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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Arab Preparatory Meeting on Environmental and Natural Resources Issues
for the 2018 AFSD & HLPF

League of Arab States' Headquarters, 11-12 April 2018
Cairo, Egypt,

Outcome Document

The Arab Preparatory Meeting on Environmental and Natural Resources Issues for the 2018 AFSD & HLPF was held from 11 to 12 April 2018 at the League of Arab States' headquarters in Cairo, Egypt. This meeting was held in response to resolution # 523 of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) adopted during its 29th regular session which *“calls on the Technical Secretariat of CAMRE, in cooperation and coordination with ESCWA, UN Environment Regional Office for West Asia, Arab and regional organizations, and concerned civil society institutions to organize preparatory meetings on priority environmental and natural resources issues in the Arab region, in order to formulate the Council's input to the 2018 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD) and the 2018 High Level Political Forum .”*

The meeting was attended by representatives of 15 Arab countries, as well as representatives of a number of regional and international organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector. The meeting addressed the relationship and interlinkages between Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 11 on sustainable cities, 12 on sustainable consumption and production, and 15 on sustainable forest management, combating desertification, halting land degradation and loss of biodiversity. The meeting also tackled the synergies and complementarity between these three goals. The meeting's discussions led to key messages that could drive communities in the Arab region to become more resilient in addressing the risks of depleting natural resources and maintaining healthy ecosystems, thus ensuring a productive and effective environment for countries of the region.

A-Regional Priorities

- Take into account an economically efficient and environmentally sound sustainable urban development in the Arab region - while considering the development and rehabilitation of existing cities in conjunction with the creation of new ones- in order to achieve a balanced development between rural and urban areas, and support interaction between them at the national and regional levels.

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- Address the status of slums and other informal bodies and practices resulting from the increasing rates of migration and population displacement towards cities, in order to ensure equal access to opportunities offered by urban development for all.
- Emphasize priorities highlighted in the Arab Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production and the road map for the implementation of the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns (10YFP) in the Arab region, namely: energy, water, waste, rural development and poverty eradication, education and sustainable lifestyles and sustainable tourism. To call for the development of an operational plan of action for the Arab Strategy in line with the sustainable development goals, which would need to include a monitoring and follow-up mechanism.
- Direct development efforts towards enhancing the utilization of natural resources in a sustainable manner, while limiting economic growth activities that are based on the depletion of non-renewable resources in order to guarantee the rights of future generations. In this regard, awareness is needed at all levels through partnership with all relevant stakeholders, particularly in the education and media sectors.
- Enhance Arab cooperation through the development of a common vision aimed at achieving synergies between the three Rio environmental conventions aiming at reducing the impacts of desertification, climate change and biodiversity decline, to be associated with action plans and supported by operational projects.
- Emphasize the need to preserve biological diversity during the implementation of national development plans, and ensure that Arab cities - which have expanded significantly - are developed in a sustainable manner that takes into account impacts on biodiversity and its role in the provision of basic services.

B-General Messages

- Emphasize that human well-being and prosperity are at the core of the interlinked impacts of sustainability of cities and communities, sustainable consumption and production, combating desertification and land degradation, biodiversity and climate change. Given the high impact of these interlinkages in the Arab region, it is necessary to address them through a holistic approach that takes into account integrated policy development and implementation. This needs to tackle complementarities and synergies in implementing the three Rio conventions (CBD, UNCCD, UNFCCC).
- Emphasize the key role of integrated and comprehensive implementation of SDGs 11, 12 and 15 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for achieving the principle of "leaving no one behind."
- Recognize that ending occupation and restoring security and stability in the Arab region are a cornerstone and a key condition for advancing sustainable development efforts, especially in areas suffering from disputes and armed conflict.
- Emphasize the key role of biodiversity in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its impact on environmental protection and poverty reduction. The Strategic

Plan for Biodiversity (Aichi Targets) is important given its impacts on food and freshwater supply, on enhancing resilience to climate change and disasters, and on enhancing job creation opportunities in agriculture, fisheries, forestry and other sectors.

C- Specific messages

First; SDG-11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

- Mainstream the principles of healthy cities in urban management and development, through: promotion of sustainable transportation, renewable energy, sustainable use of natural resources, and environmentally sound waste management; ensure universal access to safe green spaces, and promote energy-efficient traditional construction methods, among other measures and procedures. This would contribute to achieving the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in the Arab region.
- Adapting the current and future national and sub-national urban plans to the Arab Strategy for Housing and Sustainable Urban Development 2030, as well as to Quito's "New Urban Agenda".

Second; SDG-12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

- Reiterate the fact that unsustainable consumption and production patterns are a major cause of climate change, land degradation, depletion of natural resources, and air and water pollution. As such, adoption of sustainable consumption and production principles is one of the main responses to face these challenges, protect the environment, improve human well-being and contribute to achieving sustainable development.
- Promote effective joint efforts where Arab countries have comparative advantages, and benefit from the assessment that highlighted the need to address: air pollution, per capita share of CO₂ emissions, water stress, and per capita share of waste production.

Third; SDG-15: (a) Combating desertification, halting and reversing land degradation

- Affirm that the Arab region is one of the most affected regions by desertification and land degradation, due to its geographical location and climate, and the overexploitation of its natural resources.
- Increase the focus on halting land degradation and combatting desertification, drought, and dust storms, in national development plans, while prompting Arab regional and sub-regional actions to respond to the impact of these transboundary phenomena.
- Promote coordination and integration between different UNCCD activities and programmes on the one hand, and those related to SDG 15 on protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainable forest management, combatting desertification, and halting and reversing land degradation and halting biodiversity loss, on the other hand.
- Support Arab institutional frameworks tasked with ensuring integrated sustainable development in the Arab region; in particular, the *Arab working group on multilateral environmental*

agreements on desertification and biodiversity. Additionally, seek support to the Arab group from the relevant multilateral international agreement bodies, and promote their participation in its work.

Third; SDG-15: (b) Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

- Noting that despite all efforts at national, regional and global levels, biodiversity is declining, and that the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets requires further efforts and commitment. This has been reiterated in the recent regional reports of the Intergovernmental Science and Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), indicating a decline in biodiversity in all regions of the world.
- Strengthen commitment towards greater integration of biodiversity and those of other multilateral environmental agreements into sustainable development plans and strategies at the national and regional levels in the Arab region through integrated planning across all sectors.
- Encourage Arab countries to benefit from the 2018 United Nations Conference of Parties on Biological Diversity, hosted by Egypt, through promoting the commitments under the Convention and its two Protocols while also reflecting the common Arab issues related to biodiversity. This is particularly important in light of the Conference's focus on mainstreaming biodiversity into the Infrastructure, energy, mining, manufacturing and health sectors, and the launch of the process for developing a new global framework to be adopted in 2020.

D-Means of Implementation

First: In relation to sustainable cities and local communities (Goal 11 of the SDGs)

- Follow an integrated participatory approach in urban planning and promote investments in infrastructure through the provision of an enabling political, legislative and institutional environment. This will mobilize the major role of the private sector and facilitate the participation of civil society and local Arab communities.
- Support and build human and institutional capacities of local Arab communities and find innovative funding mechanisms to improve their ability to reduce and mitigate the impacts of climate change and disasters. Furthermore, develop joint national and regional coordination mechanisms to reinforce achieving sustainable urban development.
- Expand dialogue and exchange of experiences and best practices among all actors involved in urban and sustainable development at the regional, national and local levels. This will contribute to a common vision to achieve sustainable development.
- Provide financial and technical support for the rehabilitation of occupied Arab territories, and cities affected by armed conflicts, calculate their environmental cost, and build the capacity of local authorities to meet the urgent needs of the affected and displaced populations. Achieving

sustainable urban development will require incorporating the principles of “building back better” into future local and national development plans.

- Call on donors to meet their financial commitments to Arab countries; particularly to Arab least developed countries, and occupied territories and those affected by armed conflicts. This will support the achievement of SDG 11 on sustainable cities and local communities.

Second: In relation to sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12 of the SDGs)

- Develop national plans to achieve sustainable consumption and production by benefiting from regional initiatives and programs, and enhance the exchange of lessons learned among Arab countries, especially from those that have achieved positive results.
- Build human and institutional capacity and skills to support the political decision-making processes through linkages to knowledge, scientific research and technology.
- Emphasize the role of the private sector, civil society organizations and financial institutions in the implementation of sustainable consumption and production targets. Additionally, focus on: promotion of environmental services, and the use and adaptation of innovative technologies to the local context for the promotion of sustainable investments, creation of new job opportunities and reducing inequality.
- Identify and develop clear and adequate financing mechanisms to satisfy the requirements of sustainable consumption and production. This includes partnerships at the national and international levels, provision of development assistance and promotion of inter-Arab investments.
- Emphasize the importance of developing legislative frameworks to create financial and non-financial incentives aimed at behavioral change towards a more sustainable consumption and production approach.

3-In Relation to Life on Earth (Goal 15 of the SDGs)

- Exert concerted efforts to ensure coordination, coherence and complementarity between partners from specialized Arab, regional and international organizations with an aim to unify efforts towards achieving SDG 15 on land degradation and combating desertification. In this regard, greater space within their work programs on these issues is needed.
- Call upon Arab financial institutions to allocate more resources to the sectors involved in combating desertification and land degradation and combating drought.
- Call upon developed countries, within their climate change adaptation commitments, to provide financial and technical support, promote capacity-building and facilitate the transfer of technology to the Arab region. In turn, this will enhance the region’s efforts to combat drought, land degradation and desertification, thus contributing towards achieving food and water security.

- Expand regional dialogue and share experiences and successful practices among all actors in the areas of desertification, land degradation and drought, at the regional, national and local levels in order to formulate common visions that contribute to promoting sustainable development.
- Seek additional resources and funding mechanisms, strengthen political commitment, build national and regional capacities and strengthen partnership with the private sector, local communities and civil society organizations in order to achieve commitments related to biodiversity in the Arab region.
- Acknowledge and value successful efforts for the integration of biodiversity in the Arab region, such as investment in wind farms, and encourage the exchange of such experiences between Arab countries. Moreover, promote the preservation and utilization of indigenous knowledge and Arab societal cultures associated with the conservation of biodiversity for their important role in achieving sustainable development.