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PRIORITY ISSUES IN THE WESTERN ASIA REGION

**PEACE AND SECURITY AND THEIR IMPACT ON
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Peace, security and development in the ESCWA region^{*}

Summary

This sub-item was included on the session agenda pursuant to Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) resolution 241 (XXII) concerning the impact of the lack of stability in the Arab region on economic and social development. In that resolution, the Commission requests the secretariat to study the impact of war on economic and social development and to submit a report on the matter to the Commission at its twenty-third session. The Commission will consider the sub-item on the basis of the document entitled "Peace, security and development in the ESCWA region".

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Introduction

1. Member countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) are at a decisive stage in their history. Dangers and challenges are increasing and plans are being made to dismantle and reconstruct those countries under different names.
2. Development and enlightenment, in an attempt to achieve the dream of integrated development, are no longer the main challenge they represented for decades. The ESCWA member countries are threatened by anarchy and a fragmented concept of citizenship, as the result of conflicts that are being fomented over sects, races, clans and regions.* Security, stability and peace are foremost priorities in resuming the process of development and economic and social renaissance.
3. It is beyond question that foreign powers are playing an increasing role in inflaming the situation in the region, pursuant to the neo-conservative mantra of "instability or creative anarchy". That in itself constitutes one of the main challenges facing the region at this stage, which is characterized by overwhelming political and social fluidity. The situations in Iraq and Lebanon may be the best proof of that, which is also illustrated by the tensions and disturbances taking place in the Gulf region.
4. The main challenge is therefore to ensure that the process of democratization takes a systematic and gradual path that minimizes the risk of division, fragmentation and regression to archaic types of community based on sect, region and race that are inimical to the concepts of State and citizenship.
5. That situation requires the redistribution of authority and wealth, a fight against corruption, and improved institutional efficiency in each of the ESCWA member countries. The roots of the problem lie in the following:
 - (a) Lack of democracy or change in political administration and the impossibility of democratic change through peaceful means;
 - (b) The ever-growing gap between excessive wealth and abject poverty;
 - (c) The prevalence of corruption, nepotism and patronage at all levels;
 - (d) The institutional failure to manage State affairs.
6. Those are the critical ills that open the gates to foreign pressure. Occasionally those pressures coincide with popular grievances and anger, leading to a major shuffling of the cards that clears the way for the even greater dangers that could attend the formation of the future of ESCWA member countries.

I. THE TYPE OF CHALLENGES AND DANGERS THAT FACE ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

7. The dangers that confront the ESCWA member countries are material, non-material and external.

A. MATERIAL CHALLENGES

8. The following factors constitute material challenges:

* It is noticeable that current discourse divides the citizens of one country into such sects and groups as Sunni, Shia or Kurdish, as is the case in Iraq, in order to exacerbate divisions and fragmentation, and divorce people from a sense of a national identity.

(a) Military occupation with no clear timetable for the withdrawal of the occupying forces, as in Iraq and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. That situation engenders violence on both sides, destroys infrastructure, disrupts normal daily life and makes growth and development impossible;

(b) Border conflicts. Such conflicts put relationships under perpetual strain and cause lack of stability in certain ESCWA member countries;

(c) Clashes over strategic natural resources, predominantly oil, natural gas and water. Competition for water resources may be the most significant of those challenges, given the regional scarcity thereof, and in the light of ever-increasing Israeli ambitions in respect of rivers and groundwater in the Arab Mashreq, and the conflicts with Turkey over the division of the waters of the Euphrates;

(d) Civil wars. Both external and internal forces are playing a growing role in fanning the flames of confessional, sectarian and racial conflicts, thereby threatening peace and, in several ESCWA member countries, namely, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, taking matters to the brink of civil war.

B. NON-MATERIAL CHALLENGES

9. This type of challenge is represented in each ESCWA member country by economic and social factors, foremost among which are the following:

(a) The abject poverty suffered by extensive sectors of the population;

(b) Unemployment, particularly among educated youth;

(c) Unequal income distribution, whereby some 20 per cent of the population controls half of the national income;

(d) Deteriorating general health indicators for large numbers of the population;

(e) Violations of human rights and the concept of citizenship;

(f) Ever-increasing unplanned settlements. The population of such shanty-towns do not suffer merely from unemployment and lack of income, but also from loss of dignity and pervasive and destructive hopelessness;

(g) Increasing rates of environmental contamination and degradation.

10. Those potential challenges to internal stability and peace should not be taken lightly: the worse they become, the more likely they are to exacerbate the material challenges listed above.

C. EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

11. External challenges lie in the following:

(a) The expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which consume huge tracts of land and make it impossible to establish a Palestinian State;

(b) New projects for the reconfiguration of States, foremost of which is the Greater Middle East project, based on a unilateral United States of America-Europe-Israel view that will undermine the concept of security and Arab-Arab integration in the Gulf and the Arab Mashreq, which it will overwhelm by security and economic arrangements that do not necessarily serve the interests of the ESCWA member countries;

(c) The growing role played by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in concluding arrangements with a number of countries in the Gulf and Arab Mashreq regions, thereby compromising joint defence arrangements in those regions.

II. WAYS OF CONFRONTING THE NEW CHALLENGES AND RISKS IN THE ESCWA REGION

A. APPLYING THE WIDER CONCEPT OF SECURITY

12. In considering security in the ESCWA region, narrow and short-term concepts must be avoided, and a wider, long-term concept adopted. That concept is based on the following three conditions:

(a) The achievement of greater food security for the population of the region, particularly in respect of cereals;

(b) The achievement of water security for ESCWA member countries, in both the Gulf and the Arab Mashreq;

(c) The achievement of technological security, through establishing research and development centres coordinated at both ESCWA member country level and general Arab country level.

13. If those three conditions are not fulfilled, the concept of security will remain fragile in a region that will be facing great challenges and demands in the forthcoming 15 years (2005-2020).

B. THE CONCLUSION OF A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

14. It is beyond question that the integrity of the social fabric in ESCWA member countries is one of the most important constituents of national security, because it strengthens social immunity. It is therefore imperative to address the enormous disparities between rich and poor in respect of income, wealth and privileges, through a new set of social and security policies that will assist in limiting poverty, solve the problem of unplanned settlements, and provide the minimum level of such basic services as education, health care and decent housing. Linked to those policies should be the provision of the right to work for youth, who represent the future and comprise the majority of the population in ESCWA member countries.

15. Those who should take part in formulating that new social contract include the following:

(a) Civil society organizations, including trade and labour unions, political parties and non-governmental organizations;

(b) Businessmen's organizations;

(c) Intellectuals and academics.

16. The aim of the contract would be to achieve a type of national consensus on economic and social policies to improve distribution of the benefits of growth, achieve greater social equality, and ensure that the executive authorities, with their one-sided views, are not the only factors in economic and social affairs with a decisive impact.

C. A NEW TYPE OF DEMOCRACY

17. There is almost total consensus on the fact that the key to change and institutional reform in ESCWA member countries is to make democratic practices more universal, thereby achieving greater political participation for all social forces and political movements, without monopolization or rigging. That in turn will constitute a safety valve for the process in the future, by exposing mistakes immediately and combating

corruption through mechanisms for regular accountability, changes in political administration, and the regular and systematic replacement of high-level leaders and executives.

D. INCREASED DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE FOR REHABILITATION
AND RECONSTRUCTION IN IRAQ AND PALESTINE

18. A differentiation should be made with respect to methodology between three levels of activity:

(a) Relief efforts. Those take the form of emergency aid, which is, by nature, a type of first aid to bandage a wound, and relief of an urgent humanitarian type;

(b) Efforts to rehabilitate parts of the infrastructure. Those may either be material (communications networks, roads, airports and ports), or social capital (schools, hospitals, administrative buildings and facilities). Those efforts are directed at rehabilitation and, in part, at upgrading;

(c) Reconstruction efforts. Such efforts are interwoven with the demands of the process of development and the building of new productive and service capacities that will assist in improving standards of living and developing the industrial, agricultural and services sectors. Such efforts require extensive funding in the form of grants and soft loans.

19. There is no doubt that each of those types of activity needs a different funding package. Relief and rehabilitation efforts may be funded through grants in cash or non-returnable kind, while reconstruction programmes need major funding, which in many cases may take the form of soft loans, large parts of which are grants.

20. It is therefore essential to support the economic steadfastness of the population of the Occupied Palestinian Territory in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in order to protect security and peace in the ESCWA region.

E. THE INTRODUCTION OF AN EARLY-WARNING SYSTEM

21. Such a system could be created by establishing a system of quantitative indicators to monitor the development of the origins of several non-material challenges and, in particular, the following:

- (a) The growth in the number of poor persons, and their regional distribution;
- (b) Levels of unemployment, particularly among educated youth;
- (c) The deterioration of general health;
- (d) The increase in area covered by and population living in unplanned settlements;
- (e) Human rights violations;
- (f) Levels of environmental contamination and degradation.

22. Under an early-warning system, the following signals could be periodically given:

- (a) Green: the relevant indicator is within safe limits;
- (b) Amber: the relevant indicator has reached a critical level that indicates danger;
- (c) Red: the relevant indicator has entered the danger zone.

23. As a result, decision makers would be able to take the necessary preventive and corrective measures before the origins of those challenges deteriorate to a degree that threatens society.

F. THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC SYSTEM

24. The ESCWA member countries could build alliances with many other Group-15 developing countries with a view to establishing more equitable international economic relationships between North and South

and reduce the immoderate practices and mechanisms of globalization. Serious endeavours could be made in the following areas:

(a) Partnership in building a new monetary system at the international level that would help to improve the policies of the World Bank in regard to development loans and of the International Monetary Fund in regard to the distribution of international liquidity and the severity of the unjust conditions contained in some of the relevant agreements;

(b) Coordination of collective bargaining policies in the preparatory meetings and ministerial conferences of the World Trade Organization, with a view to reconsidering certain agreements, including Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, and grace periods.

25. There could be coordination in that respect between ESCWA and a number of organizations, including the following:

(a) Organizations from the Arab and joint labour sector, including Council of Economic Unity, the Arab Monetary Fund and the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States;

(b) Group-15, which constitutes the vanguard of active developing countries;

(c) The secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

G. EXTENDING AND RESTORING THE AUTHORITY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

26. The ESCWA member countries must take action to align themselves with the United Nations in its capacity as a framework in which to coordinate all initiatives relating to security, peace and development in the region, given that it is the framework that embodies multi-lateral international legitimacy.

27. Furthermore, ESCWA member countries should support all initiatives aimed at reforming the United Nations and the Security Council and making them more representative and responsive to the problems and demands of the developing countries in general and the ESCWA member countries in particular.

28. With respect to development, efforts must be coordinated at ESCWA member country level, with a view to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, on the understanding that, if good progress is made in achieving those Goals, risks and non-material challenges in the region will be reduced.

H. THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES

29. The coordination of initiatives at the Arab level (overall policy, sectoral policies, common positions on issues being negotiated at the international level) require that the relationship between ESCWA and, on the one hand, the League of Arab States and, on the other hand, the organizations under the aegis of the League, be activated. The aim would be to coordinate and link the various positions of ESCWA member countries and those of the Arab Maghreb countries and the Sudan, in order to forestall the marginalization of the Arab region in the game of nations.

30. While the deterioration in the Arab regional situation and the paralysis of certain joint Arab institutions is recognized, the League of Arab States must be preserved as a symbol of Arab unity in the face of temporary differences. Foremost among all the threats to the Arab region is the attempt to fragment it and divide the countries of the Arab Maghreb from those of the Arab Mashreq, and to integrate the Gulf region into the institutions of globalization at the expense of its organic and historical links with the Arab Mashreq, not to mention its future integration with the Asian countries, which will dilute the Arab character of the Gulf region.

31. Consideration must therefore be given to those threats in the light of future challenges to the ESCWA member countries that will affect peace and development in the region.

III. CONCLUSION

32. The forthcoming years are critical for ESCWA member countries. New policies must therefore be devised to halt the deterioration in performance and uphold the bases of security, peace and stability in the region.

33. If a social protection system is to be built, three effective mechanisms must be present in community life in order to protect growth and development and convert slogans into a reality that is perceptible to all.

34. Those mechanisms may be summarized as follows:

(a) A mechanism for the regular accountability of performance and good or bad management, characterized by transparency, clarity and credibility;

(b) A corrective mechanism, that will rectify without slowing progress when it is clear that errors are marring a set of policies: the time factor is important in this respect, because the accumulation of errors and tardiness in correction procedures cost societies efforts and money that they can ill afford;

(c) A mechanism for change, that will reassure people as to the feasibility of bringing new blood and new leadership to society, in accordance with recognized mechanisms, and give all citizens hope, when they know that change is a right and that change is essential in order to transfuse new blood into the veins of society as part of a strategy for development and growth. Change makes stability possible and reduces external pressure.

