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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION****FOLLOW-UP TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED
BY THE COMMISSION AT ITS TWENTY-SECOND SESSION***Rehabilitation and economic and social reconstruction in Palestine: resolution 252 (XXII)*

1. At its twenty-second session, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted resolution 252 (XXII) dated 17 April 2003 concerning rehabilitation and economic and social reconstruction in Palestine. In that resolution, the Commission affirmed the need urgently and at the earliest possible opportunity to convene an Arab-international forum on rehabilitation and reconstruction as a step towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, and requested the secretariat to exert efforts to increase Arab participation in reconstruction and rehabilitation and link such participation to the relevant international programmes. The Commission also affirmed the role of the Palestinian Authority and the institutions of Palestinian civil society in formulating the practical plan for reconstruction and rehabilitation, given that it is the body with true interest in that regard, and the need for the secretariat to assist the Palestinian National Authority by delegating experts to evaluate the losses suffered in economic and social sectors and providing assistance in finding a relevant mechanism, through international organizations and institutions, for compensating for such losses in the various sectors, in order to enable them to recover and undertake their duties in the future, thereby contributing to the development process.
2. On 12 July 2003, the Palestinian Council of Ministers issued a declaration in support of the Arab-International Forum for Rehabilitation and Development in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in which it reiterated the importance of the Forum and its preparatory process and stressed the fact that the Forum would constitute a basic step towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.
3. At a ministerial level meeting held on 9 September 2003, the League of Arab States issued a resolution, subsequently adopted by the Sixteenth Arab Summit Conference, held in Tunis from 21 to 23 May 2004, in which it commended the joint ESCWA-Palestinian Authority-League of Arab States initiative to organize the Forum, and urged all Arab funds and Arab financial and economic organizations to support the Forum and its preparatory process.
4. In cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and the League of Arab States, ESCWA made intensive efforts to ensure the participation of various international institutions in the Advisory Group that was responsible for preparing for the Forum. As a result, the Group comprised 14 international and regional institutions and organizations, namely, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the

United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Bank, the International Organization for Migration, the Islamic Development Bank and the Arab Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Network for Development.

5. The Advisory Group identified the aims of the Forum as the following:

(a) To affirm the responsibilities of the international community and its commitments with respect to the Palestinian people;

(b) To present to the Arab and international communities the vision, priorities and future Palestinian plans for the rehabilitation and development of the various economic and social sectors;

(c) To muster Arab support for the process of rehabilitation and development in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, through Government mechanisms and institutions and Arab funds to assist development in Palestine, Arab and international partnership with the Palestinian private sector and civil society institutions, and the strengthening of ties with the Palestinian Diaspora;

(d) To formulate specific, effective arrangements for strengthening bilateral and multilateral partnerships at the Government and civil society institution, fund and organization levels, with a view to assisting the Palestinian people in overcoming the adverse economic and social impact of the occupation and confronting the challenges of the future.

6. The Group affirmed the importance of the participation of Arab States, international organizations, and international, Arab and Palestinian non-governmental organizations in the endeavour to rehabilitate and develop social and economic sectors in Palestine. On that basis, it was decided to hold an expanded advisory meeting on 29 and 30 July 2003 in Beirut, to be attended by 60 representatives of Palestinian Authority ministries, the private sector, Palestinian civil society, United Nations agencies, Arab, regional and international organizations, and Palestinian and Arab experts and guests. Participants discussed the aims of the Forum, the main issues to be addressed and the preparatory process, including all the related activities that would be arranged.

A. THE PREPARATORY PROCESS

7. The Palestinian Ministry of Planning, in cooperation with representatives of the private sector and civil society institutions, launched a Palestinian consultative process, with the aim of reaching a Palestinian consensus with respect to a coordinated vision of the issue of rehabilitation and development. A general policy paper will be adopted at the highest levels of the Palestinian Authority, on the basis of the coordinated paper resulting from that process and the preparatory studies on strengthening the independent capacities of the Palestinian economy; that paper will be presented to the Arab-International Forum. Two consultative meetings were arranged in Ramallah, on 21 and 22 April and 19 and 20 September 2004, together with a series of seminars that were attended by representatives of various Palestinian sectors in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. That process was successful in producing a coordinated Palestinian vision which was presented at the Forum.

8. ESCWA and the Advisory Group adopted four channels for strengthening Arab-Palestinian partnership in development and, as a result, organized the following activities:

(a) Workshop on Palestinian-Arab Civil Society Partnership, Beirut, 9 and 10 June 2004, attended by representatives of Palestinian civil society institutions and their Arab counterparts;

(b) Expert Group Meeting on the Role of the Palestinian Diaspora in the Rehabilitation and Development Process in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Amman, 29 and 30 July 2004, attended by Palestinian experts from the Diaspora and the Occupied Territory;

(c) Workshop on Palestinian-Arab Private Sector Partnership, Dead Sea, Jordan, 4 and 5 September 2004, attended by representatives of Palestinian private sector institutions and their Arab counterparts;

(d) Meeting of Arab Economic Organizations and Funds, Cairo, 7 and 8 September 2004. This Meeting was held under the auspices of the League of Arab States and was attended by the heads and representatives of 25 Arab funds and economic organizations and members of the Advisory Group. The recommendations issued by the Meeting emphasized the importance of the coordinated Palestinian vision, and reaffirmed the Arab commitment to support the Palestinian people and strengthen the mechanism for that support. Those recommendations were adopted at a regular ministerial-level meeting, held on 15 and 16 September 2004, of the Council of the League of Arab States.

B. THE FORUM

9. The Arab-International Forum for Rehabilitation and Development in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Towards an Independent State was held in Beirut from 11 to 14 October 2004, under the patronage of the President of Lebanon, General Emile Lahoud. Some 450 persons attended the Forum, representing the Palestinian Authority, Arab and other States, Palestinian, Arab and international civil society and private sector institutions, Palestinian Diaspora institutions and local and regional Arab institutions, including donor bodies, and eminent persons, experts and representatives of donor States, including a number of ambassadors accredited to Lebanon.

10. Forum proceedings included such side-events as general meetings and technical workshops in which participants discussed the following issues:

(a) The repercussions of the occupation and the Palestinian vision of development;

(b) The prospects for development in an unstable situation, and the link between relief and development;

(c) Arab-Palestinian partnership at the official and non-governmental levels;

(d) Palestinian-international partnership;

(e) Palestinian needs and priorities in the economic and social sectors and the infrastructure;

(f) The role of Palestinian women in development;

(g) The role of the Palestinian Diaspora;

(h) The role of the media.

11. Other Forum side events included working meetings in which participants discussed specific projects and proposals, which inspired a number of practical initiatives and partnership agreements involving the commitment by various parties of a total in excess of \$30 million. Set forth below are the most significant of those initiatives:

(a) Rehabilitation in the Gaza Strip;

(b) A project to support the agricultural and agri-food products sectors and develop the relevant Palestinian capacities;

- (c) A programme to develop human capacities in the health services sector;
- (d) The Berlin Initiative for the Removal of the Separation Barrier;
- (e) A project for the re-planting of 1 million trees;
- (f) The establishment of an alliance of Arab and Palestinian civil society institutions;
- (g) The signature of two micro-finance agreements.

12. Forum participants issued a general declaration identifying the broad outlines of support for the Palestinian people and making a set of recommendations. There follows a summary of the most important recommendations of a practical nature that were issued by the Forum:

(a) All donors and partners in the Palestinian development process were urged to formulate development assistance programmes and projects for emergency aid, in accordance with the vision of needs and priorities and Palestinian development plans;

(b) All the relevant parties were urged to intensify efforts to reintegrate the Palestinian economy into its Arab context;

(c) Action should be taken to strengthen Arab bilateral and multilateral official and non-governmental partnerships at all levels, including Governments, funds and organizations, the private sector and civil society institutions, with a view to assisting the Palestinian people and coordinating and integrating the international aid framework;

(d) The resolutions adopted by the joint Meeting of Arab Economic Organizations and Funds and Arab Labour Institutions, held in Cairo on 7 and 8 September 2004, which were subsequently adopted at an Arab ministerial meeting, should be welcomed;

(e) Partnerships should be strengthened between Palestinian private sector institutions and their Arab and international counterparts, in order to support production and marketing processes and Palestinian investment;

(f) Palestinian, Arab and international civil society institution partnership should be strengthened with respect to sustainable development and emergency relief efforts;

(g) Mechanisms and channels should be developed to allow the Palestinians in the Diaspora to assist their fellow countrymen in the Occupied Palestinian Territory;

(h) The importance of maintaining the Forum as a permanent consultative process and a mechanism for ensuring the follow-up and implementation of its recommendations was underlined.

13. ESCWA issued a detailed report on the Forum and its preparatory process, and renewed its endeavours to follow-up and implement Forum recommendations in various fields, including by establishing a follow-up committee with the relevant institutions and through consultations with stakeholder Palestinian and Arab parties. ESCWA called for a meeting of the Advisory Group to be held in February 2005. However, the situation at that time prevented that meeting taking place.
