



Press Release:

## Cairo Climate Talks experts:

### “A vision for a greener Cairo needs a feasible strategy for an improved quality of life”

In its 6th monthly event, Cairo Climate Talks participated in the German Weeks 2012 with a panel discussion on visions of how to make Cairo greener. Cairo Climate Talks experts from Germany and Egypt agreed that, to achieve that, Cairo needs a realistic plan. A holistic approach is essential, which most importantly should also be implemented. Various possibilities and initiatives were discussed with the interested public.

Prof. Dr. Adel Yasseen, professor for Environmental Architecture, Ain Shams University, started “Cairo needs green architecture!” If principles of green design are followed, we will have better cities, buildings, and open spaces, he promised. Some suggestions include planting proper trees that help absorb the air pollutants in Cairo. He warned against non-green buildings, the so-called glass towers in the middle of the desert. “They absorb enormous amounts of energy and lack the appropriate heat insulation”, he added. Prof. Yasseen stated that the level of individual happiness or quality of life is not high: “Egypt is ranking at place 115 internationally.” Overpopulated areas, limited light and lack of public spaces contribute to this. All experts mentioned aspects of the inequality in architecture. “The gap between poor and rich neighbourhoods can be seen from pictures from above”, Prof. Yasseen said. This causes friction that further decreases the quality of life in Egypt. Dr. Salheen, architect and city planner, director of the Dual Masters Program “Integrated Urbanism and Sustainable Design” at Ain Shams University, added that underdeveloped informal settlements are proof of the failure of the society to provide suitable housing for the people. So they just build their houses themselves. Another proof for low quality of life is that green areas per capita in Cairo are only 0,3 m<sup>2</sup>, while the international standard is 7-8 m<sup>2</sup> per capita.



Yet there is hope for a greener future in Egypt’s capital: although – as suggested by Dr. Salheen - roof-top gardens might not be a practical long-term solution despite their charm, there are other creative design options. Opening up downtown areas towards the Nile, making the riverside accessible for the public could contribute to increasing quality of life in central Cairo.

Dr. Hend Farouh, architect and Senior Researcher of Sustainable Architecture & Urban Development at the Housing and Building National Research Center (HBRC), pointed out how centralization affects urban planning in Cairo, because Egypt’s capital has 30%-50% of the services in the country. “Egyptians build buildings rather than communities”, she added. Dr. Hend indicated that a holistic approach in the housing policies is needed. This includes waste management, clean transportation, and affordable planned housing options, but also community involvement. She mentioned some initiatives endorsed by Housing and Building National Research Center (HBRC) like the energy efficiency program, the newly



developed green building code and the Green Pyramid Rating System GPRS for hotels. New criteria currently include sustainable site, energy efficiency, water efficiency, indoor environmental management, etc. We need to implement green parameters for the existing buildings as well, Dr. Farouh said.



Prof. Dr. Rudolph Schäfer, founding director of the El Gouna Campus of the Technical University Berlin, said that Green is not just plants, but is a broad term for improving the living standard. He highlighted the importance of economic factors for green buildings. An urgent problem that needs to be addressed is the one of the informal settlements. This is an international problem affecting many major cities. “What is specific about Cairo is that informal settlements are massive buildings. The government cannot just destroy them and relocate the inhabitants.” Instead,

measures should involve upgrading the inhabitants’ lives by minimal invasive procedures, Prof. Schäfer added.

He further stated that “it is honest to admit, that no one can solve the situation completely and quickly. We need more state intervention that implements the strategies for urban planning.” A greener Cairo needs a long-term feasible planning and implementation to improve the quality of life for its inhabitants. Experts agreed that a strategy promoting incremental change through many pilot projects was more promising than expecting a “big bang” as Prof. Schäfer said. Best practice examples are needed to inspire the people.

Similarly, Dr. Mohamed Salheen agreed that there is no single technique that can instantly make Cairo greener. Egyptians needs to implement structural changes to make their society more liveable. “Climate Change is the key factor that will affect the cities for the next generation,” Dr. Salheen warned. Current Human Development Reports for the Arab World already state that “progress in human development is threatened by environmental inequality trends.” Egypt lacks a concept of housing resilience, which refers to the capacity of the communities to adapt to climate change. “In fact political housing measures were never sustainable because they were always linked to the political support instead of structural and holistic planning” Dr. Salheen said. A structural change is expected but needs a generation.

Dr. Hend explained how the Housing and Building National Research Center (HBRC) are initiating intensive efforts. “We try to link the stakeholders, like governors and ministries, engage the middle-ranking decision makers and work without excluding anyone; we involve Freedom and Justice Party for example. She mentioned the project of the Eco Village - the first productive, low-cost & environmentally friendly village (PLEV), as well as the New Madina project that was initiated in collaboration with the European Union. We transform the cities into sustainable communities, where green parameters are applied in choosing the most appropriate, cheap but sustainable materials.”



Prof Dr. Hanno Ertel, German professor for civil engineering and Architecture at the German University in Cairo (GUC) from the audience shared the view of Prof. Schäfer: economy is the most important factor to promote green awareness. The citizens should learn that environment-friendly lifestyles - by rational water and energy consumption- either saves money or helps them get money.

Prof. Yasseen believed otherwise: the most important factor is the human being. "We need to develop a critical mind and a collective consciousness among Egyptians to adopt a greener sustainable lifestyle." There is much to be done, and steps are being established.

Cairo Climate Talks is a series of monthly events meant to provide a platform to exchange experience, raise awareness and foster cooperation between policymakers, the business community, the scientific community as well as civil society. It is held in cooperation between the German Embassy in Cairo, the Egyptian Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs, the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA), the German Academic Exchange service (DAAD), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Egyptian German High Level Joint Committee for Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency and Environmental Protection (JCEE).



The next Cairo Climate Talks panel discussion will take place on the 5th of June 2012 at 7 pm, on the occasion of the World Environment Day. The topic will be entitled "DESERTEC - Energy from the Desert- Opportunities for Egypt".

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