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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**

**FOLLOW-UP ACTION ON THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE COMMISSION  
ADOPTED AT ITS SIXTEENTH SESSION: RESOLUTION 180 (XVI) ON REGIONAL  
COOPERATION AND COORDINATION IN THE FIELD OF  
ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**



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## I. BACKGROUND

1. As the concept of sustainable development has emerged, several United Nations agencies, in addition to Arab and international organizations, have begun to participate and work actively in the field of environment and development in the Arab region.
2. The Arab Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development (Cairo, 10-12 September 1991) recognized the importance of Arab regional coordination, with a view to elaborating Arab priorities in the field of environment and sustainable development and translating such priorities into cooperative projects to be carried out by Arab and international agencies.
3. Accordingly, and in cooperation with the League of Arab States (through the Executive Bureau of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized, in the fourth quarter of 1991, an unofficial meeting attended by representatives of major international agencies and organizations. The purpose of the meeting was to elaborate an adequate mechanism for regional cooperation and coordination in line with regional preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED [Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 1992]).
4. To provide the legislative authority for such coordination and a mechanism of cooperation at the Arab regional level, the Environment subprogramme of ESCWA prepared the background studies and information, on the basis of which the Commission adopted, at its sixteenth session, resolution 180 (XVI) of 2 September 1992 on regional cooperation and coordination in the field of environment and sustainable development. The aim of the resolution was to promote environmentally sound and sustainable development and to implement Agenda 21. In that resolution, the Commission called for the establishment of an Arab and international inter-agency coordinating committee on environment and development for the ESCWA region, and requested the Executive Secretary to report to the Commission at its seventeenth session on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.
5. At the Fourth Session of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment, including the preparatory meetings with the Executive Bureau, ESCWA defined such an orientation and the relevant steps that had been taken. The aim was to reach an agreement on the principles, rules of procedure, objectives and functions of the inter-agency coordinating committee. As a result of such joint efforts, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment approved the establishment of such a committee in its resolution 25 of 15 October 1992.
6. In collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Regional Office for the Near East (FAO/RNEA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), ESCWA and the League of Arab States, at a meeting held at Cairo on 23 January 1993, prepared the rules of procedure of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region. Subsequently, the League of Arab States circulated the rules of procedure to Arab organizations and United Nations agencies and regional committees with a request to convene a meeting in Amman hosted by ESCWA from 7 to 8 April 1993 to establish the Committee and approve its rules of procedure and functions.

## II. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION

7. The Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region, which has among its members Arab and international organizations and agencies concerned with Arab environmental work, was not established hastily but came about as a result of continued work begun in the mid-1980s by the relevant Arab and international organs, especially the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States and UNEP. It led to the creation of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment and its Executive Bureau, which adopted priority programmes of action to (a) combat desertification and increase green areas; (b) combat industrial pollution; and (c) promote environmental education, awareness and information. Steering committees composed of experts from States and relevant Arab and international organizations were formed to run the programmes. National focal points were designated for each programme in every Arab State. A number of successful activities were undertaken within the framework of the three priorities, with the concerted efforts of relevant Arab and international organizations. Arab cooperation and coordination on environmental issues received attention at the Arab Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development, which was organized jointly by the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, ESCWA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in preparation for UNCED. At its fourth session, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment welcomed that cooperation and underlined the importance of developing appropriate machinery for Arab and international cooperation in the field of environment and in the achievement of sustainable development. A similar position was taken by Arab and international organizations and agencies, particularly FAO in its resolution 2/91, which indicated the need to strengthen cooperation with other organs concerned with sustainable agricultural and rural development, and ESCWA in its resolution 180 (XVI), which supported the establishment of an Arab and international inter-agency coordinating committee on environment and development in the Arab region for the purpose of promoting environmentally sound and sustainable development.

8. On the basis of mutual concerns and in order to avoid duplication and to achieve the common goal, it was agreed to consolidate the initiatives and proposals into one appropriate concept aimed at highlighting and supporting the desired Arab international coordination and cooperation. The meeting to establish the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region was held at Amman in April 1993 and was hosted by ESCWA. Several interested Arab and international organizations and agencies participated in the meeting; the rules of procedure of the Joint Committee were formulated, and those concerned were called upon to make a prompt declaration of their intention to join the Joint Committee. In addition, agreement was reached regarding the Committee's work during the transitional period 1993-1994 and the date and venue of its first session (Cairo, 15-16 September 1993).

### A. Objectives

9. The Joint Committee aims at enhancing cooperation and achieving the highest degree of coordination between the League of Arab States and its specialized organizations, and the United Nations and its specialized organizations and their respective committees, as well as other Arab and international organizations. The purpose of such cooperation and coordination is to increase the effectiveness of joint Arab action in the field of environment, to intensify the national, regional and international efforts for sustainable development and the protection of the environment, and to reach the objectives set out in the Arab Declaration on Environment and Development (Tunis, October 1986), the Arab Declaration on Environment and Development and Future Prospects (Cairo, September 1991),

the Arab Programmes for Sustainable Development (Cairo, October 1992), and the Arab objectives of Agenda 21. Furthermore, the Joint Committee would recommend and follow up the implementation of the programmes approved by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment, and by its Executive Bureau or by the members of the Joint Committee.

## B. Membership

10. Membership in the Joint Committee includes the following Arab organizations and institutions, international agencies, and their regional offices:

(a) The League of Arab States, its specialized councils and committees and the following specialized Arab organizations: the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, the Arab Organization for Industrial Development and Mining, the Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, the Arab Fund for Socio-Economic Development, the Arab Broadcasting Federation, the Arab Atomic Energy Agency, the Arab Labour Organization and the Council for Arab Economic Unity;

(b) The United Nations and its specialized agencies: the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (Regional Office for the Near East), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Regional Office of Education for the Arab States and Regional Office for Science and Technology for the Arab States, the World Health Organization (WHO) (Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Regional Bureau for the Arab States and European Programmes), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD);

(c) Other Arab and international organizations: the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Centre for Environment and Development in the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), and the Arab Maghreb Federation.

11. Any entity is considered a full member of the Joint Committee upon announcing its membership. The relevant non-governmental organizations and donor agencies agreed upon by the Joint Committee may be invited to attend its meetings as observers. In order to ensure the continuity and work of the Joint Committee, it was agreed that each member organization, institution or agency would designate a representative on the Joint Committee for a renewable period of two years.

## C. Organization of work

12. The Joint Committee shall hold a regular session each year, presided over by the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States. Technical secretariat services for the Joint Committee shall be provided by the Department of Economic Affairs of the League of Arab States, which serves as the Technical Secretariat for the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment. The Executive Bureau of the Joint Committee, a technical working group emanating from the Joint Committee, shall meet twice a year.

It shall consist of seven members of the Joint Committee, four of which shall be permanent, namely the substantive secretariat of the Joint Committee, UNEP, ESCWA, and the FAO Regional Office for the Near East. The remaining members shall be elected by the Joint Committee for a renewable period of two years.

#### D. Functions

13. The functions of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region are the following:

(a) To develop and submit, for the approval of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment and of the members of the Joint Committee, proposals for an Arab environmental work programme, which would include annual output requirements;

(b) To allocate the roles and responsibilities of the members of the Joint Committee for the implementation of the work programme according to the agreements and rules governing their respective legislative bodies;

(c) To attract financial and moral support and determine ways of funding the work programme while endeavouring to achieve the highest level of coordination among the Arab environmental programmes approved by the members in addressing the interconnected problems of environment and development as elaborated in the Arab environmental action plan, through the exchange of information related to the respective environmental plans and programmes of work, as well as outlining ways and means of cooperation in their implementation;

(d) To consider any technical, organizational or funding proposals which might serve to develop and increase the effectiveness of the work of the Joint Committee in order to achieve its goals.

#### E. Plan of work during the transitional period (1993-1994)

14. The work of the Joint Committee during the transitional period and until its foundations are laid will concentrate on two main subjects:

(a) Initiating the establishment of an integrated environmental information network. It was agreed that each of the members of the Joint Committee should endeavour to establish a database, or update those already available, according to their field of specialization and the requirements of their work, and strive to coordinate the efforts undertaken within the field of specialization of each member. It was also agreed that the programme for establishing an integrated environmental information network adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment (in accordance with its resolution 23, RS-4, 15 October 1992) should be considered as part of the Arab programmes for sustainable development and the starting point for establishing said network after revising it in the light of the remarks and suggestions of the members of the Joint Committee in order to develop it and thus enable the Joint Committee to adopt it as a source for the integrated environmental information network. Moreover, it was agreed to entrust a specialized consultancy firm with the task of preparing an integrated study on the operational requirements for the establishment of the environmental information network and its technical and financial requirements in the short and medium term, in the light of the resources available to the members of the Joint Committee. That study will be examined



by a specialized technical team which will submit recommendations to the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment for appropriate action;

(b) Preparations for the Joint Arab Conference of Ministers of Environment and Agriculture on Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development in the Arab World. A Preparatory Committee for the Conference was established, including in its membership the Technical Secretariat of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, UNEP, ESCWA, and the FAO Regional Office for the Near East. The latter will perform secretariat functions for the Preparatory Committee and will prepare a background paper on the technical, financial and organizational requirements of said Conference, which the Preparatory Committee examined at its first meeting on 13 September 1993.

#### F. Future plans

15. In the light of its short experience, and in the context of the positive results achieved in particular through cooperation between some members of the Joint Committee in implementing certain activities in the context of the priorities established by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment, which is considered the comprehensive framework for the work of the Joint Committee, the Joint Committee will concentrate in the future on the Arab Programmes for Sustainable Development adopted by the Council so that they would, in turn, become the programmes of the Joint Committee, starting with the three priority programmes mentioned above, namely the programme for combating desertification and increasing green areas in the Arab world, the programme for combating industrial pollution in the Arab world and the programme for promoting environmental education, awareness and information in the Arab world, as well as initiating the implementation of the programme for the conservation of biological diversity and updating the programme for establishing an integrated environmental information network.

16. Should this experiment succeed, the Joint Committee will pursue its work and implement other programmes within the Arab Programme of Action for Sustainable Development according to available resources and new environmental developments at the Arab and international levels. These programmes may also be implemented in the future through specialized technical committees emanating from the Joint Committee, each assuming responsibility for a specified programme whose secretariat functions would be performed by the concerned organization or agency which carries out the main activity in the programme, for more efficient performance and distribution of functions among the members of the Joint Committee.

#### G. Resolutions adopted by the Joint Committee at its first session

17. In implementation of the recommendations of the constituent meeting of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region, the Committee held its first session at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States on 15 September 1993. Experts from the following Arab and international organizations participated in the meeting:

The United Nations Environment Programme  
The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Regional  
Office for the Near East (FAO/RNEA)  
The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

The World Health Organization, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO/EMRO)

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

The Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC)

The Arab Organization for Agricultural Development

The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization

The Gulf Cooperation Council

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa

The Department of Economic Affairs of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States.

18. After deliberations, the Joint Committee decided to:

- (a) Invite the Economic Commission for Africa to become a member of the Committee;
- (b) Adopt the Rules of Procedure for the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region and its structures;
- (c) Adopt the Integrated Environmental Information Network in its revised version, as approved by the fourth ordinary session of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment in its resolution 23 of 15 October 1992, as part of the Arab Programmes of Action for Sustainable Development and as a first step towards the establishment of the Network;
- (d) Convene the Arab Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development in November 1994 in conformity with the technical, organizational and material requirements contained in the aide-mémoire of the Conference. The Technical Secretariat was requested to submit a report on the Conference to the forthcoming session of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment and the Council of Arab Agriculture Ministers with the aim of having the two councils pass a resolution to co-sponsor the conference;
- (e) Appeal to Committee members to intensify efforts for the implementation of Arab environmental action programmes and activities and to adopt further programmes in this respect, to call on all parties to cooperate for the realization of this objective, and to urge Committee members to provide the Technical Secretariat with information on a regular basis regarding the Committee's activities and programmes in the area of Arab environmental action, with the purpose of familiarizing other members with the aim of realizing coordination and integration among the activities of Committee members;
- (f) Convene the second session of the Committee on 11 and 12 October 1994 and hold the third meeting of the Executive Bureau on 11 and 12 April 1994 to follow up the implementation of the resolutions of the first session. The fourth meeting of the Executive Bureau would be held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on 10 October 1994 to prepare for the second session of the Committee.