

ES Opening Speech for the 23rd Regional Coordination Mechanism

Excellency, Mr. Ahmad Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Mourad Wahba, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, Assistant Administrator of UNDP and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States.

Distinguished United Nations and League of Arab States Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to welcome you at the UN House and to open the 23rd meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for the Arab States, my first RCM since my appointment as Executive Secretary of ESCWA.

I would like to start by taking a moment to remember our esteemed W.H.O. colleague, Dr. Mahmoud Fikri, who passed away too soon. I would like to extend my sympathies to his family and friends. Dr. Fikri should have been among us today, and we will surely miss his experience and his insight.

Before we begin our deliberations today, I would like to welcome His Excellency, Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit from the League of Arab States. The UN and LAS have a long and distinguished history of cooperation, not only in political and humanitarian affairs, but also across all sectors of development. We are continually renewing our efforts to strengthen this relationship to effectively respond to increased regional challenges, and to ultimately improve our services to member States and the people of this region.

I would also like to welcome the Chair of the Regional undg, Mr. Mourad Wahba. Together with the Regional undg we are forging a new chapter that responds to the call by member States and our Secretary-General for closer collaboration, deeper integration and enhanced policy coherence. We are very pleased that this year, the Regional undg meeting is being held back-to-back with the RCM meeting.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to each of you for making the time and effort to join us today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 23rd meeting of the RCM comes two years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, at a time when Arab countries are facing complex and pressing domestic challenges—such as peace and security, unemployment and environmental stability—as well as transboundary regional challenges—such as water and international migration. These challenges can, but should not, affect the UN’s ability to act as “one” to ensure the basic human rights of Member States citizens are protected, a priority for all countries in the region.

It is therefore more important than ever that we find ways to accelerate the pace of SDG implementation.

We now have consensus that the siloed, sectoral approach adopted for the MDGs will not achieve sustainable development. A more holistic approach is required to address the integrated and cross-cutting nature of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their associated and interlinked targets. Unfortunately, an insufficient understanding and accounting of trade-offs and synergies across sectors has resulted at times in incoherence, adverse impacts of development policies in one sector on another, and ultimately in diverging outcomes and trends.

How, then, should we proceed to accelerate the pace of implementation in a positive and effective way? I believe our approach demands a greater level of collaboration and cooperation between all RCM members, and should be two-pronged:

First, we must look at concrete ways to operationalise the integrated approach to the SDGs at both the national and regional levels. A common understanding of what this means would greatly assist countries in the Arab region in adapting and implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Second, we must identify the transboundary dimensions of the SDGs that can only be addressed through regional cooperation interventions.

The RCM, as a regional meeting of directors of UN agencies and representatives of the LAS, offers the ideal forum to discuss these issues and focus efforts on what needs to be achieved to accelerate the pace of our work.

Friends and colleagues,

Last June, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued his report on repositioning the UN Development System, which incorporates the mandates of the 2016 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review. It aims to position the UN system at the national, regional and global levels in a new direction to deliver on our promises.

Of particular relevance to us are the Secretary-General's findings and recommendations on the UN Development System's regional functions, policy and data management capacities; his call for a clearer division of roles and responsibilities of UN entities at regional and sub-regional levels; and for a united policy voice to meet the critical demands of the 2030 Agenda.

There has been a lot of discussion about how the proposed reform agenda will affect our work. Later today we will have an opportunity to discuss some of the practical implications of the proposed reform as it affects the region, while we collaborate to adapt and implement the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs and all associated targets. Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed asked me to convey her sincere apologies that she will not be able to join by VTC as originally planned. She has shared a written statement that will be read out this afternoon.

I look forward to discussing these issues and more with you at this meeting.