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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

**ARAB REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE UNITED NATIONS
CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (RIO+20)
CAIRO, 16-17 OCTOBER 2011**

Summary

The Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD or Rio+20) (Cairo, 16-17 October 2011) brought together representatives of Arab countries from the economic, social and environmental spheres, as well as representatives of civil society and major groups, to formulate recommendations on the Rio+20 objectives and themes, in view of renewing the political commitment to sustainable development.

The meeting offered a forum for deliberation and consensus building on the objectives and themes to be addressed at Rio+20. The meeting discussed: (a) progress achieved and gaps in implementing the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region and the outcomes of major summits on sustainable development; (b) new and emerging challenges affecting progress towards sustainable development in the Arab region; (c) green economy opportunities and challenges facing the Arab region in the context of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty; and (d) the institutional framework for sustainable development in the Arab region.

The meeting adopted a set of recommendations, which were endorsed by the 13th session of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region and submitted to the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) for consideration in December 2011. This meeting report will be submitted to the UNCSD Bureau as the contribution of the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting to the global compilation document for Rio+20 and global preparations for Rio+20.

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Introduction

1. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA) and the League of Arab States, the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD or Rio+20), which was held on 16 and 17 October 2011 at the League of Arab States' headquarters in Cairo, Egypt.
2. The meeting comes under the mandate of ESCWA as stipulated in United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/64/236 of 31 March 2010, which requests that regional preparatory meetings for Rio+20 be convened throughout 2011. The meeting engaged with delegates from Arab Governments representing the economic, social and environmental spheres, as well as representatives from civil society and major groups. The meeting served as the culmination of a series of consultative meetings targeting different stakeholders throughout the region, organized by ESCWA and various partners between December 2010 and October 2011.
3. The objectives of the regional preparatory meeting were to:
 - Review progress achieved and gaps in implementing the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region and the outcomes of major summits on sustainable development;
 - Identify new and emerging challenges affecting progress towards sustainable development in the Arab region;
 - Examine green economy opportunities and challenges facing the Arab region in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication;
 - Consider the institutional framework for sustainable development in the Arab region;
 - Formulate recommendations on the objectives and themes of the conference in view of renewing political commitment to sustainable development.
4. The meeting consisted of five sessions, each devoted to a specific Rio+20 objective or theme. Chapter I of this report highlights the main conclusions and recommendations of the meeting, while chapter II provides a summary of the discussions within each session.

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Discussions led to a set of both general and specific recommendations, which were issued as a joint statement and submitted as an independent document to the Rio+20 Bureau, as reproduced in the box.

Outcomes of the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

We, the representatives of Arab States participating in the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20),

Recalling resolution 64/236 of the General Assembly of the United Nations, dated 24 December 2009, on the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development,

Recalling resolution 341 (XXII) of 20 December 2010 adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment at its twenty-second session to convene an Arab preparatory meeting for Rio+20,

Reaffirming the need for a balanced approach to achieve sustainable development and promote linkages and interaction among its economic, social and environmental pillars,

Stressing further the need to achieve fair and equitable development, so as to ensure the right of everyone to live with dignity in social cohesion and harmony; to decent employment; and to freedom from poverty, hunger and disease,

Considering that regional cooperation is a fundamental pillar for strengthening sustainable development programmes in a balanced way through regional integration, the exchange of expertise and best practices, sharing of knowledge, and emphasizing the inclusion of a regional dimension into the outcomes of Rio+20, on the basis of the commitment to the principles of the Rio Declaration (1992), Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals, and the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002),

Reaffirming the importance of consistent and effective preparation for Rio+20 at the national and regional levels, through concerned institutions, for forging a unified position to represent the Arab region at Rio+20, which would reaffirm commitment to the principles of sustainable development, lead to a road map to sustainable development goals in the region and ensure a better future for its people,

We hereby agree on the following:

A. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To ensure that the principles set forth in the Rio Declaration in 1992 are not compromised, and to reject any attempt at their renegotiation.
2. To reaffirm the principles of the Rio Declaration, particularly principle 7 on the common but differentiated responsibilities of States, and also principle 23 on the protection of the environment and natural resources of people under oppression, domination and occupation.
3. To further emphasize the importance to implement the outcomes of the United Nations summits and conferences on sustainable development, including Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Monterrey Consensus; and that developed countries honour the commitments made at these summits; and that developing countries achieve the full enjoyment of their rights.
4. To achieve sustainable development by enhancing and integrating its economic, social and environmental pillars.

B. PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND GAPS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOMES OF MAJOR SUMMITS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. Arab countries have made progress towards sustainable development in a number of areas, notably education, health and the environment.
2. Challenges remain, especially in poverty eradication, job creation, the right to development, social cohesion, women's rights, the right of access to information, the needs of youth, trade liberalization, the transfer and localization of appropriate technology, finance mechanisms, and capacity-building in the areas of sustainable development.
3. In order to face those challenges, Arab countries:

(a) Call on developed countries to honour their commitments, particularly towards developing countries; failure to honour commitments made in previous summits has been a major reason for the delay in the achievement of sustainable development in developing countries since the first Rio Conference in 1992;

(b) Reaffirm their commitment to implement the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region adopted by the 2004 Arab Summit, and to bring it in line with new and emerging developments and challenges and support national and regional efforts and policies aimed at achieving sustainable development in the Arab region, including agreed upon goals;

(c) Refrain from accepting any additional commitments on developing countries; developed countries must fulfil their commitments towards developing countries, including the provision of adequate funding, transfer of appropriate technology and capacity-building in order to achieve sustainable development goals;

(d) Stress the importance of promoting Arab regional integration as an imperative for achieving sustainable development;

(e) Support the participation of women, young people, persons with special needs, the private sector, civil society organizations and stakeholders in development and decision-making processes;

(f) Assert that conflict, occupation, aggression and economic sanctions are major obstacles to achieving sustainable development; special support is therefore required to meet the development needs of people suffering from these problems, particularly people living under occupation;

(g) Stress the need to establish and support sustainable development information and data networks, with a view to strengthening the decision-making process and the creation of a regional sustainable development information system.

C. NEW AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

1. Emerging social and political transitions in the region provide an opportunity to reconsider development priorities; notably give the social pillar greater attention in order to achieve social justice, create new job opportunities in public and private sectors, and reduce the brain drain, especially among young people.

2. Emerging issues facing the Arab region include:

(a) Climate change and climate change adaptation, the adverse effects stemming from adaptation measures and the implications for the social and economic sectors, in addition to food security, water security, increasing drought and desertification, land degradation, natural disasters and extreme events (dust storms, heat waves and floods), diseases and epidemics;

(b) The impact of the global financial and economic crisis on developing countries, and the impasse of Doha Round negotiations. In this context, Arab countries call for the establishment of a fair international trade system that provides developing countries with adequate resources to support their efforts towards achieving sustainable development. They also call for devising a solution for the external debt problem, and honouring commitments to provide official development assistance at internationally agreed levels;

(c) Unprecedented population growth and urbanization over the past years, which has inflicted more pressure on infrastructure and increased demand for the provision of basic services such as water supply, sanitation, health care and education.

D. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. An institutional framework for sustainable development is not an end in itself; it is rather a means to implement decisions agreed upon in the upcoming conference. Therefore, such a framework should address the three dimensions of sustainable development and should not impose any further burdens, technical or trade barriers, or conditionalities on developing countries.

2. The institutional framework has to be addressed on the basis of the following considerations:

(a) The need to adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach for sustainable development along three dimensions, to strengthen the existing international institutional framework with a view to address its gaps and to work towards establishing and strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development on both the national and regional levels;

(b) The institutional framework for sustainable development should not be used as a pretext to set environmental considerations as barriers or conditions on the provision of development assistance;

(c) The need to strengthen and establish national councils for sustainable development with a clear structure and defined terms of reference to enhance their ability to implement sustainable development strategies, plans and programmes;

(d) At the international level, focus should be placed on activating available mechanisms and existing institutions to address the shortcomings in coordination, and ensure cooperation and the optimum use of available resources, particularly already scarce financial resources, prior to considering the possibility of creating new institutions. In addition, activating, strengthening and enhancing the existing institutional structures for sustainable development at the regional level, including regional commissions such as ESCWA, and regional offices such as those of the United Nations Environment Programme;

(e) The need to strengthen coordination among international, regional and national frameworks, and support further coordination and coherence among United Nations agencies and organizations.

E. THE GREEN ECONOMY

1. There is, as yet, no agreement on the definition of a green economy.

2. In this respect, Arab countries highlight the following:

(a) Any concept of green economy to be agreed upon in the future shall not imply that the green economy is an alternative for sustainable development but rather a tool to achieve it. The opportunities and challenges of a green economy shall be assessed, in addition to the required means of implementation, primarily funding, transfer and localization of appropriate technology, capacity-building and the provision of technical support to developing countries;

(b) If an international concept of the green economy is to be adopted, special emphasis shall be placed on the principle of gradual transition to a green economy, in accordance with the socio-economic characteristics of individual countries and through the adoption of appropriate policies;

(c) The concept of a green economy shall not be used as:

- (i) A standard model applicable to the region as a whole;
- (ii) A pretext to create trade barriers and environmental standards that are difficult to implement;
- (iii) A basis and precondition for providing financial support and aid to recipient countries;
- (iv) A means to restrict the right of developing countries to utilize their natural resources according to their own development priorities;
- (v) A tool to exempt developed countries from honouring their commitments towards developing countries.

II. MAIN TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

A. OPENING STATEMENTS AND INTRODUCTORY SESSION

6. The meeting was opened by the Director of the Department of Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development of the League of Arab States and began with a statement on Arab Youth, delivered by Ms. Aya Mohamed Abd Elmaksoud. She stressed the importance of engaging youth in the development process, and identified job creation, poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, education and access to sanitation as the major priorities for the region. The opening statement offered by the Officer-in-Charge of UNEP/ROWA noted that many of the challenges that have faced the region since 1992 continue to persist today, including poverty, and that conflicts in the region are creating environmental impacts. He also proposed policy integration as the means for mainstreaming the environment into sector policies, and a green economy as a tool to advance sustainable development.

7. The Executive Coordinator of UNCSD Secretariat recognized the confluence of circumstances and crises currently facing the world that are affecting water, energy and food security. Opportunities for sustainable development and poverty eradication presented by the green economy were discussed, and it was suggested that the Arab region has sufficient resources to reap benefits from a green economy. The Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations, who also serves as Vice-Chair of the Bureau for the UNCSD Preparatory Committee representing the African Group, noted that the people in the Arab region are pushing for the advancement of human rights and democracy, and suggested that a practical vision is needed in order to achieve sustainable development in the next twenty years. He stressed that there is no agreed definition of what constitutes a green economy and that a green economy should not serve as a pretext to create technical barriers to trade, conditions on foreign aid, or justifications for private sector control over a country's natural resources. He also identified a series of challenges facing the region, including climate change, desertification, drought, food security, energy security and unemployment, as well as the need to ensure respect for the polluter pays principle and the principle on common, but differentiated responsibility adopted at the first Rio Conference in 1992.

8. The ESCWA Executive Secretary noted that the changes in the region in recent months have raised the expectations of the Arab people in their search for sustainable development. She also observed that while the current economic models characteristic of the region had achieved high growth rates, they had not been successful in reducing poverty or creating sufficient employment opportunities. She emphasized the importance of ensuring respect for the Rio principle on common, but differentiated responsibility, the need for technology transfer and adequate financing, and the opportunities that green economy trends may pose for advancing sustainable development. The Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs of the League of Arab States submitted a statement on behalf of the League of Arab States Secretary-General and focused on the need for improved funding, technology transfer, education and job creation as prerequisites for achieving progress towards sustainable development. He expressed concern that the youth of the region lack necessary skills, as well as the needed opportunities to pursue a brighter future.

9. Following the opening statements, the Director of the Sustainable Development and Productivity Division at ESCWA provided an overview of the meeting agenda and its expected outcomes. She noted that over 15 consultations had been undertaken at the regional and national levels in order to contribute to the regional preparatory meeting, and that a series of regional reports had been prepared by ESCWA, the League of Arab States and UNEP on the objectives and themes of the conference in order to inform the deliberations over the coming two days.

**B. ASSESSING THE PROGRESS TO DATE AND GAPS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOMES
OF THE MAJOR SUMMITS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

10. Director General of the Ministry of Economy and Planning in Saudi Arabia for the Holy Mecca Region moderated this session, which consisted of two presentations, an expert panel and further discussions. The League of Arab States presented the Third Progress Report on the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region, which builds upon previous reports endorsed by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) in 2008 and 2009. The report reviewed progress achieved in the regional initiative's nine priority areas, namely: peace and security; sustainable development governance; population and health; education, awareness, scientific research and technology transfer; natural resource management; multilateral environmental agreements; sustainable consumption and production; disaster management and emergency response; and globalization, trade and investment. In doing so, he highlighted the plight of Arab people living under occupation and those seeking to build democratic institutions, that poverty, unemployment and illiteracy remain high, and that desertification now covers 70 per cent of Arab lands. He also identified several strategies and programmes that have been launched to redress these challenges, including biodiversity protection programmes; Arab guidelines to improve energy efficiency; solar energy projects; regional committees to support the coordination and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements; an Arab strategy for sustainable consumption and production; an Arab strategy for disaster risk reduction; and a Regional Program for Trade and Environment Capacity Building in the Arab Region. He also noted that 11 Arab countries are now World Trade Organization members, and 8 countries are observers, and that the region has compiled a list of proposed environmental goods and services.

11. ESCWA presented a paper on progress and gaps in implementing the outcomes of major summits on sustainable development, which highlights the wide range of social, economic and environmental summits that cite sustainable development among their objectives. It highlighted that while progress had been made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Arab region, progress differed between countries and within countries. It also noted that while some progress had been made in the area of trade liberalization, international commitments on technology transfer and official development assistance (ODA), including the 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) ODA target for developed countries, have not been met. Gaps also lingered in the commitment of the international community to protect human rights and the right to self-determination. It closed by posing the question as to whether more commitments were needed, or whether more concerted effort should be placed on strengthening existing frameworks.

12. Three panellists further informed the discussions. The Office for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights focused on the right to development, the need for frameworks where people can fully engage in social, economic and environmental life, and the notion that there can be no democracy without development. The Islamic Development Bank highlighted that despite the progress achieved in some areas, major gaps persist in terms of employment creation and poverty reduction but also in terms of equity, which reflects international gaps in financial and technology transfer commitments, and trade liberalization policies. It suggested advancing sustainable development through a policy-based approach and highlighted the need to reform financial mechanisms and support the aspirations of developing countries. It also called on Arab countries to consider the benefits of a green economy, re-evaluate existing economic and trade policies, improve regional trade, and invest in disaster reduction strategies, clean energy and technology. The Environmental Quality Authority of Palestine emphasized the integrated nature of sustainable development and that development targets cannot be achieved without access to water and energy. It clearly explained that destruction and damage to basic infrastructure during conflicts, as well as budgetary constraints, are key obstacles to sustainable development.

13. The discussion that ensued consisted of interventions from Arab Governments and civil society, including regional organizations. Saudi Arabia expressed concern over the limited access to technology transfer and financing despite international commitments, and the declining rights of the Palestinian people. Tunisia signalled that sustainable development has been a priority for Tunisia since 1992, and that it had established a national sustainable development commission. However, a new model was necessary based on

political and social rights, and a concept of citizenship that focused on the role of young people and their central role in development. Jordan emphasized the need for joint Arab action on sustainable development and that sustainable development must be pursued along its three pillars and integrate the concept of social justice. He emphasized that there is also a need to consider regional specificities and common, but differentiated responsibility when formulating responses to the current environmental conditions. The Syrian Arab Republic noted that there is not yet an agreed definition for a green economy, and that the country has approved environmental legislation and taken steps to advance sustainable development. Iraq said it was necessary to include reference to common, but differentiated responsibility and to the polluter pays principle in the final communiqué of the meeting. Lebanon noted that it has been adversely affected by conflict, including the 2006 aggression by Israel, which had adverse impacts on the environment, the health of citizens, tourism and development. Algeria noted that the region suffers from numerous environmental problems, including climate change and desertification. The speaker emphasized the importance of mainstreaming sustainable development into national policies, and that Algeria had made progress to this end through the establishment of a sustainable development observatory and other centres focused on waste management, clean production and low-carbon growth. He also emphasized the need for technology transfer, financial resources and support for the least developed countries. The United Arab Emirates highlighted their efforts to improve access to environmental data and information, and national efforts to establish a low-carbon city, biosaline agricultural research facility, and a water academy in Abu Dhabi. Yemen made note of the consequences of climate change, but emphasized that the Arab region is a major producer but not a major consumer of energy. Palestine explained that sustainable development cannot be achieved under occupation or when a country is reliant on foreign aid, and emphasized that the country must be self-reliant and able to define its commercial relationships with trading partners in order to progress towards sustainable development. He also suggested that a mechanism should be put into place to follow-up on the outcomes of Rio+20. The Sudan accepted that some progress had been achieved, but stated that countries should not adopt commitments if they cannot be implemented. Egypt stated that efforts should be made to renew commitment on existing pledges before pursuing new commitments, and that progress towards sustainable development should take into consideration social justice, a rights-based approach, a science-based approach, and respond to the legitimate concerns of the Arab region.

14. Civil society representatives highlighted the following dimensions. The Arab Network for Illiteracy and Adult Education highlighted that two-thirds of the illiterate population of the region are women, and that gender sensitive indicators are needed. The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) called on a fairer international trading system and increased support for technology transfer, as well as research and development. Mafhoum focused on the need for accurate indicators to monitor and report on progress, including on access to water and sanitation. The United Nations University advocated a community-based development approach to eradicate poverty, and the need to draw on traditional knowledge. The Arab Media Forum for Environment and Development highlighted the need to make the media a partner in the development process. The Arab Atomic Energy Commission stressed the right of developing countries, including Arab countries, to acquire and utilize modern technologies, including environmentally friendly and peaceful use of nuclear technology (for example, in food safety, water treatment, medical applications, energy production).

15. The League of Arab States and Iraq emphasized the importance of coming out with a unified Arab vision for Rio+20. Iraq also noted that while it has not made progress on all sustainable development indicators since the collapse of the former regime in 2003, progress has been achieved. However, drought and desertification remain major challenges.

C. NEW AND EMERGING CHALLENGES FACING THE ARAB REGION

16. The session was moderated by the League of Arab States and consisted of presentations, an expert panel and discussions. ESCWA delivered a paper on new and emerging challenges facing the Arab region, which focused on ten priority clusters. On demographic change and unemployment, it was noted that 55 per cent of Arabs now live in cities, over 50 per cent are under 25 years of age, and that youth unemployment in

the Arab region is worse than in other world regions. On the Arab Spring, it was noted that opportunities could be created from the changes and challenges currently facing the region. On the global financial crisis, it was demonstrated that Arab countries were negatively affected, but to varying degrees. On food security, dependency on food imports and the inability to achieve food security through self-sufficiency were key challenges. This was largely attributed to water scarcity, as a subsequent challenge, as only 6 of 22 Arab countries are now situated above the freshwater poverty line of 1000 m³ per capita per year. On energy security, it was evident that Arab countries are endowed with differences in energy resources, but that energy consumption is largely tied to GDP. Climate change and natural disasters were identified as new complementary challenges given the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events being experienced in the region. This is witnessed through the effects of drought and desertification, the impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem loss, and on migration. Shifts in inter and intraregional migration patterns were also identified as challenges that were affecting regional integration and its ability to serve as a catalyst for sustainable development. In closing, emphasis was not only placed on the three pillars of sustainable development, but also on the interlinkages and reinforcing relationship between these ten challenge areas.

17. UNEP/ROWA introduced UNEP's Foresight Group, which has identified 26 environmental issues that are considered critical in the twenty-first century. She explained that the UNEP Global Environment Outlook process has identified freshwater, land, energy, oceans and seas as priorities in Western Asia, and environmental governance and climate change as cross-cutting themes. UNEP/ROWA then continued its presentation with an overview of the Eye on Earth Summit to be held in Abu Dhabi in December 2011, which will respond to the need for coherent information and knowledge on which to base environmental decisions and policies.

18. Two expert panellists subsequently contributed to the session. The United Nations Development Programme Regional Office for Arab States supported the suggestion that the Arab Spring presented an opportunity to move the region towards a more climate resilient economy. He identified water scarcity as the key challenge facing the region and the need to rationalize the use of water resources, while pursuing the development of non-conventional water resources. The World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean highlighted the opportunities and challenges presented by the demographic window, and the need to create opportunities for youth. He emphasized the poverty and health dimensions of food security, and the need to consider land degradation alongside drought and desertification among the consequences of climate change, including soil salinity and agro-chemical pollution. Nuclear energy should be considered within the context of energy security as an emerging challenge facing the region, as well as the brain drain and the need to transfer technologies to the appropriate region, based on local conditions.

19. The following interventions were then provided by Governments and civil society representatives. Jordan inquired what should be the response to these challenges, such as the challenge of energy security and consideration of nuclear energy options. It was also noted that energy, water and food security demonstrate the need for integrated solutions to achieve sustainable development, as well as the need to go beyond environmental challenges and consider the economic costs and benefits, and reinforce human capacity. The Syrian Arab Republic highlighted the problem of water scarcity and migration, and that groundwater is only available in some parts of the country, while Israel is taking water from the Golan. It was also noted that the Arab Spring poses a challenge for sustainable development, as progress was achieved before the recent events. Iraq identified climate change as a priority and said that his country was working on a national sustainable development plan. Palestine introduced the challenge of solid waste as key challenge. Yemen supported the idea of recycling and the challenge of floods associated with climate variability. The United Arab Emirates took note of the background paper and added that climate change and a rise in temperature will affect the productivity of the desalination industry and of the livestock sector, therefore impacting food security. Algeria emphasized the problem of desertification and how it has fuelled migration to Europe, while also affecting food security and biodiversity. Saudi Arabia emphasized the linkage between water and energy security, and the need for the localization of technology to ensure the transfer of appropriate technologies. He also emphasized the responsibility of the global North for the emissions currently in the

atmosphere. Oman followed by asserting that the Arab region will not wait for the transfer of technologies, but instead will seek out regional technological solutions in order to overcome problems.

20. On behalf of civil society and major groups, a representative of Indigenous Peoples highlighted the challenges facing desert communities, such as lack of basic services, poverty and marginalization and called for improving social services and rural livelihoods for these marginalized communities in face of climate change. A representative of the Scientific and Technological Communities called for a unified Arab position on a green economy, and a paradigm shift to a knowledge-based green economy that takes into account the social dimension and changing priorities in the region, supports knowledge management and further scientific research. A representative of the Farmers Major Group recommended the transfer of appropriate knowledge and technology, especially in relation to water and energy to address the vulnerability of farmers to climate change, the promotion of cooperatives, and the establishment of a green fund to finance strategic development programmes in poorest countries. The Sudan Environmental Union highlighted the benefits of solar energy and the need to develop indigenous knowledge and food sovereignty, which was reiterated by ANND. L'Espace Associatif Maroc highlighted the value of targets for increasing solar energy use, while Arab Network for Illiteracy and Adult Education highlighted the need for social justice, equality and democracy to advance towards sustainable development. The United Nations Habitat highlighted the urbanization challenge and the need to improve access to basic water and energy services, and improve solid waste management. The Arabian Gulf University highlighted the challenge of e-waste. The moderator closed the session by proposing to streamline the number of challenge clusters, while ensuring that focus remains on climate change, food security, water security and the potential role of the Arab Spring as a catalyst for change.

D. THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

21. The session was moderated by the League of Arab States and consisted of presentations, a review of the outcomes of a regional preparatory workshop, an expert panel and discussions. ESCWA presented a review of institutions for sustainable development in the Arab region, which examines the institutional framework for sustainable development (IFSD) at the national and regional levels and exposes some areas of progress, including the establishment of national councils for sustainable development and new regional mechanisms for advancing sustainable development in key sectors. However, the presentation highlighted key institutional challenges affecting progress towards sustainable development in the Arab region, including weak institutions and monitoring mechanism, limited public participation, poor integration of environmental considerations into national development strategies, insufficient funding, and inadequate decision-making processes.

22. UNEP examined international environmental governance and suggested that any arrangement that involves sustainable development policymaking or implementation activities can be considered part of IFSD. While awareness had been raised regarding the role of sustainable development as a guiding principle and the need for public participation, the following challenges continue to plague the IFSD, namely the lack of implementation, inadequate national arrangements, insufficient capacity-building, weak coordination and integration mechanisms, lack of mainstreaming and the lack of accountability. Meanwhile, it was explained that the current international environmental governance system was fragmented, complex and underfinanced. It also lacks coherence among the more than 500 MEAs and over 300 regional environmental agreements in place, which require capacity-building and support for improved implementation. UNEP also elaborated the five options proposed by the UNEP Governing Council as well as another for strengthening IFSD at the global level, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each option. The options include reforming of the United Nations Economic and Social Council; replacing the Commission on Sustainable Development with a new Council for Sustainable Development; establishing an umbrella organization for coordinating sustainable development; upgrading UNEP into a specialized agency; making UNEP a subsidiary body of the United Nations General Assembly, or strengthening the existing institutional framework. In closing, it was emphasized that UNEP lacks political power and the ability to access financing and policy processes,

and that there is therefore the need to reinforce the environmental pillar of sustainable development and that incremental reform would not be sufficient to improve the situation.

23. The Presidency of Meteorology and Environment of Saudi Arabia presented the outcomes of the Workshop on the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region (Jeddah, 3-5 October 2011), which it hosted in view of providing input to the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for Rio+20. The workshop discussed the outcomes of the global consultations on IFSD held in Solo and existing proposals at the global and regional level. The recommendations highlighted the need to: consider the three pillars of sustainable development in a balanced manner; overcome the gaps in IFSD at the national level; ensure that sustainable development meets the needs of all countries and engages all countries in the sustainable development process; enhance coordination between United Nations bodies; increase civil society participation; and avoid the imposition of any additional burdens on development countries. At the Arab regional level, the workshop also recommended to change CAMRE into a Sustainable Development Council, and to include economic, social and environmental committees under the Council.

24. The panellist from Jordan representing the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation commented that the ESCWA background paper on IFSD at the national level drew many of its examples from its previous report on sustainable development governance issued in 2003, which is likely because there has been little progress towards a strengthened institutional framework for sustainable development in the Arab region since then. He emphasized that IFSD in the region is not balanced and focused on the environmental pillar. He expressed concern that the proposals offered by UNEP are not compatible with the needs of the region, and argued that the objectives of the IFSD should be clarified before delving into reforming the institutional framework, adding that it is not appropriate to strengthen one sustainable development pillar at the expense of the other two. The Tunisian panellist, who had previously served in the Tunisian Environment Observatory, said it is necessary to have a regional sustainable development strategy and commission to provide a forum for coordination at the regional level. It was highlighted that Tunisia set up a sustainable development committee in 1993, and that such committees should be established in each country. The importance to resolve the fragmented coverage of Arab countries within the United Nations system was emphasized, as some countries are covered under regional bodies that serve Western Asia, while others are served under regional offices responsible for Africa. He also advocated the establishment of an Arab network for environmental information.

25. Egypt initiated the subsequent series of Government interventions by stating that there is a need to strengthen the institutional framework for sustainable development, but that there remains lack of clarity and information on the options available, including the proposed 'umbrella organization' option proposed by Brazil, and the report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the costs and assessment of each option. The Egyptian delegate emphasized that there is no political will to create a new international organization, change UNEP into a specialized agency, or to provide additional funding to UNEP, therefore effort should be placed on making existing mechanisms more efficient. Morocco followed stating that Arab Governments have the political will to support sustainable development and have enacted laws and institutions at the national level to this end. As examples, it was cited the new constitution of Morocco that provides every citizen with the right to a sound environment, and which is supported by a national council that engages government and civil society representatives in the formulation of sustainable development policies. Yemen highlighted the need to benefit from the experiences of other countries at the national level. Saudi Arabia expressed support for the statement delivered by Egypt and reiterated that the region does not want any new commitments or burdens given the current financial situation. He also highlighted that changing the name of an institution does not necessarily mean strengthening the system. Saudi Arabia also emphasized that Rio+20 should not allow for any renegotiation of the Rio principles adopted in 1992. The Sudan questioned whether changing the name of CAMRE at the League of Arab States was feasible, and that there should be recognition that some countries organize their sustainable development activities under different names. The League of Arab States moderator responded noting that it was possible to change the name of the council but that it could take several years, adding that a 2004 League of Arab States decision provided CAMRE with competency in the areas of environment and sustainable development. Iraq noted that the appointment of a

sustainable development minister would complicate coordination and that balance was needed between the three pillars of sustainable development. At the international level, he stressed the importance of building on existing structures and accumulated expertise while making the most efficient use of resources. Lebanon emphasized that sustainable development requires increased coordination and supports changing the name of CAMRE to the Sustainable Development Council, noting that national sustainable development frameworks were also needed. Palestine also emphasized the importance of integrating the three pillars of sustainable development and noted that they would have liked to participate in the Jeddah meeting. Palestine also expressed support for a stronger UNEP, but not to transform it into a specialized agency that would affect the ability of Palestine to benefit from its services. Iraq reiterated the importance of sustainable development along its three dimensions and encouraged the proposal to establish the Sustainable Development Council supported by three committees. Oman noted that it has a sustainable development committee, a committee focused on the collection of sustainable development indicators, as well as a newly established environmental research centre. Algeria sympathized with the need to improve coordination among MEAs given the high level of fragmentation and duplication that exists between agreements. Taking Agenda 21 as a basis for any institutional reform, Algeria called for reviewing mandates of, and improving cooperation between, existing institutions and to avoid establishing new institutions due to the financial burden entailed. He also advocated for a more democratic approach to the negotiations that involves developing countries in decision-making, and the need for additional funding. Jordan emphasized the need to strengthen IFSD at the regional level, and the need to consider the common interests of the Arab countries in view of harmonizing our activities. The United Arab Emirates described IFSD established at the federal level, and the financial benefits it has created in the area of environment and sustainable development, noting that while the Bali Plan of Action and other agreements adopted at the international level have not been implemented, it continues to support UNEP/ROWA. Saudi Arabia noted that the debate on IFSD and green economy will make it difficult to come up with concrete recommendations and that more time may be needed to discuss the recommendations. Oman presented its national achievements, including the development of national strategies, the establishment of sustainable development committees and scientific research councils and centres.

26. A representative of the Youth and Children Major Group highlighted the importance of human capacity-building, particularly among youth, and an increased involvement of the youth in formal and informal forums, to help to create a new vision for sustainable development in the region. The Global Environment Facility representative also called for upgrading UNCSD to a Council on Sustainable Development and the establishment of councils for sustainable development at the national and regional levels that are transparent and participatory. The ANND representative also urged for a greater involvement of civil society organizations in policymaking and programme implementation through real partnerships, stressing the need for increasing transparency and reducing corruption.

E. A GREEN ECONOMY IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ERADICATION

27. The session was moderated by the former Minister for Industry and Trade of Yemen and consisted of a background presentation and the review of the outcomes from the cross-sector regional preparatory meetings convened on the green economy, followed by an expert panel and discussion. Prior to initiating the presentations, the former minister postulated that the current economic development model being pursued in the Arab region had failed since it has not reduced unemployment or poverty rates in the region. It was further suggested that this failure fostered the political tensions and transformations underway in several Arab countries. The situation thus demonstrated the importance of not neglecting the social pillar when discussing the green economy.

28. ESCWA presented a background paper on green economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication that focused on the principles, opportunities and challenges a green economy poses for the Arab region. The paper noted the concern that Arab countries have that the transition to a green economy was being promoted as an alternative to sustainable development and could lead to the

creation of new technical barriers to trade, financial conditionalities, and productivity losses. In terms of opportunities, it was highlighted that a green economy could create new socio-economic benefits by improving living standards in rural areas and improving access to basic environmental services. Indicators for monitoring and measuring progress towards a green economy were suggested, such as the sustainable development indicators adopted by CAMRE. Certain sectors were identified as offering the potential for generating triple benefits from a green economy, such as the renewable energy, clean technology, water recycling, green buildings, sustainable transport, as well as green electricity alternatives including natural gas. Participatory approaches, including the engagement of the private sector, were necessary to generate positive benefits from a green economy, and regional integration, as well as conditions for fostering education, innovation, research and development in technologies that are appropriate and responsive to regional needs.

29. Statements on outcomes from three specialized regional preparatory meetings on the green economy within the framework of sustainable development and poverty eradication followed. ESCWA presented the outcomes of the Workshop on Economic Policies Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy in the Arab Region (Beirut, 20-21 July 2011), which solicited the views of ministers of finance and economic stakeholders. The meeting considered green economy concepts and sought to build consensus regarding the potential mix of fiscal policies that could foster a gradual transition to a green economy in the Arab region. Sustainable public procurement, environmental taxation, green investment incentives and green financing were considered. Recommendations called for: the preparation of technical and economic feasibility assessment for green economy projects; compliance with all environmental requirements prior to approving new projects, while encouraging existing facilities to improve their environmental performance through government assistance programmes; public-private partnerships; the establishment of specialized funds, such as the Arab Environment Facility; legal and institutional frameworks for encouraging investments in new technologies, while earmarking funds for environment-related projects in national budgets; unified Arab positions against discriminatory taxes on fossil fuels and emphasizing the sovereignty of states over the exploitation of their national resources based on national circumstances; cleaner uses of fossil fuels and renewable energy resource, including technology transfer in this area; the principle of a gradual transition to a green economy, according to country specificities and the level of development; and the engagement of economic, social and environmental stakeholders in deliberations regarding a shift towards a green economy.

30. UNEP/ROWA reported on the outcomes of the Third Roundtable Meeting on Sustainable Consumption and Production in the Arab Region: Paving the Path to Green Economy in the Arab Region (Cairo, 26-27 January 2011), which involved representatives from clean production centres and civil society representatives. The meeting found that the current models of production and consumption are unsustainable and have negatively impacted the environment. The meeting therefore recommended that a new model for economic development based on sustainable consumption and production patterns. Regional and global processes, including the Marrakech Process and Arab strategy on sustainable consumption and production, encourage such transition. Synergy was also identified between the goals of sustainable consumption and production and the transition to a green economy within the framework of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

31. The Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization delivered the outcomes of the Conference on the Role of Green Industries in Promoting Socio-Economic Development in the Arab Countries (Beirut, 28-30 September 2011), which involved government representatives and experts engaged in green industry development, particularly from the energy sector. The meeting concluded with recommendations aimed at accepting the concept of green industry as a pathway for advancing industrial development and employment creation in the region; encouraging technology transfer and partnerships with developed countries; fostering exchange between scientific bodies and research centres in strategic sectors; encouraging financial institutions in the Arab region to support the development of green industries; and supporting small and medium enterprises to adopt green industry practices and policies.

32. ESCWA subsequently delivered a presentation on behalf of the League of Arab States on sustainable development indicators as a means for monitoring progress towards a green economy within a sustainable development framework. The review introduced the 13 clusters of indicators adopted by CAMRE to monitor and report on sustainable development along its social, economic and environmental pillars. He explained that the League of Arab States, ESCWA and UNEP had consolidated the initial set of indicators and prepared the methodology for calculating the indicators. Training was underway in the region to ensure unified computation of the indicators at the national level, such as in Saudi Arabia.

33. An expert panel subsequently informed the discussion from a different perspective. The Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration took note of the cautiousness with which the concept of a green economy is discussed in the region, including the concern that a green economy was proving to distract focus from a balanced and coherent approach to sustainable development itself. It was also suggested that a green economy appears to be more of a market driven approach to sustainable development, rather than one based on government and civil society intervention. It was further noted that this may be due in part to the failure to achieve significant progress towards sustainable development over the last decade. The expert therefore suggested considering a range of green economies that may develop in different ways across the world, rather than one model for applying a green economy, noting nonetheless that these new green economies must be local, diverse, participatory and built from the ground up. They should also recognize regional and local specificities, and must support universally accepted rights and access to basic services. It was noted that the international community must be cognizant of its limitation in predicting what the needs of a green economy might be and its impacts, noting that the green biofuel industry had already demonstrated a naïveté regarding the relationship between agriculture, energy and food security. Food waste and warnings regarding the unforeseen effects of nascent biotechnologies was also expressed, along with concern over the international oligopoly that controls the global market for agro-chemicals and climate resistant plant varieties, and the inability of the United Nations or early warning systems to monitor the private sector. In closing, Agenda 21 was cited, noting the calls for the establishment of technology assessment mechanisms and a precautionary principle, and the need to be cognizant of the risks associated with technology transfer within a green economy.

34. The former Director of the Trade and Economics Branch of UNEP put forth the argument that the green economy is not a new concept, but is an integral part of sustainable development. The concept gained momentum during recent years as a means to accelerate the transition towards sustainable development as the international community struggled for ways to overcome the global financial crisis. As such, a green economy seeks to prioritize job creation through green sectors, such as sustainable transport, waste recycling, renewable energy, and investments in climate change adaptation that can generate win-win situations for the economy and the environment. He compared this with the earlier development paradigm that sought to promote environmental protection without reference to economic development. As such, he stressed that the transition to the green economy as advanced by UNEP should not be viewed as an additional burden, but as a means to alleviate poverty and pursue sustainable development in a balanced way. To do so, effort must be made to reduce the gap between the rich and poor, and increase investment in human capacity, research and development, and ensure that planning processes are participatory and bottom-up.

35. During the ensuing discussions, Arab Governments noted the following: Iraq highlighted that water scarcity is a key issue that has resulted in a variety of impacts, including migration, agricultural degradation, food security, desertification, impacts on the indigenous people of the Iraqi marshes that have suffered from water scarcity. It was emphasized that trade is a tool for advancing sustainable development, and that the green economy is the new prevailing model that is supported by some trade models encouraged at the international level. Concern was expressed, however, that a market economy may still result in the depletion of natural resources and that national economic development should be assessed by the welfare of citizens and the amount they need to pay for basic services. Tunisia emphasized the importance of having a more detailed definition of what constitutes a green economy and what transition entails. The representative recognized that a green economy could assist Arab countries in order to achieve sustainable development, but that such efforts should be in accordance with the national development goals of a country, and

particularly its social objectives. Tunisia also called for the international community to support the transfer of technologies, human capacity-building and the removal of non-tariff barriers to trade. Lebanon shared its experience to seek to transition towards a green economy, including its success in reducing ozone-depleting substances, support for micro and small enterprises and encouragement of solar energy development projects, including local manufacturing of solar water heaters. Yemen suggested that the recycling of all materials can be considered part of the green economy, and that such practices are already in place in rural areas. Yemen further called for the region to focus on rural areas during the transition to a green economy, since rural agricultural areas are already suffering due to climate change, noting that climate resistant crops might prove to be a solution. However, companies need to be committed to technology transfer and waste recycling. Saudi Arabia explained that global fossil fuel consumption had quadrupled between 2006 and 2010, and that the country was starting to suffer significantly from air pollution, which had led to the promotion of solar energy alternatives. Morocco noted that the region needs to consider the potentials for the green economy, and its promotion through technology transfer in key sectors, such as water supply and sanitation, and programmes targeting rural communities through more sustainable agricultural practices that can also support food security and employment creation objectives. She also highlighted that eco-tourism and green industry projects were underway as a means to create jobs, as well as a low-carbon green city development initiative that also seeks to increase water use efficiency. A green urbanization strategy was being implemented that aimed at improving governance and reducing traffic congestion through a new high-speed railway system.

36. Egypt recognized that there had been evident progress towards sustainable consumption and production, but raised concern that there remains no agreed definition of a green economy, which is now being promoted as a toolbox for selective application at the national level. It was also noted that it had taken twenty years to understand the concept of sustainable development and that now a new, unknown concept was being introduced that aims at the same objectives, but through alternative means. As such, it was suggested that a cautious approach be taken to ensure that a green economy concept does not create additional barriers to trade or new conditionalities, as countries are already trying to use green economy concepts as a means to restrict trade and increase private sector influence in economic decision-making. As such, focus should be reoriented towards realizing existing commitments related to technology transfer and financing in view of assisting developing countries progress towards sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty. Jordan iterated that Arab countries are committed to achieving sustainable environmental development, but remain unclear regarding what constitutes a green economy. Concern was also expressed that Rio+20 was trying to shift the policy dialogue from the microeconomic to the macroeconomic level by involving big industries. Trade liberalization is needed to move the process forward. He also questioned whether the region was ready to shift from a brown economy to a green economy given technology, investment and human capacity constraints. The Sudan followed emphasizing that the region was still weak to move itself away from a brown economy and would have difficulty transitioning to new industries in a green economy without overcoming existing pollution problems first. The Syrian Arab Republic emphasized water as a key sector to consider, and noted that the country had encouraged investments in slums and pursued renewable energy alternatives as part of its transition towards a green economy since 2008.

37. Saudi Arabia disagreed that the current development models applied in some Arab countries had not succeeded, and reemphasized that there remained as yet no agreed definition on what a green economy is. He argued that the sectors and activities being advanced as part of a green economy are nothing new and have been part of sustainable development frameworks for the past twenty years. As such, he expressed reservation regarding this new terminology in the absence of greater clarity regarding what it entails, emphasizing that the Arab Group should adopt a united stand at Rio+20. The United Arab Emirates in turn suggested that a green economy is one that uses little carbon and that there are significant initiatives being undertaken for transition to a green economy in the United Arab Emirates, including the adoption of green building criteria, private sector partnerships, material recycling centres, biodiversity reserves, carbon capture and storage alongside other countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as energy efficiency standards. Algeria also contended that the concept of a green economy is an old one, and that every country

has programmes underway which it considers green. However, the purpose of these projects is to promote sustainable development, therefore pursuit of new concepts should be done gradually. In doing so, it is essential that countries maintain full control over their national natural resources, and that a green economy does not impose any limits on economic development. Qatar noted that it was not appropriate to proceed to Rio citing the Arab countries' achievements towards a green economy, when a definition had not yet been adopted. Palestine accepted that some fears regarding the transition to a green economy were justified, but that if a green economy incorporates the three pillars of sustainable development, then effort should be made to concentrate on the environmental dimension of a green economy that also seeks to create jobs and reduce poverty, within a general framework that reaffirms political commitment towards sustainable development. Oman presented its achievements including conversion from diesel to natural gas, the development of an agricultural research strategy and national water plan, and related legislative measures.

38. Regional experts and civil society representatives proceeded with their interventions following guidance provided by the former Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA who recalled that the meeting aimed at forging a unified position on the key themes of the conference and that the meeting report should emphasize the international and regional context when specifying positions and recommendations, including the need for adequate funding to support the transition towards a green economy. Representatives then articulated the importance of referring to common but differentiated responsibilities within the discussion of a green economy, and the need to respect international commitments on emission targets related to climate change. The major group representative speaking on behalf of women emphasized the importance of including women in the preparatory process for Rio+20, mainstreaming gender into sustainable development indicators, and positioning women as potential beneficiaries of and contributors to a green economy. Other representatives focused on the need to transfer modern and appropriate technologies to the region, and consider the implications of transferring nuclear technology and nanotechnologies to the region. Greenpeace focused on the implications of climate change on the region and that a green economy should not become one that depletes natural resources and becomes dependent upon nuclear resources. The delegate representing Scientific and Technological Communities also identified the need to pursue environmentally friendly technologies and expressed concern that nuclear energy might be viewed as a sustainable alternative energy source. The need to avoid the import of polluting industries into the region was also noted.

39. The moderator closed the session by inviting participants to submit their written comments for inclusion in the meeting report and outcome documentation.

F. SECURING RENEWED POLITICAL COMMITMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

40. The Director of the United Nations Regional Commission New York Office moderated the session, which opened with statements on the outcomes of civil society consultations in preparation for the Arab regional meeting, and was followed by interventions by a panel of experts invited to address issues raised during the previous sessions and plenary discussion.

41. The Environment Society of Oman presented the outcome of the civil society consultation organized with support from UNEP and the United Arab Emirates (Dubai, 9-10 October 2011). The meeting called for a fair and just international trading system, renewed political commitment to achieve the MDGs, sustainable funding mechanisms, institutionalized mechanisms for civil society participation at the national and regional levels, greater accountability, the establishment of a sustainable development council, support for UNEP, social justice, job creation and poverty eradication. The meeting also agreed that a green economy should not impose barriers on developing countries, foster greater investment in education and science, encourage the adoption of environmental accounting practices, and prioritize policies that support renewable energy alternatives, green building design, sustainable transport, recycling and grey water reuse, particularly in the agricultural sector.

42. ANND presented the outcome of the civil society consultation organized under the auspices of the Lebanese Ministry of Environment with the support of ESCWA (Beirut, 12-13 October 2011). The meeting

highlighted the importance of food security and emphasized the need to place sustainable development on equal footing with other regional issues, including the pursuit of human rights. The meeting took note of the Arab Spring and considered how the food crisis and financial crisis likely contributed to transformations in the region. In doing so, the meeting noted that peace and security are preconditions for sustainable development and that a human-rights based approach should be pursued that encourages Governments to meet social needs and thus mitigate the risk of conflict. The consultation recommended that the transition to a green economy not overpower efforts to alleviate poverty, which remains a core cause of environmental degradation. Citizens should be empowered to be partners in sustainable development, and that sustainable development requires good governance over natural resources and especially water resources in order to ensure food security and rural development. The consultation emphasized the need for the international community to respect its commitments and be accountable to agreed protocols. It also proposed that a Sustainable Development Council could help to monitor compliance and implementation of international agreements on sustainable development, but that regional dimensions also be considered when pursuing sustainable development.

43. The Arab Network for Environment and Development presented a statement on the outcomes of their civil society consultation (Cairo, 14 October 2011). The meeting sought to highlight the role of civil society organizations in the region and emphasize the importance of civil society representation at Rio+20. The consultation took note of the need to support the Palestinian people, ensure food security in the region, and overcome challenges related to desertification and urbanization. The meeting expressed support for UNEP, although no specific recommendation was endorsed on the form UNEP should take. The establishment of a specialized council on sustainable development was considered a possible means to achieve more concrete results, noting that the strengthening of CAMRE and its technical committee in the region would also reinforce the institutional framework for sustainable development in the region. The establishment and enhancement of national councils for sustainable development was encouraged, noting that the leadership of such committees largely determined its success and that such committees should therefore be led at the level of president or prime minister. A transition to a green economy was also favoured, provided it is pursued in a regionally appropriate manner. The meeting also identified illiteracy, unemployment and poverty as key obstacles to sustainable development.

44. An expert panel followed to further inform the deliberations based on the discussions undertaken during the previous sessions. The president of Mafhoum commented on the session related to progress made and gaps in international commitments and noted that there are no clear indicators for measuring progress towards sustainable development with a view towards a green economy and that a technical committee of experts might be formed to draw up such indicators. It was highlighted that unemployment was a key challenge in the region, but so were the protection of workers rights and access to social services, including health insurance. Access to water and environmental pollution are major concerns. Meanwhile, efforts should be made to evaluate whether countries have met their commitments in light of ensuring that the polluter pays principle remains in force. It was also recommended that local level action be encouraged in support of sustainable development.

45. The Lebanon Country Manager of the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas commented on the session related to new and emerging issues. It was recommended that Arab countries increase their exchange of experiences in the area of sustainable development, and that an Arab fund could support the implementation of projects based on lessons learned. It was reiterated that sustainable development should be addressed in an integrated manner since most emerging challenges are interlinked. The importance of fostering sustainable rural livelihoods that take into consideration the role of women and agriculture in development was emphasized. There is also a need to support agricultural research and climate change adaptation and to advance the interests of Arab countries at the regional and global levels.

46. The Dean of the College of Graduate Studies at the Arabian Gulf University commented on the institutional framework on sustainable development, highlighting the need to find balance between the social, economic and environmental policies that contribute to sustainable development and human

wellbeing. Focus was placed on the need for good governance, which requires institutions that are participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable and transparent. The expert also highlighted the difference between economic growth and economic development and the contribution that the Arab Environmental Outlook (2010) can have on setting the context for the institutional framework for sustainable development in the region.

47. The former Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA commented on the session focused on a green economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and emphasized the importance of ensuring that each country can pursue its development goals in accordance with its own development needs. The importance of preserving the polluter pays principle, and the principle of common but differentiated responsibility when considering the transition towards a green economy was also emphasized. It was further noted that the international community should provide adequate financing and facilitate technology transfer to encourage investments in green economy projects, and that specific funds should be applied to support countries suffering under special circumstances, such as Palestine. The high level expert took note that Arab countries refuse to accept any commitments or responsibilities that may be associated with a green economy. She insisted that civil society, women and youth should be engaged in sustainable development processes at all levels, and that the capacity of the public and private sectors should be enhanced in order to reap benefits from the opportunities that a green economy may provide.

48. The ensuing interventions were made by Arab Governments. The Syrian Arab Republic noted that his country had adopted 15 sustainable development indicators used for monitoring progress towards sustainable development. He also noted that education is free for all in the Syrian Arab Republic, including Bedouins, and that two Syrian cities have eradicated illiteracy. He also noted that efforts were underway to increase access to clean water and sanitation throughout the country, and that environmental impact assessments are being conducted prior to approving all new industries, adding that environmental monitoring is conducted to ensure compliance with environmental regulations. Yemen recognized civil society as a key partner with government in sustainable development, but that civil society organizations should seek to ensure their financial sustainability in order to be able to maintain their independence when advocating their positions. Jordan recognized that there are sustainable development projects of different scales underway in all Arab countries. However, it was recognized that not all industries in Jordan are operating in a sustainable way, but progress should be encouraged as much as possible. Iraq emphasized the role of good governance in supporting efforts to achieve sustainable development. Dust storms along with drought and desertification were highlighted as new phenomenon facing the region. He proposed that a new regional project be undertaken to address this challenge. He lamented the poor implementation of commitments by members of the international community and insisted that there be no renegotiation of agreements undertaken at previous summits. He acknowledged that limited scientific capacity to advance sustainable development in the Arab region could be enhanced by making use of collective expertise, while noting that a green economy may be a new basis for development, but that efforts need to avoid unnecessary obstacles to trade and be in line with efforts to achieve sustainable development. Palestine encouraged the full participation of NGOs in all issues. Saudi Arabia reiterated the need to avoid applying new criteria related to a green economy.

49. Civil society interventions wrapped up the session with ANND emphasizing the importance of technical assistance, technology transfer and funding for advancing sustainable development. Debt relief should also be pursued to help countries pay off their debts. The right to development was reemphasized and it was postulated that sustainable development was a human right. The Arab Network for Illiteracy and Adult Education subsequently identified the need to redress exclusion in the region and broaden the concept of engagement and participatory development in sustainable development decision-making.

G. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CLOSING SESSION

50. A drafting committee was convened to prepare an initial draft set of recommendations based on the deliberations undertaken during the meeting. During this working session, the Ambassador of Brazil in Egypt provided the delegates with an update on global preparations for Rio+20 in Brazil. He stated that the

international community agreed that multilateralism was the best way to address global challenges, and that Rio+20 presents a unique opportunity to set the sustainable development agenda for the next two decades. The Ambassador noted that the conference will focus on poverty eradication as the greatest priority facing the international community. Participants were invited to submit their national and regional contributions to the outcome document by the 1 November 2011 deadline. The importance of promoting a green economy as a means for poverty eradication was emphasized, adding that countries should remain open to new opportunities that may arise, while ensuring that a green economy should adapt to national development priorities and be based on all three pillars of sustainable development.

51. The meeting concluded following deliberation on the draft recommendations prepared by the drafting committee. It was agreed that the recommendations would be distributed for final comment following editing and submitted to the UNCSD Bureau along with the meeting report as the input of the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting to the outcome document. It was also agreed that the recommendations would be submitted to CAMRE and its Technical Committee for endorsement, and would serve as the basis for preparing a ministerial statement to be submitted by Arab Governments to Rio+20.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

52. The meeting was held at the League of Arab States in Cairo during 16-17 October 2011.

B. OPENING

53. The opening session featured a statement by Ms. Aya Abdel Maksoud, representing the Arab Youth. The meeting was formally opened by Mr. Adel Farid Abdel-Kader, Officer-in-Charge, UNEP/ROWA, Ms. Elizabeth Thompson, Executive Coordinator for Rio+20, Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz, Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations and Vice-chair of the Bureau for the Rio+20 Preparatory Process, representing the African Group, Ms. Rima Khalaf, Executive Secretary of ESCWA, and Mr. Mohammed Ibrahim al-Tuwaijri, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs representing Mr. Nabil el-Araby, Secretary-General, League of Arab States.

C. PARTICIPANTS

54. The meeting was attended by a total of 135 participants, excluding representatives of the organizing agencies ESCWA, the League of Arab States and UNEP. Sixty-two participants represented 16 Arab Governments, while representation by civil society organizations and major groups was prominent, with 29 participants. It is noteworthy that Government representation covered a multitude of Ministries, namely foreign affairs, environment, labour, social affairs, planning, international cooperation, finance, water, economy, electricity, petroleum, industry and commerce, foreign trade, and agriculture. The full list of participants is contained in the annex to this report.

D. AGENDA

55. Presentations and discussions were made over the following five sessions:

- (a) Assessing the progress to date and gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development;
- (b) New and emerging challenges facing the Arab region;
- (c) The institutional framework for sustainable development;
- (d) A green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication;
- (e) Securing renewed political commitment for sustainable development.

E. EVALUATION

56. An evaluation questionnaire was distributed in order to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the meeting. A total of forty participants responded to the questionnaire, out of which 70 per cent rated the meeting to be of overall good to excellent quality. Around 80 per cent of responses judged that the meeting provided a good to excellent forum for exchange of information with other participants, while around 70 per cent of respondents rated the clarity of presentation and the quality of written documentation to be good or excellent. When asked about the need for follow-up activities, the majority of respondents (87 per cent) were positive. Suggested follow-up activities mainly included workshops on green economy and Rio+20 themes in general, in addition to follow-up relating to the implementation of the meeting recommendations.

F. DOCUMENTS

57. The documents submitted to the meeting are available on the ESCWA website at: < <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1545E> >.

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