

News Release

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים

Hebrew University scientists working with Jordanian colleagues



Beam of light from Eilat as seen in Aqaba.

(Photo by Menachem Luria, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

'Beam of Light' is ray of hope for Israeli-Jordanian cooperation

Jerusalem, Nov. 8, 2007 – An Israeli-Jordanian-U.S. cooperative project aimed at measuring air quality in the area between the neighboring southern cities of Aqaba in Jordan and Eilat in Israel has been launched by scientists from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem together with scientists from the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Administration (ASEZA) and the Desert Research Institute of Reno, Nevada, in the US.

The one-month, intensive, transboundary regional air quality research study began earlier this month, with the Israeli team operating a mobile laboratory located north of Eilat, and the Jordanian researchers performing continuous measurements of air quality in Aqaba.

As part of the experiment, the Hebrew University team shines a powerful light projected from the Israeli side to the Jordanian side, the returning rays of which are then submitted to spectral analysis. This analysis enables the group to determine the composition of the air over the Red Sea that lies between the two measuring sites. The scientists have nicknamed the study "Beam of Light".

According to Hebrew University Prof. Menachem Luria, the head of the Israeli team, the overall aim of the project -- which is supported with American funds through the US AID MERC (Middle East Regional Cooperative) framework -- is to develop cooperative efforts to improve air quality in the region and reduce transboundary

pollution transport. This can be achieved through joint scientific efforts and the generation of public awareness, he said.

Dr. Bilal Al Bashir, deputy chief commissioner for the environment of the Jordanian ASEZA, said that good air quality is an essential factor for the continued success of the tourism-driven economic basis of the region. All parties agree that the outcome of this study will serve as a basis for government officials to address air quality issues as a central part of the planning process in this rapidly developing area.

The current intensive study will be followed by a similar program across the northern Jordan Valley next year involving additional scientists from Israel, Jordan and the US. The second phase will focus on developing a better understanding of the transboundary transport of air pollutants as predicted by model simulation in a previous MERC funded study by Erez Weinroth as part of his Ph.D. dissertation at the Hebrew University.

Based on the success to-date in bringing together scientists from both sides of the Jordan River to address these mutual environmental issues, Prof. Alan Gertler of the Desert Research Institute in the US, who helped bring the parties together and develop the program, has been impressed by the cooperative spirit of the team and believes it will serve as a model for future regional studies.

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