MR: Hello. I am from Malaysia.

IR: I am from Italy.

BR: Good evening, I am from Great Britain. So then, the water problems!

MR: Malaysian people take water for granted, which they shouldn’t do. It can and will run out in the near future. Underground reserves are receding in many countries, not just Malaysia, and will run out soon as it takes many years to replenish.

IR: Hmm, unfortunately your situation is experienced around the world, Italy has also had severe flooding due to the deforestation of the ground. The trees are no longer there to soak up the water, and, for example, in 1966, the river Arno flooded Florence for the third time, due to extraordinarily high rainfall, but also as a result of the deforestation. Then, the technicians at the dam which had been built up river to try to ease the problem, opened the flood gates too late, thus contributing to the problem instead. Before long, over a period of just 48 hours, the city was drowning under a sea of mess, and many of the residents had not realised what was happening, and by the time they did, power lines were down, gas was out, electricity was off and they could not contact anyone.

BR: Britain suffers with that same global problem of taking water for granted and there has also been a lot of deforestation over the years, but the increasing problem of flooding in Britain has been aggravated by increased rainfall and the mass building on flood plains. The influx of people migrating to Britain has meant that it has had to build more houses to meet increased demand, but many of these houses are built on flood plains, and that is not good.

MR: Why isn’t building on flood plains good?

BR: It isn’t good because the ground becomes less absorbent and the flood water gets pushed out further because of lack of absorbent space, therefore damaging people’s homes, lives and crops, as well as damaging buildings and other things, especially those first hit like those on the flood plains.

IR: So many problems, but what are the solutions?

MR: We can learn a lot from Singapore, they import water from us in Malaysia and, because their water supply is under threat, they have imposed regulations to help save water and to stop people taking it for granted, such as making industrial premises install water saving devices and ideas. They also impose a conservation tax and water rationing to prepare residents for a serious shortage of water in the future. Malaysia, following their example, has introduced a three-tier billing system whereby the cost of water goes up the more water the residents use.

IR: Hmmm. What could be done to ease the flooding in Italy, do you think?

BR: Reforestation may be a solution for both Italy and Britain, alongside some of the other ideas from Malaysia and Singapore. In fact, Britain has already started a programme of domestic water metering. What we also need to do now is work on reducing the demand for housing in some way, but that becomes a much more political issue.

IR: Hmm, very true, very true. It will be interesting to see what emerges from the Conference over the next few days, it has been interesting talking to you both.

MR: Yes, it has been a pleasure to meet you.

BR: I wish you both well, good night.