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Item 6 (d) of the provisional agenda

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**
**SUMMARIES OF REPORTS OF SESSIONS
OF THE COMMISSION'S SUBSIDIARY BODIES**

Report on
the second session of the Committee on Social Development

I. ORGANIZATION OF WORK
A. Date, venue and objectives of the session

1. The second session of the Committee on Social Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was held in Beirut at the permanent headquarters of the Commission on 7 and 8 April 1999.
2. The session was organized by the ESCWA secretariat pursuant to ESCWA resolution 198 (XVII) of 31 May 1994, which was approved by the Economic and Social Council on 26 July 1994 by its resolution 1994/27 on the establishment of a committee on social development within the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, and in accordance with the recommendations adopted by the Committee on Social Development at its first session, held in Amman on 25 and 26 March 1997, and approved by the Commission at its nineteenth session, held in Beirut on 7 and 8 May 1997.
3. The purposes of the session, in addition to strengthening coordination and cooperation in the various fields of social development between the countries of the region and the Social Development Issues and Policies Division of ESCWA, were as follows:
 - (a) To review the progress made by the Social Development Issues and Policies Division in the implementation of the subprogramme "Improvement of the quality of life" for the biennium 1997-1998;
 - (b) To follow up the implementation of the resolutions of the United Nations global conferences on social development and Arab plans of action at the regional and national levels;
 - (c) To present the subprogramme "Improvement of the quality of life" for the biennium 2000-2001;

(d) To present the subprogramme "Improvement of the quality of life" in the light of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005;

(e) Other matters.

B. Participants

4. Representatives of eight States members of the Commission participated in the second session of the Committee on Social Development of ESCWA, which was also attended by observers from 15 Arab, regional and international organizations:

II. DISCUSSION

A. Progress achieved by the Social Development Issues and Policies Division in 1997 and 1998 in the implementation of the subprogramme "Improvement of the quality of life"

5. Under agenda item 5, the Committee discussed the document entitled "Progress achieved by the Social Development Issues and Policies Division in 1997 and 1998 in the implementation of the subprogramme 'Improvement of the quality of life'" (E/ESCWA/SD/1999/IG.I/5).

6. The discussion of the subprogramme focussed on the following main points:

(a) The difficulties encountered in the implementation of the Division's programme of work, viewed within a more clearly defined context;

(b) Greater agreement regarding the concept of sustainable human development and promotion of wider use of indicators of the application of that concept;

(c) Improvement of the essential conditions for social integration, including mechanisms for achieving democracy and preserving human rights;

(d) The strengthening of regional coordination mechanisms for the implementation of social development programmes and their various activities;

(e) Greater utilization of the experience gained in local community development and the need to coordinate efforts to take advantage of the related results on a wide scale;

(f) Development of national networks on human development, women's issues and human settlements and national committees on population; the need for ESCWA to provide support to countries in which such machineries have not yet been created; and the need to strengthen the role of local non-governmental organizations;

(g) The strengthening of national coordinating bodies and a greater role of the Resident Coordinator system of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP);

(h) The delegates expressed their appreciation for the efforts made by the Social Development Issues and Policies Division and commended the Division on the quality of its activities and its level of technical qualification.

7. On concluding its discussion, the Committee made the following recommendations:

(a) The ESCWA information system should be developed so as to become capable of receiving and providing information on policies, programmes and procedures in the various social fields, especially in view of the fact that the States have expressed their willingness to provide ESCWA with such data owing to the importance of data exchange in this area;

(b) Member States, Arab funds and regional and international donor organizations should be urged to provide support and financial aid to ESCWA for carrying out its programmes of work and for the monitoring and follow-up of the recommendations of the global conferences and Arab plans mentioned above, subject the reservations concerning the global conferences expressed by some Arab and Islamic States in respect of certain resolutions and recommendations, owing to the wish of those States to adhere to the provisions of Islamic law and Arab values and traditions;

(c) To request ESCWA to devote greater attention to publicity for the programmes and activities which it carries out and to familiarize countries with the contents of the development programmes which it implements so as to enable those countries to benefit from them;

(d) Efforts should be made to issue a regional report on sustainable human development that presents the concept of such development, its indicators and samples of its prerequisites, in accordance with a comprehensive view based on regional reports and studies done in this field and on abstracts of the national reports issued by some of the countries of the region;

(e) The training programmes undertaken by the Population Section, the Human Development Section and the Women and Development Unit should be strengthened and developed to include the provision of expertise in the field of local community development.

B. Regional follow-up on the implementation of the resolutions of the United Nations global conferences: the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995), the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (Istanbul, 1996)

8. The discussion of regional follow-up to the United Nations global conferences focussed on the following basic points:

(a) The need to standardize the approach of the different States in their preparation of national reports, including the use of similar indicators and methods for the follow-up of the recommendations of global conferences, in accordance with a shared concept and vision developed for that purpose so as to help impart precision to the definition of national data and facilitate the assessment of follow-up operations and the achievement of the objectives of the global conferences mentioned;

(b) The exchange of experience and the transfer of knowledge from the global to the national level via the regional level through direct bilateral cooperation and participation in regional activities organized by ESCWA in the various social fields with a view to strengthening cooperation and firmly establishing the foundations of collaboration;

(c) Practical modes of dealing with social problems and bridging of the gap between academic approaches and practical approaches, with the consequent need to deal with the obstacles that face social

development plans and programmes, coordinate activities relating to their implementation and strengthen the political will of Governments to commit themselves;

(d) Inviting international organizations to prepare a list of new terms found in United Nations reports, advantage being taken of the efforts made by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in preparing a list of terms relating to the concept of gender in preparation for a discussion of those terms with the United Nations organizations.

9. On concluding its discussion, the Committee made the following recommendations:

(a) Member States should be requested to activate and support the work of the national committees on population, human settlements and women and the networks on human development with a view to follow-up on the recommendations of the global conferences and of Arab plans that have been adopted and the implementation of those recommendations at the national level in a manner in keeping with the legislation and conditions of each country; moreover, action should be taken to form committees in those countries in which they have yet to be created;

(b) The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia should undertake to support the work of the national committees in the fields of human development, women's issues, human settlements and population, coordinate with them and provide them with all available technical assistance;

(c) States which have not yet joined the project "Integrated regional follow-up by the Arab States to United Nations global conferences" being undertaken by ESCWA in cooperation with UNDP and in coordination with Arab States, the League of Arab States and other Arab and international organizations should be invited to do so by informing ESCWA or UNDP of their desire to join the project;

(d) The United Nations organizations and specialized agencies, Arab regional institutions and Arab funds should be encouraged to participate with ESCWA, UNDP and the League of Arab States in carrying out the activities of the project "Integrated regional follow-up by the Arab States to United Nations global conferences" and efforts should be made to expand the framework of the project and extend its dimensions to include other fundamental sustainable social development issues included in the plans and programmes of action of those global conferences;

(e) Member States should be invited to participate in the ESCWA conference on integrated regional follow-up by the Arab States to United Nations global conferences in the Arab States (population, social development, women's issues and Habitat II) to be held at the end of 1999;

(f) Member States should be invited to participate at the highest level in the sessions to be held by the General Assembly on five-year follow-up to global conferences.

C. Reports of the member States on national follow-up to the United Nations global conferences

10. In connection with the follow-up of the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations global conferences, it was emphasized that there should not be a repetition of the national reports submitted by member States at regional conferences previously held on follow-up to individual global conferences. It was the participants' view that reports should be confined to those aspects which the participating States considered as additional information and new measures not dealt with in earlier reports on national follow-up. In addition, the participants mentioned the need for agreement on priorities in the monitoring and

reporting of difficulties experienced by States in implementing the recommendations and the need to focus on problems common to a number of States, on the one hand, and to a number of global conferences, on the other hand. They also mentioned the need to report on pioneering work in the field of follow-up to those conferences. The delegations of Egypt, Iraq, Oman, Palestine and Saudi Arabia to the session submitted country papers and gave presentations on the results of follow-up activities, at various levels, within their respective countries.

D. Subprogramme "Improvement of the quality of life":
programme of work for the biennium 2000-2001

11. The discussion of the subprogramme "Improvement of the quality of life" for the biennium 2000-2001 focussed on the importance of strengthening the mechanisms of follow-up to global conferences on social development and the support that ESCWA must provide to the related national committees. It also focussed on the need to standardize terminology relating to social development concepts and to adopt dialogue among the various parties concerned as a means of arriving at the most accurate translations.

12. On concluding its discussion, the Committee made the following recommendations:

(a) The proposed programme of work and priorities should be adopted and emphasis should be placed on taking into account the comments of the delegations;

(b) ESCWA should be requested to accelerate the completion of the social development database and efforts should be made to provide training in the development of national databases to the State agencies concerned;

(c) Efforts should be made, after the priorities of the member States have been taken under consideration, to support regional coordination in the area of exchange of experience and information as part of the process of follow-up on the recommendations issued by global conferences, namely the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, Habitat II and the Fourth World Conference on Women, and reaffirmed by Arab conferences;

(d) ESCWA should provide technical support to Member States and regional organizations in connection with the elaboration of social development projects, especially for setting policies, monitoring execution, bolstering institutional structures and building human resources for social development institutions;

(e) ESCWA should undertake, in cooperation with member States and international organizations, to support non-governmental organizations, strengthen their role in national committees and councils, develop their institutional structures and promote their participation in social development programmes;

(f) The monitoring role played by ESCWA in providing early warning to member States about negative social phenomena stemming from new developments at the national, regional and international levels should be emphasized.

E. Presentation of the subprogramme "Improvement of the quality of life"
in the light of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005

13. The Committee examined the reasons justifying the transfer of this item to the twentieth session of ESCWA, to be held from 25 to 28 May 1999. In accordance with instructions from United Nations

Headquarters, the subprogramme "Improvement of the quality of life" in the light of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 will be presented in a standardized form, together other subprogrammes, at the twentieth session of ESCWA, which will take up the examination of this question.

F. Report on the effort to combat poverty in the countries of the region

14. The discussion of ESCWA activities relating to the fight against poverty revolved around the following main points:

(a) With regard to the study of poverty and its characteristics, there is a need for greater efforts to measure poverty by means of household income and expenditure surveys and to apply statistical methods relating to the poverty line. In addition, there is a need to adopt the "unsatisfied basic needs" survey method, which sheds light on many characteristics of the poor and on their geographic distribution; to use an anthropological approach for an in-depth study of the phenomenon. In this connection, ESCWA calls upon the international organizations concerned to carry out a global survey of the phenomenon of poverty along the lines of the earlier global survey on fertility;

(b) With regard to the determinants of poverty, it is necessary to take up the question of economic, social, political and cultural variables and their relation to the phenomenon of poverty at the national and regional levels. Such an approach will make it possible to ascertain the determinants of poverty in a clear and complete manner what will facilitate successful policy-making for coping with poverty as a many-sided phenomenon that has in most cases become a social and structural phenomenon that is not merely transitory;

(c) Attention must be paid to assessment of the impact of development projects intended to combat poverty, especially with regard to the beneficiaries, for this will help make it possible to correct the orientation of field projects;

(d) There must be formal recognition of the existence of poverty and an earnest commitment to combat it, either through an official governmental commitment or through a commitment on the part of non-governmental organizations. Such an orientation requires the creation of official machinery connected, for example, with the office of the prime minister or the ministry of planning and including all the ministries of the social sector (such as labour, education, health, social affairs) as well as the ministries of finance and economy, together with non-governmental organizations concerned with development issues. The task of such a machinery would be to define national poverty lines and to establish policies for combating poverty and for monitoring the implementation of the plans adopted.

15. The Committee made the following recommendation:

ESCWA should be requested, as a recurrent item, to submit to the Committee on Social Development at future sessions a report on a social question of vital importance in the field of human development, women's issues, human settlements, population or multidimensional issues.

G. Other matters

16. On the basis of a proposal of the committee for the preparation of a draft report to the Committee on Social Development at its second session, the participants approved a declaration of general principles of social development and decided to include it among the documents of the session for subsequent presentation to the Commission at its twentieth session, to be held in May 1999.

Annex

**DECLARATION ISSUED BY THE COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AT
ITS THIRD SESSION, HELD IN BEIRUT ON 7 AND 8 APRIL 1999**

PREAMBLE

We the representatives of the member States participating in the work of second session of the Committee on Social Development, established within the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) pursuant to the ESCWA resolution 198 (XVII) of 31 May 1994, which was approved by the Economic and Social Council by its resolution 1994/27,

Having considered the progress achieved by the Social Development Issues and Policies Division of ESCWA in carrying out the activities of its subprogramme "Improvement of the quality of life" in the ESCWA region, including follow-up to the resolutions and recommendations of the United Nations global conferences,

Having considered also the activities of the subprogramme "Improvement of the quality of life" and the related areas of concern decided upon for the biennium 2000-2001,

Stressing the comprehensive nature of development and the merits of an integrated approach to the planning of activities aimed at improving the quality of life in accordance with a vision of an interactive relationship that strikes a balance between economic development and social development,

Convinced of the validity of the concept of sustainable human development, which is aimed at raising the standard of living of human beings and is dependent on participation by them as the focus of social and comprehensive development efforts, thus requiring enhanced possibilities and broader choices for people in order that they may participate in and have an impact on administration and decision-making; their just treatment in the obtainment of the fruits of society and the enjoyment of its benefits; their right to sound management subject to accountability and oversight; and solidarity between generations that includes the individual, society and the State and is backed up by institutions and organizations that ensure the mobilization of capacities, the representation of interests and the institutionalization of participation,

Committed to the international and Arab covenants on development and human rights, including the declarations, principles and resolutions issued by the United Nations global conferences, whose implementation depends on composite, multifaceted indicators connected with the principles of human rights, social justice, equality, cultural diversity, democracy, participation, security in the social sphere and trust in coordination and cooperation,

Aware of the dimensions of the variables that affect international conditions, imparting to those States that possess science, technology and economic strength hegemony over international relations and the related institutions and a control over the conditions of mutual dealings and trade that is tending to extend beyond economic and market considerations to the heart of the cultural and social fabric of societies,

Conscious of the enormous dangers and challenges that face the countries of the region, threatening their security, contributing to the destruction of their potential, deepening the gap within and between their societies, hampering their social cohesion and stability and impeding their progress along the path of development and cultural advancement,

OBJECTIVES AND COMMITMENTS

Have agreed upon a common objective consisting in basing sustainable human development and comprehensive development on what is required in order to achieve that objective, namely: untiring work, a new vision of investment in social capital and a commitment to the furnishing of the necessary components to make the concept of comprehensive development practicable, the most important of those components being:

(a) Support for peace, which entails the adoption of dialogue as a means of participation; the settlement of disputes; the achievement of stability at the local, national and regional levels; and the strengthening of social cooperation, which entails development of the role of the State, support for the position of the family and strengthening of non-governmental organizations, inasmuch as they are the fundamental means for reinforcing systems of social welfare and security, especially in certain segments and classes that suffer from deprivation, marginalization and rejection;

(b) Respect for political, civil, economic and social human rights and the right to development; elimination of all forms of discrimination between individuals and groups; strengthening of the role of women; participation of youth in development; investment in the development of children; and care for persons with special needs;

(c) Development of the capacities of human beings, with emphasis on the all-inclusive concepts of health, food, population, employment, education and training;

(d) Review of macroeconomic policies to guarantee sustained growth rates and ensure that they satisfy the requirements for improving the quality of life, with provision of the requisite financial resources through rationalization of consumption, encouragement of savings, development of human resources, improvement of infrastructures, improvement of productivity and employment and just distribution of income; and review of sectoral policies, programmes and plans so as to ensure that they answer market needs and keep up with technological advancements, and also to ensure that the issues of productive employment, promotion of social integration and alleviation of poverty are dealt with;

(e) Sound development management, inasmuch as this is a public responsibility involving common effort and common benefit which must be undertaken by the State, society and the individual and includes the following: the participation of ordinary citizens and non-governmental organizations; the development of the role of the private sector and the encouragement of individual enterprise; transparency of acts of authority; agreement of the legislative framework with civil rights; strengthening of administrative and judicial bodies; development of economic productivity; application of the principle of equal opportunity; greater decentralization; and encouragement of self-help in local community development;

(f) Efforts directed towards achieving social harmony at the regional level by embarking upon integrative regional experiments, projects, policies and plans; providing a basis for joint endeavour; bolstering confidence in cultural values and ties; strengthening the institutions of Arab solidarity; striving to create research centres; and making available specialized data on social development;

(g) Participation in international cooperation; efforts to eliminate obstacles to social development; appeals to donor countries to honour the international commitments to development proclaimed at various international conferences; redesigning of economic reform and structural adjustment programmes to include the social dimension; and joint concern with the environment, the development of its resources and its preservation.
