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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations
Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)
Cairo, 16-17 October 2011
League of Arab States, Egypt

ANNOTATED AGENDA OUTLINE

Opening session

The session will consist of statements delivered by high-level representatives of the United Nations Bureau for the Preparatory Process of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the League of Arab States, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and will also include an Arab Youth Statement.

Session 1: Assessing the progress to date and gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development

Taking stock of achievements and identifying gaps in the implementation of outcomes of major summits is critical to enhancing global efforts towards sustainable development. Findings on the results and status of implementation of the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPoI) and other global summits affecting progress towards sustainable development will be presented by the League of Arab States and ESCWA, and expert panelists will present their views in order to foster dialogue and consensus on achievements and lingering commitments by the international community constraining progress towards sustainable development in the Arab region.

Session 2: Addressing new and emerging challenges

At the first Preparatory Committee Meeting (PrepCom 1), which was convened from 17 to 19 May 2010 (New York), and the second Preparatory Committee Meeting (PrepCom 2) which was held from 7 to 8 March 2011 (New York), a number of new and emerging challenges were identified by Governments and stakeholders for consideration as issues that affect the achievement of sustainable development. These challenges as well as other challenges that face the Arab region include: the financial crisis; food crisis; climate change; migration; energy crisis; water scarcity; biodiversity and ecosystem loss; desertification; natural disasters and extreme events; global economic governance; and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The purpose of this session is to identify the new and emerging challenges facing the Arab region (since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002) and suggest ways for addressing these challenges. ESCWA and civil society representatives from major groups will offer a preliminary list of the new and emerging challenges, which will be commented on by regional organizations. A discussion will follow to agree upon a list of emerging challenges and possible proposals on ways to respond to these challenges from the Arab regional perspective.

Session 3: The institutional framework for sustainable development

Many changes have taken place in the Arab region and globally since the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, and significant progress has been made towards establishing institutional mechanisms for achieving many of the goals defined at Rio. However, the effective management and coordination of the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development requires improvement at the global, regional and national levels. Furthermore, considerable uncertainty has been introduced by the global economic crisis of 2008, the food crisis and the region's political upheavals in 2011. Rio+20 therefore presents a timely opportunity to review the institutional framework for achieving progress towards sustainable development in the Arab region and at the global level in view of identifying the options available for improving the planning, coordination, implementation and monitoring of sustainable development and the institutions that support the achievement of sustainable development goals.

UNEP and ESCWA will give background presentations to help inform the discussions regarding the institutional framework for sustainable development (IFSD) at the global and regional levels. The UNEP/ROWA study is on "IFSD and International Environmental Governance" and reflects on the proposals of the UNEP Governing Council as articulated through the Helsinki-Nairobi Outcome, and how it all relates to the region. ESCWA will in turn provide a "Regional Review of Institutions for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region". The presentations will then be complemented by a review of the outcomes from the regional preparatory workshop on IFSD hosted by the Government of Saudi Arabia and comments from Arab Government representatives engaged in strengthening institutional frameworks for sustainable development at the national level. Discussion will follow in view of identifying the key issues of concern for the Arab region.

Session 4: A green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication

A green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development is one of the core themes for discussion at Rio+20. Several organizations have defined progress towards a green economy as a vital link between economy, society and environment, which seeks the transformation of production processes as well as production and consumption patterns. Indicators for measuring progress towards a green economy have been suggested, including the reduction of waste or pollution generated on a per unit basis, or measures for demonstrating increased efficiency in the use of natural resources, minerals, materials, and energy. Some have also argued that fostering a green economy will help to diversify economies, create decent employment opportunities, promote sustainable trade, reduce poverty, and improve equity and income distribution. Contrarily, others are concerned that a green economy will create new barriers to trade, stifle competition, and increase production costs without commensurate benefits.

This session will provide an overview on the green economy and will address how to move into a green economy while pursuing social and economic development goals within the context of sustainable development and poverty reduction in the Arab region. To trigger the discussion, ESCWA will present a background paper on green economy principles, opportunities and challenges facing the Arab region. The outcomes from a series of specialized Arab preparatory meetings and workshops on green economy will also be presented focusing on various sectors (sustainable consumption and production, finance, industry and labour). In addition, the League of Arab States will present the sustainable development indicators adopted by Arab Governments to complement the other presentations and help inform the discussions.

Session 5: Panel on securing renewed political commitment for sustainable development

Based on the discussions undertaken during the previous four sessions, participants will be invited to re-examine the objectives and focus areas of Rio+20 in an integrated manner and to identify the means of implementation for securing renewed political commitment and progress towards sustainable development in the Arab region. In particular, the session will seek to propose means for securing access to additional, reliable and predictable financial resources; ensuring that appropriate mechanisms for monitoring, reporting and verification of commitments for sustainable development are into place; and forge consensus on the core requirements and commitments needed for the achievement of sustainable development in the Arab region.

Session 6: Discussion of the Draft Arab Preparatory Meeting Report

This session will present and discuss the draft recommendations to be included in the Report of the Arab Preparatory Meeting and the regional input to the outcome document to be submitted to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Secretariat by 1 November 2011. The resulting recommendations and inputs from this session would also serve to inform further regional discussions that would take place under the auspices of the League of Arab States and its associated bodies on regional concerns and priorities for action on sustainable development.
