area. In this joint-initiative approach, McClain emphasized the significance of centering local viewpoints, incorporating environmental knowledge, and applying a systems perspective in all environmental peace-building efforts.

Jerad Bales, Executive Director of Consortium of Universities for the Advancement of Hydrologic Science, Inc. (CUAHSI), discussed the importance of data and technology in resolving water disputes and building diplomacy. Bales stated that parties can only agree on shared goals and actions if they are operating on the same set of shared facts and data, using the principles of FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) Data and TRUST (Transparency, Responsibility, User focus, Sustainability, and Technology) Principles, as guiding strategies for open data sharing.



Robert Muscat, Board Member at Global Peace Services and retired development economist, described ongoing water infrastructure negotiations in India and Pakistan; Sri Lanka; Tibet, China, and Myanmar; and Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt. Muscat focused on linking physical and social engineering to foster effective diplomacy.

The second panel of the day highlighted the value of water security and ecosystem integrity in promoting sustainable development and building peaceful responses to water stress. Moderator, Allison Lassiter, Professor of City and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania, introduced common themes between presenters including the importance of community involvement in water system management.

Korin Tangtrakul, Sustainability manager for the Sustainable Water Resource Engineering (SWRE) Lab at Drexel University, presented on SWRE's ongoing work with residents of Camden, New Jersey to handle flood waste and improve the area for residence. Tanagtrakul focused on the importance of working in partnership with community members, particularly as a predominantly White organization working within a predominantly Black community, to meet the community's needs.

Marisa Ensor, Professor at the Justice and Peace Studies Program and the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University, presented on her ongoing, community-based research in South Sudan, working with women regarding water collection. Ensor highlighted the gender-differentiated vulnerabilities and resilience of the community-members she works with, stating that women should play a part in all aspects of water governance.

Scott Moore, Senior Fellow at the Water Center at Penn, and Director of China programs in the Office of the Provost at the University of Pennsylvania, focused his presentation on three common myths about water: water is for fighting over, water wars are international, and scarcity stokes conflict. Moore urged conference attendees to counter negative popular discourse surrounding water management and consider the many ongoing instances of successful water diplomacy.

Since the Water & Peace conference is an official [2021 World Water Forum](#) preparatory event, Co-President of the International Steering Committee of the 9th World Water Forum, Abdoulaye Sene, recorded comments shared during the conference, discussing the importance of effective water management and promoting the upcoming 2021 World Water Forum in Dakar.

Following all presentations, Kelly Bridges, Senior Associate at Global Water 2020, lead an interactive work session for conference participants to consider important questions surrounding water management. In breakout group discussions, moderators helped lead participants through questions addressing the importance of engaging different stakeholders, building interdisciplinary coalitions, and encouraging community voice for effective and inclusive water management. This session formed the basis for conversations that will continue in a volunteer committee led by GWA in preparation for the 2021 World Water Forum.

This conference was hosted by Drexel University's College of Engineering, and planned in partnership with the Water Center at Penn. It was executed with financial support from Temple University, Aqua, the Deb Family Trust, Innovyze, Pennoni, Ramboll, Rotary, and Suez.

The Global Water Alliance thanks all who participated in the conference for their dedication and commitment to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) for all.



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For the full conference recording, speaker slides, answers to unanswered questions, and a full conference agenda including session titles, please visit: <https://www.globalwateralliance.net/gwa-conference2020-waterpeace/>.