



Arab  
Reform  
Initiative



Robert Bosch  
Stiftung

# Second Annual Conference on Conflict, Climate Change and the Environment in the Middle East and North Africa Region



**5-6 March 2024**



**9:00 a.m - 5:00 p.m**



**Landmark Amman Hotel & Conference Center**

[www.arab-reform.net](http://www.arab-reform.net)

The MENA region continues to suffer from multiple armed conflicts that have led to major environmental damage and large-scale displacement. Yet, the impact of conflict on the environment (be it directly through the damage caused by attacks or indirectly through the weakening of governance and oversight) remains insufficiently measured and the perpetrators of environmental degradation are rarely if ever held to account locally or internationally.

This conference will focus on specific topics relevant to the intersection of conflict and environment, such as the role played by extractive industries in conflict induced pollution, the challenges faced by activists seeking to document the impact of conflict on the environment in MENA. It will also examine the existing legal frameworks – local and international – to qualify such environmental damage and what avenues are available to pursue accountability. Benefitting from the presence of a large and local humanitarian community in Amman, the conference will also seek to explore how humanitarian actors have sought to include environmental considerations in their support of displaced populations and how such considerations can be better integrated in addressing medium-term environmental challenges faced by the host communities.

Organized by the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) and the Robert Bosch Stiftung (RBSG) and held on 6-5 March 2024, in the Landmark Amman Hotel & Conference Centre in Amman Jordan, this conference convenes activists, researchers, and practitioners working on the intersecting frontlines of conflict and environmental action in MENA. This conference will be hybrid, with both in person attendance and live stream on both Zoom and Facebook.

## Day 1: Tuesday 5 March

9:00am - 9:15am | **Welcoming the Audience**

9:15am - 9:30am | **Opening Remarks by ARI and RBSG**

9:30am - 11:00am | **Session 1:  
Extractive industries and conflict in MENA region**

Highly polluting extractive industries have acted as a catalyst and perpetrator of conflicts in the MENA region. This panel explores the ways in which extractive industries, especially oil and gas, have contributed to local conflicts in southern Iraq, North East Syria and Yemen. It will focus on how extractive industries have provided income to armed groups as well as their long-term impact on local communities through polluting soil and underground water. The panel will also explore the steps that can be taken by different local and international actors, and the private sector, to address this pollution and hold perpetrators accountable.



Moderated by **Tobias Zumbraegel**

Postdoctoral Researcher and Lecturer in the Department of Human Geography,  
Heidelberg University

### Speakers:



**Mawada Bahah**

Syrian Freelance  
Journalist



**Shukri Al-Hassan**

Professor in Environmental Pollution,  
University of Basrah



**Ahmad al Wadaey**

Associate Professor of Agriculture,  
University of Sanaa



**Wim Zwijnenburg**

Humanitarian Disarmament Project  
Leader, PAX



**Youness Abouyoub**

Chief, Governance and State-Building,  
Governance and Conflict Prevention  
Division, United Nations

11:00am - 11:30am | **Coffee Break**

11:30am - 1:00pm | **Session 2:  
Mainstreaming Climate Change in Responses to Displacement**

Several displaced communities in the MENA region are subject to harsh environmental conditions with limited capacity to adapt to them. They often find themselves in emergency shelter with little protection from scorching heat or cold winters and regularly end up in areas with limited natural resources. This panel will explore how environmental concerns can be mainstreamed in responses to displacement. It will examine how environmental challenges can be addressed in often urgent situations, as well as how environmental issues can be integrated in the medium-term as time passes and local resources come under pressure for the displaced as well as the host communities.

The panel will focus notably on lessons drawn from displacement in Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Yemen, Lebanon and Palestine, and will give a priority to local and regional organizations that are directly acting on the ground with displaced communities



Moderated by **Sarine Karajerjian**

Director, Environmental Politics Program, Arab Reform Initiative

**Speakers:**



**Abdalftah Hamed Ali**

Junior Visiting Fellow, Middle East  
Council on Global Affairs



**Musaed Aklan**

Senior Researcher, Sana'a Center for  
Strategic Studies



**Zeina Shahla**

Environment editor and journalist,  
Raseef22



**Mac Skelton**

Director, American University of Iraq's  
Institute of Regional and International  
Studies



**Georgi Stickels**

Senior Environmental Manager, UNRWA

1:00pm - 2:30pm

| **Lunch Break**

2:30pm - 4:00pm

**Session 3:**

**Understanding the Environmental Damage in Gaza:  
How to measure it? How to quantify it?**

Israel's attacks on Gaza have led to widespread damage to housing, critical infrastructure and farmland, disrupting water sources, sewage and waste systems. This results in water scarcity, land contamination, and severe environmental degradation rendering entire swaths of land uninhabitable for the foreseeable future, further complicating Gaza's post war rehabilitation efforts. This panel will explore the impact of the current war on Gaza's environment. In addition to discussing how to measure and evaluate the impact, it will also explore how to characterize and even legally qualify this destruction. This panel will aim to lay the grounds for a better grounded understanding of what environmental justice could mean in the context of Gaza.



Moderated by **Hussam Hussein**

Executive Director of Partnerships for Development, Royal Scientific Society (RSS) of Jordan

**Speakers:**



**Lisa Shahin**

Advocacy and Research Officer, Arab Group for the Protection of Nature



**Nidal Atallah**

Program Coordinator, Heinrich Boell Stiftung



**Munira Khayyat**

Clinical Associate Professor of Anthropology, New York University Abu Dhab



**Abeer Butmeh**

Coordinator, Palestinian Environmental NGO Network

## Day 2: Wednesday 6 March

9:30am -11:00am

### Session 4: Environmental Activism in Times of Conflict: What spaces and what risks?

Environmental activists in the MENA region have consistently endeavoured to document and bring to light environmental violations occurring amidst the turmoil of armed conflicts, whether at the hands of armed groups or opportunistic individuals taking advantage of governance breakdowns for personal gain. This critical undertaking is perilous, as these activists often face targeted attacks that go largely unchecked and unprosecuted. The panel provides a platform for climate activists hailing from Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen to share insights into the challenges they face, the threats they endure, and the strategies they employ to navigate these circumstances.



Moderated by **Safa' Al Jayoussi**

Climate Justice Advisor for the Middle East and North Africa, Oxfam International

### Speakers:



**Sahar Mohammad**

Yemeni Journalist



**Shivan Fazil**

Iraqi Researcher



**Sammy Kayyed**

Co-founder and Managing Director,  
Environment Academy, Lebanon



**Azhar Al-Rubaie**

Freelance Journalist and Researcher



**Saada Allaw**

Head of the Press Department, Beirut Legal Agenda

11:00am - 11:30am | **Coffee Break**

11:30am - 1:00pm

| **Session 5:**

**Litigating environmental damage: How can international and domestic law help prosecute the perpetrators of environmental crimes in times of conflict?**

Environmental crimes in times of war have received comparatively little legal attention in MENA even when there is clear evidence that they are caused by deliberate and belligerent human action. This panel will explore how international laws and framework account for environmental damage caused by conflict, and how can adequate legal frameworks be created and/or adapted in MENA to hold perpetrators to account?



Moderated by **Nadim Houry**

Executive Director, Arab Reform Initiative

**Speakers:**



**Mais A.M. Qandeel**

Senior Lecturer of International Law and Technologies, Orebro University



**Farah al Hattab**

Independent Legal Researcher



**Shahinaz Adel**

Lawyer, Ahmad elSeidi Law Firm



**Kristine Berckerle**

Clinical Lecturer in Law, Yale Law  
School



**Zaki Shubber**

Lawyer and PhD Candidate

1:00 pm - 2:30 pm | **Lunch Break**

The Arab Reform Initiative is an independent think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change as well as social and environmental justice in Arab countries. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.

- We produce original research informed by local experiences and partner with institutions to achieve impact across the Arab world and globally
- We empower individuals and institutions to develop their own concept of policy solutions
- We mobilize stakeholders to build coalitions for positive change

Our aim is to see vibrant democratic societies emerge and grow in the region. Founded in 2005, the Arab Reform Initiative is governed by a Plenary of its members and an Executive Committee.

The Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH is one of Europe's largest foundations associated with a private company. The Foundation operates on a non-profit, independent, and non-partisan basis across the areas of health, education, and global issues. The latter comprises the topics "Peace", "Climate Change", "Migration" and "Inequality" as well as "Democracy" and "Immigration Society". The Peace strategy focuses on supporting locally-led approaches as a means to contributing to sustainable peace in the Middle East, the Sahel and the Western Balkans.

Together with regional stakeholders, we set up initiatives that shape inclusive peace processes and implement projects locally. The ongoing development and implementation of local peace approaches require collective efforts. Hence, we promote exchange among academics and practitioners globally while contributing findings of our work to peacebuilding debates and activities.