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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION****THE REGIONAL ROLE OF ESCWA IN THE COORDINATION
OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES****A. Introduction and background**

1. The present report is submitted to the nineteenth session of ESCWA to inform the member States of the activities carried out by the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group, which was established pursuant to requests made by the Secretary-General and the States Members of the United Nations. The report contains a review of the meetings held and the agreements reached since the formation of the Group in 1995.
2. The Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group in Amman represents an integral component of United Nations coordination efforts at the regional level within the context of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC).¹ Recognizing that the regional structures of the various United Nations agencies had evolved in different ways, the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chairman of the ACC, decided to create a mechanism for coordinating system-wide activities at the regional level through the respective secretariats of the regional commissions.² In his letter of 4 March 1994 addressed to all members of the ACC, the Secretary-General requested the executive heads of the specialized agencies and programmes, in coordination with the regional commissions, to hold annual meetings for consultation and coordination relating to the regional activities conducted in their respective regions. The Secretary-General indicated that he had given renewed attention to the role which the regional commissions could play as catalysts for more

¹ The Administrative Committee on Coordination, composed of the Secretary-General (as Chairman) and the executive heads of the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), supervises the implementation of the agreements between the United Nations and the specialized agencies and ensures that their activities are fully coordinated.

² The five United Nations regional commissions include the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

coherent, system-wide regional strategies. He reiterated the importance of coordinating activities not only at the global level but also at the country and regional levels.

3. During his meeting with senior officials on 21 February 1995, the Secretary-General announced his decision to establish what he referred to as "regional ACCs"; he then designated the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator as Special Coordinator, the executive secretaries of the regional commissions as regional coordinators, and the UNDP resident representatives as resident coordinators. The UNDP Administrator was made responsible for coordination at the global level, while regional and country-level coordination was entrusted to the executive secretaries of the regional commissions and UNDP resident representatives respectively.

4. The thirty-fifth session of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC), held in New York from 15 May to 9 June 1995, reviewed the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on "Review and assessment of efforts to restructure the regional dimension of United Nations economic and social activities" (A/49/423 of 22 September 1994). The seventh recommendation of the CPC report states that "Member States, through their representatives in the legislative bodies of organizations of the United Nations system, may wish to accord the necessary support to the Secretary-General's initiatives aimed at strengthening the coordinating and team leadership role of the regional commissions".

5. In response to the Secretary-General's directives and within the framework mentioned above, the executive secretaries of the regional commissions initiated their first inter-agency meetings. The UNDP Administrator, as the Special Coordinator for Economic and Social Development, along with all senior officials in the United Nations system, have been regularly apprised of the activities of these meetings. The participation of UNDP and other United Nations agencies in mechanisms for regional-level coordination has been actively encouraged.

B. ESCWA Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group in Amman

6. As a first step, ESCWA held an informal meeting on 10 April 1995—attended by representatives of UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the World Health Organization (WHO)—to establish a base for inter-agency coordination at the ESCWA regional level. The participants decided to explore the possibility of establishing a regional inter-agency cooperation mechanism for initiating and carrying out selected activities.

7. Following this initial contact and various inter-agency consultations, the first meeting of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group was held in Amman on 14 October 1995. The meeting was chaired by the Executive Secretary of ESCWA and was attended by representatives of a number of United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat); the International Telecommunication Union (ITU); UNDP; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); UNFPA; the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); UNICEF; the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); the World Food Programme (WFP); and WHO. Information was exchanged during the meeting on issues relevant to the United Nations, including the Organization's financial crisis, the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit (the Amman Summit), and UNRWA activities. In addition, the

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Inter-Agency Task Force on Gender was established, with UNIFEM as the convening agency (ESCWA assumed this role in February 1997).

8. The second meeting of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group was held in Amman on 16 January 1996 and was attended by representatives of ESCWA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, Habitat, UNHCR, WHO, UNRWA, WFP, UNFPA and UNIFEM. The main areas of discussion included recent events and meetings which had had or were expected to have an impact on United Nations activities in the region, the follow-up of United Nations global conferences, the financial crisis, operational activities for development, and information-sharing and cost-efficiency within the United Nations system.
9. During these two meetings, an agreement was reached to strengthen regional inter-agency coordination in various specific fields. At the second meeting, the participants discussed the possibility of forming task forces parallel to those of the ACC on social services, employment and sustainable livelihood, and the creation of an enabling environment for social and economic development. These task forces would report to the regional coordination meetings to be held at least twice a year.
10. The third meeting of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group took place in Amman on 17 June 1996. Two United Nations officials visiting Amman at the time—the UNESCO Director-General and the UNFPA Executive Director—were the guest speakers at the meeting, which was chaired by the ESCWA Executive Secretary. Both speakers emphasized the importance of United Nations inter-agency coordination in the new era of post-cold war relations within the contexts of the Agenda for Peace, the Agenda for Development, and efforts to follow up the United Nations global conferences in the areas of human rights, environment, social development, population, women and human settlements, and elucidated the complementarity of the work of the various United Nations agencies and bodies. The meeting participants included representatives of ESCWA, UNDP (Amman and New York), UNICEF, UNESCO-ENEDBAS (the UNESCO Regional Office of Education in the Arab States), UNHCR, UNFPA, UNRWA, WFP and WHO.
11. During the fourth meeting of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group, held in Amman on 26 September 1996, emphasis was placed on the follow-up of United Nations global conferences and on the recent activities of ESCWA and the United Nations specialized agencies in the region. The meeting—attended by representatives of ESCWA, UNDP-RBAS (Regional Bureau for Arab States), Habitat, UNICEF, UNESCO-UNEDBAS, UNHCR, UNFPA and the UNFPA Division for Arab States and Europe, UNRWA, WHO and WFP—decided to strengthen and consolidate the integrated regional approach to the follow-up of global conferences³ under the umbrella of a regional programme of action which focused on the issues common to the four conferences and of direct relevance to the region. The Executive Secretary of ESCWA informed the other participants that ESCWA intended to prepare a project proposal for a regional integrated programme of action for the follow-up of United Nations global conferences; inputs from other United Nations agencies were invited. The proposal is currently being finalized; once it is completed, it will be submitted to the members of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group for discussion, and once adopted, it will be submitted to UNDP as a flagship project.

³ Particularly the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

C. Accomplishments and future trends

12. Within a relatively short space of time, the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group, as mentioned above, has agreed to formulate a joint programme for the follow-up of United Nations global conferences. The programme will focus on selected issues of common concern to the participating agencies. Once funded, it will provide support to follow-up action and activities at the regional level with the participation of selected countries located within the agencies' areas of geographic coverage.

13. The Inter-Agency Task Force on Gender has carried out two activities:

(a) The Task Force acted as a support group for the Arab Conference on the Formulation of a Unified Arab Programme and a Follow-up Mechanism for the Action Plan of the Fourth World Conference on Women: the Conference of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, organized by the League of Arab States in Amman from 25 to 29 September 1996 and hosted by the Government of Jordan. The agencies, through the Task Force, provided financial, technical, and conference services support to the Conference. This joint effort represented a successful example of inter-agency coordination as well as coordination with another regional organization (the League of Arab States);

(b) The Task Force agreed in February 1997 to work together to formulate a project on the Arab family that would be jointly submitted for funding and eventually executed. Project formulation is currently under way.

14. As emphasized in the ESCWA medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, the consolidation and expansion of existing regional coordination mechanisms among United Nations agencies and with other regional organizations are among the Commission's main objectives. Aided by the experience it has gained thus far in the area of inter-agency coordination, ESCWA, as the convenor and secretariat of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Group, will facilitate increased coordination at the regional level by developing inter-agency relations, conducting consultations, and identifying joint schemes for inter-agency implementation in the ESCWA region. In this respect, the initiatives and actions of ESCWA will be guided by the decisions of the ACC and by the Inter-Agency Coordination Group, and will also rely on the active participation and involvement of the United Nations agencies operating in the region.

