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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Regional Consultation on the Environment and Natural Resources for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and High Level Political Forum
Cairo, 27-28 February 2019

INFORMATION NOTE

I. Mandate

Since 2014, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has been cooperating with regional partners to organize the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD), which is convened each year to support regional preparations for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). This year the AFSD will be organized from 9 to 11 April 2019 in Beirut, Lebanon. Its outcome report will feed into the 2019 HLPF session, which will focus on “Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality.” The HLPF will be convened in New York from 9 to 18 July 2019 under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and then from 24 to 25 September under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly.

In preparation for the AFSD, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) regularly requests the League of Arab States Secretariat, the United Nations Environment Programme and ESCWA to organize a regional preparatory meeting on the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to inform regional and global processes in preparation for the HLPF. Specifically, CAMRE adopted resolution 551 during its 30th regular session in October 2018 that:

“Calls on the Technical Secretariat of CAMRE, in cooperation and coordination with ESCWA and UN Environment Regional Office for West Asia, and also in cooperation with relevant Arab and regional organizations and NGOs, to follow-up on the implementation of activities and programs of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and priorities of environment and natural resources in the Arab region, and calls upon them to organize preparatory meetings to discuss these issues to prepare contributions of CAMRE to the 2019 sessions of AFSD and HLPF, and present a report on the implementation of the resolution to the upcoming CAMRE session.”

II. Background

The HLPF was established in accordance with the Rio+20 outcome document to provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for advancing progress towards sustainable development. It also serves as a platform for the follow-up and review progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). United Nations General Assembly resolution 67/290 of 9 July 2013 sets the format of the HLPF, acknowledges the importance of the regional dimensions of sustainable development, and invites the five United Nations Regional Commissions, including ESCWA, to contribute to the work of the Forum through annual regional meetings. In accordance with this mandate, ESCWA coordinates with regional partners to organize the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD) on an annual basis. Associated sector-specific preparatory consultations are also convened, including regional

consultations on energy, water and the environment in 2018. In 2019, sectoral consultations on the environment and climate change, as well as a stakeholder-specific consultation for parliamentarians, are being organized to inform the AFSD. The outcomes of these preparatory processes will be submitted to the AFSD and inform its deliberations. The resulting AFSD meeting report is then submitted as regional input to the HLPF with the aim is to ensure that Arab regional perspectives, priorities and specificities are considered in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the HLPF.

The theme for the 2019 sessions of the AFSD and HLPF is on “Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality.” The set of goals to be reviewed under this theme are listed below, noting that Goal 17 is considered every year:

- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

More information on the HLPF, AFSD and the 2018 regional preparatory meeting on the environment can be obtained from the following websites:

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=4444>

<https://www.unescwa.org/events/arab-forum-sustainable-development-2018>

<https://www.unescwa.org/events/arab-preparatory-meeting-environmental-issues-2018>

III. Objectives

In order to examine the environmental and natural resource dimensions that influence the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in line with CAMRE resolutions, the League of Arab States Technical Secretariat of CAMRE, UN Environment and ESCWA are organizing a Regional Consultation on the Environment and Natural Resources for the 2019 AFSD and HLPF from 27 to 28 February 2019 in Cairo, Egypt.

The regional consultation will result in an outcome document that includes a set of key messages, conclusions and recommendations reflecting regional views on the environmental and natural resource dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and particularly the SDGs under review during the 2019 HLPF review cycle. The outcome document will be submitted to the 2019 AFSD to inform regional preparations for the HLPF. It will also be used to inform the subsequent Regional Consultation on Climate Change for the 2019 AFSD and HLPF, which will be held in Beirut, Lebanon from 21 to 22 March 2019, which aims to prepare a dedicated outcome document on climate change for informing the 2019 AFSD.

A. Thematic Areas

The regional consultation will be structured around four major themes that reflect the environment and natural resource dimensions of the goals being examined during the 2019 review cycle. Climate change will be considered as a cross-cutting issue as it will be more deeply addressed in the subsequent regional consultation focused on Goal 13. The meeting’s four thematic areas are detailed below.

Theme 1: Quality Environmental Education

Environmental education improves understanding of environmental challenges and informs action at the local, national, regional and global levels. Capacity development is needed to strengthen the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions on how to prevent and reverse environmental degradation. Initiatives to strengthen environmental education should thus empower individuals to become agents for change and proactive contributors to creating a more just, inclusive and sustainable world. Environmental education initiatives also help to change behavior and inform policies that can support climate action, protect biodiversity, enable a transition to more sustainable economies and inclusive societies, enhance skills for the creation of green jobs, and motivate people to adopt more sustainable lifestyles. Specifically, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) initiatives empower people to change the way they think and work towards a sustainable future, and are increasingly recognized as an effective enabler for accelerating progress towards sustainable development.

The regional consultation will discuss the options, opportunities and success stories from the Arab region that can advance the quality of environmental education in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and ESD initiatives. Attention will be paid to how ESD helps learners understand the causes and consequences of environmental degradation and empowers them to take informed decisions and responsible actions in support of inclusive and just societies that ensure a sustainable natural resource base for present and future generations.

Theme 2: Promoting Green Jobs

The transition to more sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth models that pursue productive and decent work for all are avenues for achieving sustainable development objectives through national policies, plans and local initiatives. Transitioning towards a greener economy that supports green and decent job creation is one of the pathways advanced in the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP), which was launched at Rio+20 in 2012 and is referred to in SDG 8.4. The promotion of sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local products is also specifically identified as a means to achieve SDG 8.

The regional consultation will exchange perspectives, lessons learned and opportunities for generating green and decent jobs, as well as ways that transitioning to more sustainable consumption and production patterns can support these efforts. Consideration will be given to the importance of engaging private sector enterprises in green job creation, and how enhancing sustainable business practices, public procurement policies and consumer behavior can support these efforts.

Theme 3: Decoupling Economic Growth from Environmental Degradation

Current patterns of economic growth have largely relied on the extraction of natural resources, manufacturing and the delivery of services that fuel consumption and the generation of waste. The environment has already been subject to irreversible damages in several areas across the globe. However, significant progress has been made on ways to improve natural resource efficiency and mitigate unsustainable production and consumption patterns in several sectors across the region. Opportunities thus exist to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, and pursue development objectives based on more sustainable production and production patterns.

The regional consultation will thus examine ways Arab States have sought to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, with special attention paid to the means of implementation needed to make this happen. This will include consideration of how enhanced environmental education and the promotion of green jobs can support these efforts, alongside capacity development, access to finance and appropriate technology transfer arrangements that support reuse, recycling, repair and reengineering of goods and services that can fuel more sustainable economic growth pathways.

Theme 4: Conflict and the Environment

Armed and protracted conflicts have affected and continue to impact the environment and access to natural resources in several Arab States. Conflict and occupation has resulted in significant environment damages, the contamination of natural ecosystems, as well as damage and destruction of the water, land and energy resource base of the region and related infrastructure assets.

Assessments of the impact of conflict on the environment have been prepared by UN Environment in post-conflict countries such as Iraq and Lebanon. National and sector-based assessments have also been prepared by other development agencies and partners to examine the impact of conflict on natural resources, the environment as well as strategic sectors that depend upon those resources, such as agriculture, industry, tourism and health. These assessments will be drawn upon to inform discussion on the effects of protracted conflict and occupation on the environment. The potential compensation for environmental contamination and damage due to armed conflict would also be considered, drawing upon the need to promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.

The regional consultation will consider the effects of armed conflict on the environment and natural resources, how to best assess the environmental damages caused by armed conflict, and examine ways by which countries can claim compensation for environmental damages.

IV. Organizational issues

A. Participants

The consultation will engage designated member State representatives and concerned regional organizations with standing before the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR) that advises CAMRE. Other regional stakeholders and experts will also be invited to contribute.

B. Partners and processes

This regional consultative meeting is organized by the League of Arab States Technical Secretariat, UN Environment and ESCWA as the members of the Joint Secretariat serving JCEDAR.

The outcome of this meeting will be conveyed to the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (Beirut, 9-11 April 2019) and the Regional Consultation on Climate Change for the 2019 AFSD and HLPF (Beirut, 21-22 March 2019) to inform regional preparations for the 2019 session of the High Level Political Forum.

C. Date and venue

The meeting will be held at the Four Seasons Hotel Cairo at the First Residence, which is located at 35 Giza Street in Doki, Cairo, Egypt. The meeting will be organized over one and one-half days from 27 to 28 February 2019. More information on the hotel is available at: www.fourseasons.com/cairofr/

D. Language

In accordance with League of Arab State practices, the meeting will be conducted in the Arabic language.

E. Registration and logistical issues

Invited participants are asked to submit their letter of nomination, completed registration form and a color scanned copy of their passport to ESCWA no later than 6 February 2019 to be eligible for sponsorship. Sponsorship covers roundtrip air travel, a daily subsistence allowance and terminal expenses. Roundtrip airline tickets will be issued in economy class on the least expensive route, in accordance with United Nations

Financial Rules and Regulations. Participants approved for sponsorship may be asked to complete a bank details form to allow for the electronic transfer of their sponsorship entitlements.

Participants attending the meeting at their own expense are kindly asked to submit their letter of nomination and registration form to ESCWA no later than 15 February 2019 in order to receive the meeting-related documentation.

All participants are responsible for obtaining their own entry visa for travel to Egypt. Participants are also asked to make their own hotel reservation arrangements at the meeting venue or other location.

F. **Correspondence**

Correspondence related to the meeting should be directed to the following counterparts:

League of Arab States

Ms. Shahira Wahbi
Chief, Natural Resources, Sustainability and Regional
and International Cooperation
Environment, Housing, Water Resources Department
League of Arab States
Cairo, Egypt
Tel: +20 2 257 50 511
Fax: +20 2 257 40 331
Email: environment.dept@las.int
shuhryar@yahoo.com

ESCWA

Ms. Lara Geadah
Economic Affairs Assistant
Food and Environment Policies Section
Sustainable Development Policies Division
ESCWA
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel: +961 1 978 532 (Direct)
Fax: +961 1 981 510/2
Email: geadah@un.org