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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**

Twenty-first session  
Preparatory Committee  
Beirut, 8-9 May 2001

Item 5 (c) of the provisional agenda

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY ON  
THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION****FOLLOW-UP ACTION AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL  
ON UNITED NATIONS WORLD CONFERENCES**

1. In connection with the regional follow-up to world conferences and other global meetings, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was involved at the regional level in follow-up action on and/or preparations for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (Beijing + 5), the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the four United Nations world conferences in the field of social development,<sup>1</sup> the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio + 10) and the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries.

**I. "WOMEN 2000: GENDER EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND  
PEACE FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY"**

2. A new methodology for following up at the national and regional level on critical areas of concern of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action is reflected in harnessing the mass media in Lebanon to raise the awareness of the public at large with regard to gender-related issues. Thus, in December 2001, ESCWA and the National Broadcasting Network (NBN) in Lebanon agreed to cooperate in the production of a television programme that will focus on the critical areas of concern for the advancement of women, as identified in the Beijing Platform for Action and the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women, to be broadcast throughout the region. The programme includes 14 episodes of one hour each, 12 of which will focus on the following areas of concern: women and health; violence against women; women in positions of power and decision-making; human rights and women; women and the media; women and poverty; education and training of women; women and armed conflict; women and the environment; women and the economy; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; and the girl-child.

3. In addition to the foregoing, an introductory episode will focus on the role of ESCWA in furthering the advancement of Arab women, and another episode will focus on partnership in the family and gender roles as the social dimension for the advancement of women.

4. The first episode was broadcast during the week of the celebration of International Women's Day on 8 March 2001. The programme, expected to reach a wide spectrum of audiences, is a departure from the conventional approach which focused, by and large, on studies and meetings that targeted only a selected and limited group of people.

<sup>1</sup> The International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, September 1994); the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, March 1995); the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995); and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (Istanbul, June 1996).



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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY ON  
THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**

**FOLLOW-UP ACTION AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL  
ON UNITED NATIONS WORLD CONFERENCES**

Corrigendum

1. Page 1, paragraph 2, line 3  
For December 2001 read December 2000
2. Page 5, paragraph 29, line 3  
For Western Asia read West Asia
3. Page 6, paragraph 31, lines 2 and 3  
For Resolution A/RES/53/182 of 2 February 1999 read resolution 53/182 of December 1998

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5. ESCWA is also collaborating with the Johns Hopkins University Center for Communications Programs on the production of television spots on gender awareness in the countries of the ESCWA region.
6. The twenty-first special session of the General Assembly on "Women 2000: gender quality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" stressed the importance of building national capacity. This was reiterated in response to strategic objective H.3, paragraph 206, of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, related to the necessity of compiling, analysing and disseminating gender-disaggregated data and statistics on a regular basis, as well as establishing gender focal points for this purpose.
7. In fulfilment thereof, ESCWA in 1997 initiated a pioneering project for the development of national gender statistics programmes in the Arab countries, which aims at building national capacities in the production, use and dissemination of gender statistics that would promote action and monitor changes for the benefit of women. To date, a total of 11 Arab countries have participated in this project, 9 of which have developed a national publication on men and women. The project has made a significant contribution towards bringing the issue of gender statistics to public attention and in placing it on the national agendas and work plans of member countries. As a result, several member countries have established special units in their respective statistical offices for follow-up action in this area.
8. ESCWA is also developing a gender statistics database predicated on data received from member countries. It is hoped that this database will consolidate all data on women and men in one application that would be made available for public use and for relevant gender-related research.

## **II. THE HIGH-LEVEL ARAB MEETING FOR FOLLOW-UP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HABITAT AGENDA**

9. The High-level Arab Meeting for Follow-up on the Implementation of the Habitat Agenda (Istanbul + 5) was held by ESCWA in Manama, Bahrain, 16-18 October 2000, in cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) and the Ministry of Housing, Municipalities and Environment of Bahrain.
10. The Meeting was attended by officials from Arab States, as well as by representatives of local authorities and persons concerned with sustainable urban development.
11. The overall purpose of the Meeting was to assess urban development trends in the Arab countries since the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) was held in Istanbul in 1996 and to formulate an Arab strategy for dealing with the urban challenges facing Arab cities at the threshold of the third millennium, in preparation for the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.
12. The Meeting focused on the following issues:
  - (a) Strengthening mechanisms for regional, Arab and international cooperation in the area of sustainable urban development;
  - (b) Monitoring urban development strategies at the national and local levels in the Arab region;
  - (c) Providing a forum for the participants, including municipalities, civil society institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to consult with each other, exchange experiences and discuss modalities for cooperation and for developing information networks in support of Arab urban development policies;
  - (d) Exploring future prospects for housing and human settlements issues in the Arab States on the basis of follow-up action to the Habitat II Agenda.
13. In addition to handling the organizational aspects of the Meeting, ESCWA prepared a paper in Arabic on "The Arab City and the Habitat Agenda", which stressed the strategic role of national institutions and other actors in the urban scene, including municipalities and civil society institutions, in enabling the management and

financing of urban development in line with the Habitat Agenda. ESCWA also prepared a Draft Arab Strategy for the Implementation of the Habitat Agenda at the regional level.

14. The two principal results of the Meeting were:

(a) The adoption of the Basic Principles and Measures for the Implementation of the Habitat Agenda in the Arab Region, which had emanated from the Draft Strategy and which consisted of the basic principles and the international, Arab and national levels for action to be taken in this respect, taking into consideration the social, cultural and political characteristics of the Arab region;

(b) The Manama Declaration on Cities and Human Settlements in the New Millennium, which consists of 14 items that represent a reconfirmation of commitment to the principles and methodology (partnership and enabling approach) of the Habitat Agenda. It also represents a commitment to the Habitat campaigns on security of tenure and good governance which have been recently launched.

15. The two foregoing documents, as amended, will be submitted to the Council of Arab Ministers of Housing and Reconstruction of the League of Arab States and to the Habitat secretariat by the Government of Bahrain. The United Nations Office of the High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has included them in the documentation for its eighteenth session and for the session of the Preparatory Committee for Istanbul + 5, both held in February 2001.

### **III. REGIONAL MEETING ON SOCIAL INDICATORS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP OF MAJOR UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCES AND WORLD SUMMITS**

16. The Statistics Division and the Social Development Issues and Policies Division at ESCWA, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Statistics Division and the Ministry of National Economy of the Sultanate of Oman, held a meeting in Muscat, from 29 October to 1 November 2000, in response to the recommendations of the Economic and Social Council to adopt a framework of Common Country Assessment (CCA) indicators and produce Minimum National Social Data Set (MNSDS) indicators to facilitate follow-up to the recommendations of the four global conferences in the field of social development (see footnote 1).

17. The meeting was attended by national experts from central statistical agencies in the Arab States responsible for producing statistical indicators; experts from the ministries of planning and social affairs, in their capacity as users of social indicators; a number of experts in their personal capacity, who presented papers at the meeting; and representatives of other United Nations agencies, namely, the World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, World Food Programme and United Nations Children's Fund.

18. The main purpose of the meeting was to familiarize the participants with the social indicators related to United Nations world conferences and meetings; to map out national and regional efforts for building national statistical capacities in the collection, analysis, publication and utilization of statistical indicators in planning for development; and to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations of global conferences.

19. In specific terms, the meeting aimed at the following:

- (a) Reviewing statistics and indicators related to the follow-up to global conferences;
- (b) Identifying national efforts to produce and use basic social indicators within the framework of following up on the implementation of the recommendations of global conferences;
- (c) Examining the extent to which national statistical bodies in the ESCWA region had adopted CCA and MNSDS indicators, identifying indicators used in this area and existing gaps, and reaching an agreement

with regard to the appropriate mechanism for disseminating and updating these indicators annually and integrating them in national statistical systems to ensure their sustainability;

(d) Examining national mechanisms for linking CCA with national policies related to issues such as poverty alleviation, unemployment, empowerment of women, population and human development and other policies;

(e) Identifying national programmes designed to bridge the gaps in data, improving their timeliness and identifying national efforts for building statistical capacities in the areas of compiling, analysing and disseminating data within the context of the follow-up to global conferences.

20. A total of twenty recommendations emanated from this meeting. Chief among them were:

(a) Endorsing the adoption of CCA indicators for monitoring national development trends in the Arab countries and for measuring progress made in the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of global conferences, and considering the CCA indicators framework as part and parcel of the comprehensive statistical system at the national level;

(b) Requesting ESCWA to take the initiative in developing a statistical system at the national level, aimed at updating data, statistics and indicators, harmonizing statistical classifications and developing coding handbooks in Arabic compatible with those produced by the United Nations;

(c) Requesting ESCWA to establish an information network on the Internet dedicated to social indicators, to train producers and users of statistics on their production and utilization and to underline policy issues related thereto;

(d) Developing new indicators in areas not previously covered, such as human rights, democracy, participation, governance and child-related issues;

(e) Underlining the significance of coordination between the regional and international levels in terms of data compilation and analysis;

(f) Establishing a committee comprising rapporteurs of national committees for population, social development, women and other relevant areas to follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations of the latest United Nations world conferences and summits and participate in the preparation of national reports on progress made in this regard;

(g) Underscoring the necessity of producing annual national reports, similar to the human development reports, to follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations of United Nations world conferences and be comprised of CCA indicators and other necessary circumstantial indicators.

21. The meeting embodied significant efforts on the part of ESCWA and its partners to facilitate the use of social indicators at the regional level in observance of the recommendations of the Economic and Social Council in this respect.

#### **IV. ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION ON CAPACITY-BUILDING OF NGOS IN THE ARAB WORLD**

22. The recommendations emanating from the United Nations global conferences and summits stipulated strengthening the capacities of NGOs and civil society institutions and promoting their role as partners with governmental institutions. However, the participation of these institutions in governance remained wanting, owing to a variety of reasons.

23. It was within this context that the Round-Table Discussion on Issues of Capacity-Building of NGOs in the Context of Implementation and Follow-up to United Nations Global Conferences was held in Cairo, from

19 to 21 September 2000. The meeting was jointly organized by ESCWA, the League of Arab States, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Insurance of Egypt and the Arab Research Center for Arab African Studies and Documentation in Cairo, within the framework of the Integrated Regional Follow-up by the Arab States to the United Nations Global Conferences (Flagship Project).

24. The round-table was attended by representatives from 14 Arab countries, including government officials, representatives of the private sector, NGOs, civil society institutions and academicians, as well as representatives of several United Nations agencies and regional and national organizations.

25. The discussion revolved around five major themes:

(a) Analysing the recommendations of the World Summit for Social Development, with emphasis on the role of NGOs in their implementation within the context of national plans of action and NGO partnership with Governments;

(b) Surveying civil society institutions in the Arab world: the institutional set-up, legislative mandates, and the activities and services rendered with the intent of determining their capacity for implementing the recommendations of global conferences;

(c) Building the capacity of Arab NGOs and enhancing their role in service delivery, advocacy and mobilization by identifying the obstacles they face and the ways and means of surmounting those obstacles to promote their role as major actors in the development process;

(d) Empowering Arab NGOs to participate in the follow-up project at the national and regional levels.

26. The conclusions and recommendations emanating from the round-table discussion spanned nine main areas in relation to civil society institutions, as follows:

(a) Developing theoretical grounds for the perceptions and activities of civil society institutions;

(b) Formulating a strategy for common work between civil society institutions;

(c) Providing an appropriate environment for the operation of civil society institutions;

(d) Defining the relationship between the State and civil society institutions;

(e) Strengthening the institutional set-up of civil society institutions;

(f) Developing human capacities in civil society institutions;

(g) Financing civil society institutions;

(h) Providing basic information;

(i) Coordinating among civil society institutions at the national and regional levels.

## **V. THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

27. In line with the designation, during a meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment (CAMRE), of ESCWA as a regional coordinator in preparing for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in partnership with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Commission will assume an important role in this respect.

28. Two coordination meetings have been held in this regard and the third will take place in April 2001.

29. An inter-agency coordination meeting was convened in New York in June 2000, involving ESCWA, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the other United Nations regional commissions and the Regional Office for Western Asia of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/ROWA), to coordinate efforts with regard to preparations

for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio + 10). During this meeting, a coordination mechanism was established for implementing the following activities:

(a) A Thematic Round Table on Regional Preparation for the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, hosted by ESCWA and convened in Beirut, from 9 to 13 April 2001, involving experts from the ESCWA region with vast experience in sustainable development. The purpose is to elaborate on concerted proposals and recommend innovative approaches for expediting progress in the implementation of selected priority themes in Agenda 21;

(b) A Regional Stakeholder Round Table, to be convened in Bahrain, from 23 to 25 September 2001, which will provide a platform for a multi-stakeholder dialogue and solicit contributions from other major groups. It will involve participants from the private sector, women's groups, youth, academicians, media representatives, local authorities and NGOs;

(c) The following special sessions and ministerial forums:

- (i) Special session of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR), Cairo, 28 October 2001, which will review, debate and comment on the outcome of both the Arab regional thematic round table and the regional stakeholders' round-table meeting;
- (ii) The special session of CAMRE, Cairo, 29 October 2001, in which the outcome of the JCEDAR special session will be reviewed, discussed and approved by CAMRE;
- (iii) The special session of CAMRE, Arab Ministers of Planning and Arab Ministers of Economy, Cairo, 30 October 2001, in which the Ministers will debate, finalize and endorse the outcome of the special session of CAMRE;
- (iv) The special meeting of CAMRE and the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN), December 2001 (the venue has not yet been determined), in which the positions of African and West Asian countries concerning sustainability of development are to be coordinated and in which ESCWA may participate.

30. CAMRE approved the foregoing programme, jointly formulated by ESCWA and UNEP/ROWA in November 2000.

## **VI. THE THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES**

31. In preparation for the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, to be convened in Brussels from 14 to 20 May 2001, pursuant to General Assembly Resolution A/RES/53/182 of 2 February 1999 and the memorandum of Mr. Rubens Recupero, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), dated 8 October 1999, the secretariat of ESCWA appointed a coordinator for the Conference and advised Yemen, the only least developed country (LDC) member of ESCWA and UNCTAD, of the decision on 18 November 1999.

32. The Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries aims at assessing the results of the Programme of Action for LDCs during the 1990s at the country level; reviewing the implementation of international support measures, particularly in official development assistance, debt and investment; and considering the formulation and adoption of appropriate national and international policies and measures for the sustainable development of the LDCs and their progressive integration into the world economy.

33. On 25 February 2000, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA, accompanied by seven ESCWA technical experts, made an official visit to Yemen to discuss ESCWA technical assistance to Yemen on its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO); the formulation of the Republic's negotiating groups and national

preparatory committee; and the preparation of a paper on its national plan of action to be submitted to the above-mentioned United Nations Conference to be convened in Brussels in May 2001.

34. During the same visit, and for the purpose of intensifying efforts to further cooperation for aid increase, a joint meeting was convened with the international donors and representatives of embassies accredited to the State.

35. Cooperation between UNCTAD, as the general coordinator, and ESCWA continued on securing financial support for Yemen's national preparatory committee to perform tasks entrusted to it by the UNDP office in Sana'a.

36. On 2 May 2000, a joint meeting was convened between UNCTAD and ESCWA, at ESCWA Headquarters in Beirut, to study the outcome of an UNCTAD mission to the Republic of Yemen and to follow up on the steps taken by the national preparatory committee in preparing for the Conference.

37. On 20 July 2000, ESCWA participated, through its coordinator, in three meetings related to preparations for the Conference, which were convened at United Nations Headquarters in New York, and at which the United Nations organizations and regional commissions, including ESCWA, were requested to provide support to Yemen by assisting it in preparing its national plan of action.

38. The date for convening the Conference, as well as its agenda, were decided upon at those meetings. It was also decided to convene another meeting in April 2001, prior to the Conference, to discuss the progress made, adopt the final document on the Programme of Action, and urge attendance of the Conference.

39. An agreement between the representatives of the Government of Yemen, UNCTAD and ESCWA also was concluded to convene a meeting in Sana'a for the Arab LDCs.

40. Based on correspondence between the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and the Minister of Supply and Trade of Yemen and in coordination with ESCWA, the following two meetings were convened in Sana'a during the period from 6 to 8 November 2000:

(a) The Symposium on International Trade-WTO Accession, which was attended by a number of international experts from WTO, UNCTAD and ESCWA, and by Yemeni government and private sectors representatives. All agreed upon the importance of joining the WTO and preparing a national strategy for that purpose. They called for further cooperation between the executive and legislative bodies of the Government of Yemen, as well as for the promotion of the role of the private sector, the training of the Yemeni negotiating team, and the strengthening of cooperation between the Arab States, with special emphasis on the LDCs in matters related to membership in the WTO;

(b) In conjunction with the above Symposium, a Brainstorming Meeting of Least Developed Arab Countries was then held. It was attended by representative of five Arab countries: the Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen. Palestine was also represented as an active participant. Somalia did not participate. The main issues discussed during the meeting were: preparation of the national plan of action; financial support for its implementation; and outlining and coordinating the common goals contained in the national papers prior to and during the Conference.

41. During the second half of 2001, a paper entitled "Review and appraisal of progress made by the Republic of Yemen in the implementation of the Programme of Action in the 1990s" will be prepared by ESCWA.

42. Over the period 26 March – 6 April 2001, three meetings will take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The meetings, which will be attended by representatives of all LDCs, other United Nations member countries, United Nations agencies, the regional commissions and regional organizations, will discuss the national plans of action of LDCs, to be presented as one final paper at the Conference. Follow-up on the recommendations adopted in the July 2000 meetings also will be discussed.



