



# Economic and Social Council

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**High-level political forum on sustainable development**  
Convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council  
8–17 July 2024  
**Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times  
of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable,  
resilient and innovative solutions**

## **Report of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development**

### **Note by the Secretariat**

The Secretariat hereby transmits the report of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, held from 5–7 March 2024, entitled “Delivering for sustainability and peace”, to the 2024 high-level political forum on sustainable development.



## Report of the 2024 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development: “Delivering for sustainability and peace”

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## Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the League of Arab States and United Nations system entities operating in the Arab region, held the 2024 session of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, the theme of which was “Delivering for sustainability and peace”. The session, which was held both in person and virtually in Beirut from 5 to 7 March 2024, was chaired by Oman.

2. The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development is the high-level regional forum for reviewing and following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region. The previous nine sessions were held in Amman (2014 and 2016), Manama (2015), Rabat (2017), Beirut (2018 and 2019), virtually in 2021, and in person and virtually in Beirut in 2022 and 2023. The Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which ESCWA adopted at its twenty-ninth session (Doha, 13 to 15 December 2016), established the Forum as an annual event at which the Governments of Arab States and sustainable development stakeholders can meet to review national and regional experiences and discuss mechanisms for implementing the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels.<sup>1</sup> Its conclusions are submitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which is held annually in New York in July.

3. The forum was preceded by a series of regional meetings: (1) the 2024 Arab regional parliamentary forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: The role of parliamentarians in accelerating the achievement of women’s economic empowerment in the Arab region (held virtually, 31 January to 1 February 2024); (2) the 2024 consultative meeting on the environmental dimension: Strengthening the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for sustainability and peace in the Arab region (in person and virtually, Cairo, 14 and 15 February 2024); and (3) the regional civil society forum on sustainable development on the road to the Summit of the Future (in person and virtual, Beirut, 4 March 2024).<sup>2</sup>

4. In addition to the opening and closing sessions, the Forum’s programme of work included six plenary sessions on the Sustainable Development Goals to be reviewed at the 2024 High-Level Political Forum, as well as on digital technology and the Summit of the Future. The sessions were as follows:

- Session 1: High-level dialogue: A more equal and sustainable world? Chasing the promise of digital technologies
- Session 2: Reforming public institutions for peace-building and inclusive societies (Goal 16)
- Session 3: Looking ahead to the Summit of the Future: Perspectives from the Arab region
- Session 4: Eradicating poverty in times of crisis (Goal 1)
- Session 5: Food system transformations in a polycrisis environment (Goal 2)
- Session 6: Building climate resilience in a polycrisis environment (Goal 13)

<sup>1</sup> The Forum’s terms of reference derive from a series of ESCWA resolutions, including resolution 327 (XXIX) on the working mechanisms of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, adopted at the twenty-ninth session of the Commission (Doha, 13–15 December 2016); resolution 314 (XXVIII) on the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, adopted at its twenty-eighth session (Tunis, 15–18 September 2014); and Executive Committee resolution 322 on a strategy and plan of action on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the Committee at its second meeting (Amman, 14–16 December 2015).

<sup>2</sup> The meeting was organized by the Arab NGO Network for Development.

5. The Forum included 12 special sessions that focused in more detail on regional priorities selected on the basis of the theme of the Forum and the Sustainable Development Goals under review: (1) Adopting a sectoral anti-corruption approach as a key accelerator to promote accountable and inclusive institutions; (2) The nexus between the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region; (3) the ESCWA Digital Arabic Content Award for Sustainable Development 2023–2024; (4) Collaborative futures: strategic foresight for sustainable development in a world of crisis; (5) Transforming education: greening solutions and inclusiveness; (6) The Second Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report; (7) The United Nations Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment (UNFSS+2) outcomes in the Arab region: action plan for resilient food systems transformation; (8) Overview of the international human rights mechanism’s contribution to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16; (9) Empowering communities: building resilience through early warning systems in the Arab region (10) Climate-resilient water solutions for communities hosting displaced persons; (11) Data in conflict and humanitarian crisis settings in the Arab region; and (12) Reform priorities of the multilateral system from a civil society perspective.

6. The Forum’s programme of work included the Arab and Sustainable Development Goal business roundtable, a special event that brought together business representatives and policymakers to discuss ways to enhance the private sector’s contribution to achieving the Goals in the region.

7. The Forum’s discussions led to the formulation of several messages that that will be submitted to high-level political forum on sustainable development to be held in New York from 8 to 17 July 2024 on the theme: “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions”. The messages were formulated as a regional contribution reflecting regional priorities.

## **I. Key messages of the 2024 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development**

8. The Forum produced several messages on reinforcing the 2030 Agenda in times of multiple crises, the most prominent of which are:

### **Peace and security**

- There must be an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Unconditional access to humanitarian aid must be granted. The Israeli occupation of Gaza and all of the Occupied Palestinian Territory must come to an end in line with international law.
- The Summit of the Future should be taken advantage of to press for comprehensive reform of the multilateral system. United Nations resolutions that support developing countries and countries affected by conflict and occupation must be implemented. Coalitions must be built between governments and civil society organizations to use the institutions of international law to help achieve stability, security and justice.
- Access must be ensured to information and communications technology (ICT) in conflict-affected countries and adopt legislation against the use of ICT as a weapon of war.
- A comprehensive Arab strategy for women, peace and security must be developed that responds to the conditions of conflict and occupation in the

region. It should be linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Effective and sustainable alliances should be established among Arab women's groups, especially those working in areas remote from city centres.

### **Information and communications technology (ICT)**

- Data safety should be ensured by establishing a global mechanism to certify AI datasets. Algorithms should be adopted and integration of multilateral organizations' efforts enhanced to capitalize on AI gains.
- Digital governance should be strengthened and human rights-based policies developed to ensure information and data privacy, protect people from breaches, and prevent technology from being monopolized by major actors. Mechanisms should be put in place to prevent existing inequalities from being perpetuated and to counter disinformation that AI might produce.
- Ministries of education and universities should be encouraged to establish an institutional framework for programmes and platforms linking formal and non-formal IT education. Local digital skills training should be increased to meet national needs.

### **Reform of the international financial architecture**

- Arab countries and financial institutions are called on to consolidate efforts and voices to enhance the representation of the countries of the South, including Arab countries, in global financial institutions. International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank voting should be restructured to give developing countries a stronger voice in decisions affecting their economies.
- The international financial architecture, in particular the distribution of IMF special drawing rights, should be reformed to ensure that developing countries in general, and in particular countries undergoing instability, have access to development finance during crises.

### **Youth and intergenerational justice**

- Strategic foresight should be incorporated into planning processes. Advantage should be taken of available technological knowledge and tools such as AI. Local communities and youth in particular should be included in foresight exercises.
- We must be better prepared to deal with major social and environmental trends, including ageing, geographic mobility and climate change. Work, learning, health and social care systems need to be reimagined, and innovative practices adopted to bring generations closer together and spread well-being to older and younger people.
- All stages of education should be greened to bring about desired changes in behaviour. The role of higher education institutions in empowering students to achieve real change and in producing relevant knowledge, evidence and data should be enhanced.

### **Engagement with the private sector**

- Governments should be called on to create an enabling environment that encourages companies to integrate sustainability into their strategies and initiatives. That includes targeted measures and policies, such as streamlining procedures for setting up businesses, improving access to finance and investments, ensuring that basic infrastructure is built and accessible, and reforming tax policies.

- Companies should make a cultural shift towards sustainable development that goes beyond mere corporate social responsibility. Sustainability should become an integral part of their strategies and operations. That entails planning for long-term growth driven by sustainability rather than short-term profits.

### **Combating poverty**

- Social protection programmes, economic policies and political reforms should be interlinked to reduce poverty among present generations while meeting the needs of future generations and ensuring growth and social justice.
- Reliable and well-managed poverty databases should be developed. Early warning systems should be established to detect potential poverty crises and take proactive measures.

### **Food systems**

- A three-pronged approach should be employed that provides relief, development and peace to achieve food security in conflict-affected countries; avoids politicizing humanitarian and development support in general and food in particular; and refrains from using starvation as a weapon of war.
- Investments should be made in food sovereignty at the regional and South levels, and not just at the national level, in every Arab country. Adequate and healthy food should be ensured for all in a sustainable manner and without falling into debt and financial deficit.

### **Climate action**

- Efforts by financing institutions to prioritize climate action finance flows to the least developed countries in the region should be stepped up. Financing mechanisms should be tailored to the specific circumstances of those countries.
- Nature-inspired solutions should be adopted that contribute to supporting adaptation to climate change and reducing the economic and human impact of the increasingly frequent extreme weather and climate events in the Arab region.
- While adaptation to climate change is a top priority for the Arab region, it is important for countries in the region work towards a just energy transition, with a focus on supporting youth participation in climate action and green job creation.

### **Public institutions**

- Anti-corruption legislation should be strictly enforced to create inclusive and peaceful societies. A culture of ethical conduct and integrity should be instilled in public administrations to restore confidence in national institutions.
- Competency-based recruitment policies should be followed, public sector employees should be invested in throughout their careers, and specified indicators should be adopted to measure performance.
- National human rights institutions should be recognized as key elements in the institutional architecture for achievement of the 2030 Agenda. In that connection, a formal mechanism should be established to include such institutions in the Sustainable Development Goals follow-up and review process, so as to make use of reports issued by them to lighten the reporting burden of States.

### **Sustainable Development Goals database**

- A systematic framework should be established for the use of non-traditional sources of data, such as geospatial information, big data and social media data. Consideration should be given to using emerging AI technologies to generate statistics so as to ensure the continuity of data flow in conflict and humanitarian emergencies.

## **II. Sessions and presentations**

### **A. Opening session**

9. The opening session was addressed by: Rola Dashti, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA; Najib Mikati, Prime Minister of Lebanon; Sa'id al-Saqri, Minister of Economy of Oman in his capacity as Chair of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2024; Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations; and Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, representing the Secretary-General of the League.

10. Their remarks addressed the importance of joint action towards peaceful options, reform of public institutions, building bridges towards achieving peace and security in the region, and the need for solidarity with those who suffer from conflict and occupation. Speakers stressed the close connection between social justice and sustainable development, and the need to reform the global financial architecture to make it more equitable and accessible to all, and to enhance financing policies, investments and multilateral solutions to drive transformative changes for present and future generations. They noted that the Summit of the Future to be held in September 2024 in New York was an opportunity to achieve that end and to strengthen international cooperation to realize peace, development and human rights for all.

### **B. Plenary sessions**

#### **Session 1 – High-level dialogue**

##### **A more equal and sustainable world? Chasing the promise of digital technologies**

11. The dialogue was moderated by Maisaa Youssef, Cluster Leader, 2030 Agenda and SDG Coordination, ESCWA. Guests included: Paola Narváez Ojeda, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations and President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and Guy Ryder, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations for Policy. Panellists included: Abdulrahman Al Mutairi, Vice-Governor, Digital Government Authority, Saudi Arabia (virtually); Ahmad Marafi, Co-Founder and CEO, CODED, Kuwait; Mohamad Najem, Executive Director, SMEX, Lebanon; Hoda Alkhzaimi, Research Assistant Professor and Director, Center for Cybersecurity, New York University Abu Dhabi, President of Emirates Digital Association for Women, United Arab Emirates (virtually).

12. Panellists stressed the importance of a global mechanism for certifying and guaranteeing the integrity of AI system data sets. They touched on the importance of digital governance to address existing gaps, regulate technology markets and consolidate efforts to formulate guidelines to regulate the development of technologies and address their misuse. Speakers focused on the need to develop policies that ensure confidentiality of data, protect people from abuses, and challenge disinformation produced by AI that might contribute to increasing inequality and injustice. The session highlighted the importance of cooperation between the public

and private sectors to guide the use of technology and prevent its monopolization by major actors, so that it can be an engine of progress and a better life. Interventions stressed the urgent need to step up discussions and integrate efforts among various parties to reap the benefits of AI.

13. The session addressed the subject of digital human capabilities in the region, and the need to provide young people with a platform supported by the private sector to enable them to learn the latest technologies free of charge or at a reasonable cost, which would give them the opportunity to work remotely with international companies. Speakers focused on the need to reform the computer science education system to make it more flexible, focus curricula on practical knowledge, enhance educational interactivity, and align education outcomes with the needs of the labour market.

## **Session 2**

### **Reforming public institutions for peace-building and inclusive societies (Goal 16)**

14. The session was moderated by Lamia Moubayed Bissat, Non-resident Senior International Fellow, American University of Beirut, and Vice-Chair of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA), Lebanon. Panellists included: Mohamed Alhawri, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen; Tarek Ladeb, Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations and Vice-President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council; Mervat Rishmawi, Human Rights Regional Expert (virtually); Fadi Salem, Director of Policy Research, Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, United Arab Emirates; and Kinda Hattar, Middle East and North Africa Regional Advisor, Transparency International.

15. Interventions and discussions at the session stressed that sustainable development cannot be achieved without strong institutions and social pacts founded on human rights. Speakers addressed the urgent need to reform public administration and effectively fortify national institutions. They highlighted the importance of civil service recruitment being subject to qualification and competence standards. They called for a participatory approach that included all citizens with a view to establishing governance frameworks that fulfil the conditions of transparency and accountability and meet the needs of individuals and communities at risk of neglect. They stressed the importance of humanitarian assistance being coupled with a long-term development approach in least developed countries and in conflict-affected countries. Speakers touched on the importance of enforcing anti-corruption legislation to build inclusive and peaceful societies and instilling ethical conduct and integrity in public administrations in order to restore confidence in national institutions. Speakers stressed the need to reform the United Nations Security Council and the international financial architecture to stop waves of violence and conflict. They agreed on the importance of reducing military spending and channelling it towards financing development initiatives, and strengthening the role of parliamentarians in national budget oversight.

## **Session 3**

### **Looking ahead to the Summit of the Future: Perspectives from the Arab region**

16. The session was moderated by Diana Moukalled, Co-founder, Daraj Media Platform, Lebanon. Panellists included: Guy Ryder, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Policy; Jamal El Saghir, Professor of Practice, Institute for the Study of International Development, McGill University; Diala Chehade, Attorney, Center for Defending Civil Rights and Liberties, Lebanon; Marwa Fatafta, MENA Policy and Advocacy Director, AccessNow (virtually); Shereen Hussein, Professor of Health and Social Care Policy, Department of Health Services Research and Policy, London



School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (virtual). There was an intervention from Kairat Sarybay, Secretary General, Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, in which he presented the work of the Conference, which is a multi-national forum for dialogue to address common regional issues, globalization, economic development and escalating challenges. Recorded remarks were delivered by Felipe Paullier, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs. He stressed the importance of seizing the opportunity offered by the Summit of the Future to rebuild confidence in global governance and join forces for a better present and a better tomorrow for all young people.

17. The panellists touched on the themes of the Pact for the Future, which was to be adopted at the Summit. They stressed the need to reform the international financial architecture to enhance the representation of countries of the South and provide greater access to development finance for developing countries. They stressed the need to reform the governance system within United Nations organs, in particular the Security Council, to ensure implementation of United Nations resolutions that support developing countries and countries affected by conflict and occupation. Light was shed on the role of cross-border agreements in ensuring that technologies exported as part of digital cooperation were regulated and used transparently and responsibly, to avoid further human rights violations. Interventions stressed the need to ensure that human rights principles are integrated into the design of technologies using existing mechanisms and standards, including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business, which impose on companies the responsibility to ensure that their products and policies do not violate fundamental rights. Also stressed was the need to ensure enforcement, challenge impunity and confront the flouting of mechanisms and standards. On the subject of intergenerational justice, panellists noted the need to increase awareness and knowledge of older persons' issues and to reimagine work, learning, health and social care systems to make possible qualitative solutions that had a positive impact on all demographic groups.

#### **Session 4**

##### **Eradicating poverty in times of crisis (Goal 1)**

18. The session was moderated by Sobhiya Najjar, journalist specializing in Social Economics and Public Policy, Lebanon. Rachid Kadida, Director of Social Development, Ministry of Solidarity, Social Inclusion and Family, Morocco (virtually); Barq Al-Dmour, Secretary General, Ministry of Social Development, Jordan; Nizar El-Mohsni, General Director of Common Services, Ministry of Social Affairs, Tunisia; Touhami Abdelkhalek, Professor of Economics, Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, Morocco (virtually); and Samir Makdisi, Professor Emeritus of Economics, Founding Director of the Institute of Financial Economics, American University of Beirut, Lebanon.

19. Panellists highlighted the efforts of Morocco, Jordan and Tunisia to develop social protection plans and strategies, support vulnerable and low-income groups, and combat multidimensional poverty. They touched on the disparity in poverty levels in Arab countries and the relationship between that disparity and the internal instability that affects the development process in conflict-affected countries. The speakers stressed the importance of achieving coherence between social protection policies and economic policies, and the need to look ahead when developing anti-poverty policies to ensure that the requirements of present generations were met while fulfilling the needs of future generations and determining the soundest path to combining growth with social justice. Speakers touched on the importance of designing social welfare programmes that take into account the needs of the middle classes, avoiding dependence on subsidies for groups at risk of neglect, and lifting families out of poverty through comprehensive development programmes and policies that promoted

income generation. Speakers recommended that Governments establish and administer reliable poverty databases to serve as early warning systems to detect potential poverty crises, and provide support for proactive measures to avoid them.

### **Session 5**

#### **Food system transformations in a polycrisis environment (Goal 2)**

20. The session was moderated by Luna Abu Swaireh, Director General, Center for Arab Unity Studies. Panellists included: David Nabarro, Strategic Director of 4SD, Geneva, Switzerland; Ibrahim Dukheiri, Director General, Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (virtually); Ahmed Nasser AlBakri, Undersecretary for Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Oman (virtually); Mariam Al Jaajaa, General Manager, Arab Society for the Protection of Nature; Fadhel Kaboub, Associate Professor, Denison University and President of the Global Institute for Sustainable Prosperity; and Maria Selin, Head of MENA Development Cooperation, Embassy of Sweden in Jordan (virtually).

21. It emerged from the discussions that achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2 was elusive in most Arab countries. Participants stressed that peace was a prerequisite for sustainable transformation in food systems. The discussions shed light on the importance of strengthening regional integration and adopting a comprehensive and cooperative approach to address the root causes of food shortages, especially in light of the multiple crises facing the region, which included violent conflict, displacement, climate change and a precarious financial and economic situation. The discussions stressed that the debt crisis in the countries of the South was the creation of an unfair global economic and trade structure that had entrenched a vicious circle in which the existing food, energy and manufacturing deficits in these countries and the inefficiency of food and energy subsidy policies were intertwined. Historical imbalances must be addressed in cooperation with the countries of the South and there must be investment in food sovereignty, not only at the level of each country, but also at the regional level. Development organizations were called upon to depoliticize humanitarian support and adopt a rights-based approach, and to coordinate and leverage support within a framework that linked relief, development and peacebuilding in neglected and conflict-affected areas in order to go beyond mere resilience to address the root causes of conflict.

### **Session 6**

#### **Building climate resilience in a polycrisis environment (Goal 13)**

22. The session was moderated by Nadim Farajallah, Chief Sustainability Officer, Lebanese American University, Lebanon. Panellists included: Razan Al Mubarak, United Nations Climate Change High-Level Champion for COP 28 and President of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (recorded speech); Zaghoul Samhan, Director General of Policies and Planning, Environment Quality Authority, State of Palestine; Abdullah Bin Ali Al Amri, Chair, Environment Authority, Oman (virtually), Asma Rouabhia, Youth Climate Advocate, Tunisia; and Amgad Elmahdi, Regional Manager, MENA region, Climate Fund.

23. The panellists stressed that chronic conflict, occupation and displacement conditions exacerbated the difficulties caused by climate change, and did severe damage to natural resources, as evidenced most recently in the war on Gaza. Donors were called upon to contribute to adequate fiscal space and financing for climate action in conflict-affected countries and refrain from politicizing aid. In the course of the discussions, it was pointed out that the Middle East and North Africa is one of the regions least able to attract financing for climate action. That meant that efforts should be stepped up with climate funds to channel financing to countries in that region on concessional terms. The session included a presentation on the approach of

channelling climate finance in the least developed Arab countries from the Green Climate Fund, stressing the need to make sure that such finance was having an overall positive impact on the beneficiary country and assess the level of exposure of beneficiaries to climate change risks.

24. Topics raised by the session included efforts by high-level climate leaders at the United Nations along with non-governmental actors to mobilize participation in climate action in the region, the need to involve youth in climate action decision-making, and how to assess the impact of climate change on different groups. Interventions stressed the role of nature-based solutions and dam systems in addressing the risks of natural disasters and increasingly common extreme weather events in Oman, and the importance of increasing the contribution of healthy food systems to climate change adaptation in the region. They addressed initiatives taken in that connection, including the United Arab Emirates declaration on sustainable agriculture, resilient food systems and climate action.

## C. Special sessions

### Special session 1

#### **Adopting a sectoral anti-corruption approach as key accelerator to promote accountable and inclusive institutions**

25. The session was moderated by Younes Abouyoub, Chief of Governance, ESCWA. Panellists included: Afrah Saleh, Chair of the Supreme National Authority on Combating Corruption, Yemen (virtually); Mr. Haytham Yassine, Senior Integrity and Anti-Corruption Specialist, Regional Hub for the Arab States, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); Kinda Hattar, Senior Adviser, Transparency International; and Cendrella Abou Fayad, Chair of the Management Department, School of Business Administration, Lebanese University.

26. The session focused on the role of corruption in hindering progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the negative impact of corruption on various public sectors, such as health and education. The session included a practical example from the experience of Lebanese University in adopting a sectoral corruption risk management approach, which involved identifying weaknesses, assessing corruption risks and proposing mitigating measures and corrective actions to enhance administrative, financial and academic processes with a view to improving the quality of education. Speakers stressed the need for anti-corruption authorities to be highly independent and efficient, especially in political environments with weak institutions. Speakers touched on a case study from Yemen, where the Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption has the legal independence to investigate corruption allegations. Unfortunately, curbing corruption remains a challenge because of weak institutions and protracted conflict. They stressed the need to harmonize national anti-corruption strategies with the standards set out in the United Nations Convention against Corruption. They also emphasized the importance of right-to-information and budget scrutiny laws when it comes to enhancing the transparency of public procurement processes.

### Special session 2

#### **The nexus between the women, peace and security agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region**

27. The session was moderated by Heba Zayyan, Acting Regional Adviser for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action, Regional Office for the Arab States of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) (virtually). Rania Tarazi, Gender Team Leader, UNDP, Amman

Hub, Regional Bureau for Arab States, delivered welcome remarks (virtually) in which she presented the main themes of the session. Panellists speaking virtually at the session included: Fadia Kiwan, Director General of the Arab Women Organization; Amal Hamad, Minister of Women's Affairs, State of Palestine; Magda El-Sanousi, International Expert on development, equality and the women, security and peace agenda, the Sudan; and Buthaina Al-Mahdawi, Founder and President of Hawa'a Organization for Relief and Development and the Sustainable Development Goals Network 2030, Iraq. The session concluded with a speech by Marc Rubin, Deputy Regional Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa.

28. Statements and discussions addressed the role of efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in preventing conflicts and supporting the implementation of the women, security and peace agenda. They also touched on the need to invest in comprehensive rights-based development and to address the root causes of conflict, including inequality, governance failure and the depletion of natural resources due to climate change. The discussions stressed the urgent need for concerted conflict resolution and reconstruction efforts and the need to increase the participation of women of all ages in the work of humanitarian organizations. The panellists highlighted the dire humanitarian and health situation in the Gaza Strip in particular, and in Palestine, the Sudan and Iraq in general. They also focused on the impacts of conflict, violence and insecurity on women and children and the importance of protecting minimum levels of basic rights and essential services. Discussions focused on the central importance of coordination, coherence and accountability among international actors, building partnerships and strengthening solidarity within and between countries to reduce military expenditure, curbing the use of weapons, monitoring human rights violations, support for holding perpetrators accountable and the use of non-violent methods in conflict resolution.

### **Special session 3**

#### **ESCWA Digital Arabic Content Award for Sustainable Development 2023–2024**

29. This session was dedicated to announcing the winners of the ESCWA Digital Arabic Content Award in its third cycle (2023–2024). It was organized by ESCWA in partnership with the World Summit Awards. This award is given for outstanding projects related to the Sustainable Development Goals, in two categories: institutions and young entrepreneurs. The session included statements by Nibal Idlebi, Acting Director of the Statistics, Information Society and Technology Cluster at ESCWA, and by Ziad Al-Makary, the Minister of Information of Lebanon, who presented the awards to the winning projects. The session was followed by a panel discussion moderated by Mirna El Hajj, Programme Officer of the Statistics, Information Society and Technology Cluster, during which the winners gave a brief overview of their projects and answered questions about their contributions to innovation and digital Arabic content, the economic and social impact of the projects and difficulties faced in the areas of development and sustainability.

30. Seven projects won prizes and two received special mentions. In the institutions category, the winners were the Ayn platform from Oman, the BravoBravo application from the United Arab Emirates and the Horizons platform from the State of Palestine. The winners in the young entrepreneurs category were the Arab platform from the State of Palestine, the My Language Letters project from Lebanon, the We Are All Mothers platform from the United Arab Emirates and the Let's Innovate platform from Jordan. Special mentions were received by the Soundeals platform from the United Arab Emirates in the institutions category and the Come to Palestine project from the State of Palestine in the young entrepreneurs category. During the discussion, some of the difficulties facing projects were addressed, especially

regarding supportive environments and institutional incubators for initiatives, funding sources, and taking advantage of project incubators.

#### **Special session 4**

##### **Collaborative futures: strategic foresight for sustainable development in a world of crisis**

31. The session was moderated by Abdelmenam Mohamed, Regional Coordinator for Science Policy, United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for West Asia. The session began with an opening speech by Mounir Tabet, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA. Paula Narváez Ojeda, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations and President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, delivered a statement. The session was addressed by: Stephen Kenney, Director of the Middle East Institute Strategic Foresight Initiative (virtually); Layla Al-Musawi, Programme Manager, Dissemination of Scientific Culture, Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (virtually); Moutaz Al Riyami, Executive Director, Gas Directorate at Petroleum Development Oman; and Nourhan Badr El-Din, Youth Futures Senior Fellow, UNICEF Global Office of Research and Foresight.

32. The session included a presentation on the key role of strategic foresight and reflection in the future of planning processes and implementation paths in enabling the Arab region to overcome multidimensional challenges and crises and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The panellists addressed the importance of effectively guiding decision-making amid global crises, in particular the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, by leveraging strategic foresight and available tools and methodologies to monitor emerging signposts of change and ensure sustainable and resilient responses. They stressed the importance of forward-looking efforts to shape new perspectives. They also highlighted the issues of inevitable technological progress and the need to adapt to it; taking advantage of the tools available in foresight processes, such as artificial intelligence; and learning from success stories such as Singapore and Finland. Panellists called for increasing and stimulating youth participation and integrating youth perspectives into strategic foresight processes to advance sustainable development.

#### **Special session 5**

##### **Transforming education: greening solutions and inclusiveness**

33. The session was moderated by Elie Mekhael, Senior Educational Adviser, Center for Educational Research and Development, Lebanon. Speakers included: Maysoun Chehab, Regional Education Coordinator, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Multisectoral Regional Office; Dekmara Georgescu, Education Programme Specialist, UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office; Ghinwa Itani, Senior Education Specialist, UNICEF, Lebanon; Cezar Mahmoud, Founder of Cezar Projects, Lebanon; and Karma El-Hassan, Professor, American University of Beirut.

34. Speakers highlighted the need for the greening approach to be adopted at all levels of education, from early childhood to higher education, including in technical and vocational and non-formal education for young people. They also highlighted the four pillars of greening education, namely, greening schools, greening learning, greening capabilities and greening society. Guidelines were introduced to assist educational policymakers in greening educational curricula. The experience of UNICEF was discussed as it related to raising awareness on the use of renewable energy in public schools and health facilities in Lebanon. Emphasis was placed on the importance of equipping young people with the green skills needed for contributing effectively to societal change. Panellists discussed the Cezar Projects initiative, which

is aimed at motivating young people and the local community to get involved in sustainable agriculture and ecotourism, organizing events to enhance the entrepreneurial skills of young people in these fields and including persons with disabilities in the initiative. The results of a survey on education for sustainable development initiatives in the Arab region, carried out in collaboration with the UNESCO Regional Office, showed that Arab countries are in general committed to education for sustainable development. Their efforts are focused mostly on changing the learning environment, promoting relevant policies and building capacity, and more efforts are needed when it comes to youth empowerment and mobilization and community engagement.

### **Special session 6**

#### **Second Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report**

35. The session was moderated by Tarek El Nabulsi, Minister plenipotentiary, League of Arab States and addressed by Khaled Abu-Ismaïl, Chief of Development Challenges and Poverty Section, ESCWA; Fekadu Terefe, Programme Specialist, UNDP, Jordan (virtually); Corinne Mitchell, Executive Director, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, United Kingdom (virtually); Ashraf El Araby, President of the Institute of National Planning, Egypt (virtually); Luigi Peter Ragno, Chief of Social Policy, UNICEF, Lebanon; and Sabina Alkire, Director, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, United Kingdom (virtually).

36. The session addressed the findings of the Second Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report, focusing on the progress made in the region in reducing poverty in all its dimensions. The report, which is based on the revised Arab Multidimensional Poverty Index developed through the joint efforts of and discussions among the League of Arab States, ESCWA, UNICEF, UNDP and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, showed a marked reduction in the level of multidimensional poverty in middle-income countries in the region. However, this progress has not been universal, as large numbers of individuals and children, a quarter of the population assessed in these countries, remain in poverty. Using the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index to assess severe forms of multidimensional poverty, the report shows a high prevalence of multidimensional poverty in the least developed Arab countries, although significant progress has been made in reducing it. The session included a presentation of the main recommendations contained in the report, in the light of the axes of the Arab Strategic Framework for the Eradication of Multidimensional Poverty 2020–2030 issued by the League of Arab States, which seeks to strengthen efforts to reduce evidence of multidimensional poverty by 50 per cent by 2030. The session concluded by emphasizing the importance of using the revised Arab Multidimensional Poverty Index to track progress in the region and to advocate for policy interventions aimed at improving the well-being of the people of the region.

### **Special session 7**

#### **The United Nations Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment (UNFSS+2) outcomes in the Arab region: action plan for resilient food systems transformation**

37. The session was moderated by Theresa Wong, Natural Resources Officer of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, and David Nabarro, Strategic Director, 4SD Foundation. Opening remarks were delivered by Ibrahim Eldukheri, Director-General of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (virtually); Sylvia Ekra, Deputy Director of the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub, and Reem Nejdawi, Chief of the Food and Environment Policies Section of ESCWA. Panellists included: Inaya Ezzeddine, Member of the Lebanese Parliament; Fayez Al-Moukdad, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform of the Syrian Arab Republic;

Ehab Badawy, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt; Hasan Ashqar, Director-General of Planning and Policies, Ministry of Agriculture, State of Palestine; Ahmed Al-Badeery, Assistant Director-General, Ministry of Agriculture, Iraq; and Said Saghir Zarouali, Head of Agricultural Programmes and Rural Development Division, High Commission for Planning of Morocco. The session included key remarks by: Ayham Al Homsy, Razan Zwaiter and Fadi Jabr, respectively representing the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands, the Arab Group for the Protection of Nature and the Arab Federation for Food Industries.

38. The session involved a discussion of an assessment of the achievements of the United Nations Food Systems Summit two years after it was held in the region. It included presentations on the progress made by Arab countries in transforming their food systems, steps to be taken in the future and the most serious challenges they face. The session provided a platform for sharing successful strategies and for identifying future solutions across the six action areas outlined in the Secretary-General's call to action for accelerated food systems transformation. As the Arab region is not on track to achieve the Goals related to food security and climate action, calls were made for an integrated approach to food systems and the alignment of food-related climate action plans with food systems transformation, including through the food systems convergence initiative launched by the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. Panellists emphasized the importance of a people-centred approach, improved governance and broader stakeholder participation through the inclusion of the perspectives of young people, civil society and persons with disabilities. They also stressed the need to address the fragility of food systems at the structural level and to bring peace in order to find sustainable, just and inclusive solutions.

### **Special session 8**

#### **Overview of the international human rights mechanism's contribution to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16**

39. The session was moderated by Jessy Chahine, Public Information Officer at the Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The following OHCHR staff members participated: Kinga Janki, Human Rights Officer; Ansam Al-Abayechi, Regional Gender Adviser (virtually); Maan Salman, Anti-Racial Discrimination Adviser; Lyn Eid, Capacity Building Programme for the Middle East and North Africa, Human Rights Treaties Branch (virtually); and Jad Hajj Chehade, Associate Human Rights Officer.

40. The session reviewed areas of action related to the Human Rights Council special procedures, in which experts report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective and support the formulation of relevant international standards. Drawing on positive examples from the region, panellists highlighted how special procedures have helped to reform the legal architecture and public policy, prevent and put a stop to human rights violations, and support the victims. They also highlighted how special procedures mandate holders use thematic reports, country visits and other activities to help States and stakeholders in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and enhancing the close connection between the human rights process and the 2030 Agenda, with a particular focus on Sustainable Development Goal 16. Speakers identified ways to leverage the international human rights instruments to achieve Goal 16 and, in particular, to combat racial discrimination and violence against children. Speakers emphasized that national human rights institutions and mechanisms for coordinating the sustainable development goals must coalesce, and that the work done by those actors must be combined with efforts to enhance efficiency and tackle double standards. The

discussions brought out the need to develop a formal cooperation mechanism for national human rights institutions in monitoring progress towards achieving the sustainable development goals and preparing voluntary national review reports.

### **Special session 9**

#### **Empowering communities: building resilience through early warning systems in the Arab region**

41. The session was moderated by Saira Ahmed, Risk Knowledge Programme Officer, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Regional Office for Arab States. The panellists were: Chadi Abdallah, National Early Warning System platform, CNRS Lebanon; Khader Mohamed Nur, Director, Somali Disaster Management Agency (SoDMA), Somalia (virtually); Hamidi Soule Saadi, Director, Volcanological Observatory of Karthala, the Comoros (virtually); Mohamed Salem, Chief of the Communications and Networks Unit, United Arab Emirates (virtually); Ahmad Raad, expert, Telecommunications Regulation Authority, Lebanon; and Kassem Chalaan, Lebanese Red Cross Society.

42. The session focused on how to implement the global Early Warnings for All initiative in the Arab region. Speakers provided insights and shared experiences with early warning systems in the Comoros, Lebanon, Somalia and the United Arab Emirates, and strategies used in the field to strengthen the resilience of communities facing various risks. Strengthening early warning systems across the Arab region required a holistic approach, from gap analysis to the formulation of appropriate strategies. Care should be taken to ensure that resources reach a range of communities, including those at risk of neglect. The session focused on the need to identify gaps that hindered risk-informed development, such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, limited technology transfer and lack of community awareness. The session also addressed means of cooperation, knowledge exchange and technology transfer among Arab States. It was noted that cooperation between Government agencies and community-based organizations could facilitate the exchange of information between early warning systems to build disaster preparedness and response capacities. Participants emphasized the need to develop targeted risk awareness campaigns and promote the transfer of appropriate technologies with a view to mobilizing resources and expertise across countries.

### **Special session 10**

#### **Climate-resilient water solutions for communities hosting displaced people**

43. The session was moderated by Carol Chouchani Cherfane, Cluster Leader for Climate Change and Natural Resource Sustainability, ESCWA. Panellists included: Taina Christiansen, Country Programme Chief, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Lebanon; Sara Al Haleeq, Head of the Adaptation Unit, Ministry of Environment, Jordan (virtually); Salem Darwich, Adviser to the Minister of Agriculture, Lebanon; Anjam Mohammed Ameen Sabir, Water Sanitation and Hygiene Support (WASH) Transition Coordinator, Mercy Corps; Iraq; Lea Mascaro, Consortium Coordinator, HawkaaMaa, European Union in Lebanon; Georges Saade, Environmental Water and Sanitation Engineer, UN-Habitat Lebanon; Mohamed Emara, Environmental Water and Sanitation Engineer, UN-Habitat Jordan; and Sarah Hess, Assistant Economic Officer, ESCWA.

44. Panellists addressed the need for a variety of coordinated and integrated solutions at the policy and technology levels to address water scarcity in Arab cities hosting displaced people. Proactive efforts had begun for that purpose, despite the difficulties faced by some regional States. Initiatives had been launched to collect rainwater on rooftops, treat grey wastewater and reuse wastewater in schools and municipal buildings. In Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon, sustainable agroecological



practices were being adopted, and lessons were being learned that could be replicated in other parts of the region. Participants focused on the need to work closely with the community and relevant institutions, and to involve all stakeholders, including groups at risk of neglect, in the process of identifying and implementing appropriate interventions. The goal should be to develop a coherent blend of humanitarian aid, development aid and climate action financing in order to help cities to cope with the multiple crises of climate change, water scarcity, refugee flows and internal displacement, and to help countries and communities to transition from humanitarian support to comprehensive development programmes.

### **Special session 11**

#### **Data in conflict and humanitarian crises in the Arab region**

45. The session was moderated by Ismail Lubbad, officer in charge, Demographic and Social Statistics Section, ESCWA. Opening remarks were made by Nibal Idlebi, Director, Statistics, Information Society and Technology Cluster, ESCWA. The panellists were Safa Mautee, Head of Central Statistical Organization, Yemen; Ali Mohamed Abbas Ahmed, Director-General, Central Bureau of Statistics, the Sudan (virtually); Khalid Abu Khalid, Director-General, Registers and Statistical Monitoring Directorate, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Palestine; Magued Osman, Chief Executive Officer, Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research (Baseera), Egypt (virtually); and Emad ElHajj Chehade, Head of the Buildings Directorate and Acting Director of the Port of Sidon, Lebanon. Participants in the dialogue included Chokri Ben Yahia, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in the Arab region and Abdihamid Warsame, Technical Officer for Health Emergency Data and Risk Assessment, Health Emergencies Management, World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (virtually).

46. The discussion addressed the effects of crises and conflicts on the national data system, including the destruction of infrastructure, the loss of equipment and databases, the interruption of statistical work, and the difficulty of conducting surveys under a continuing occupation. Statements focused on opportunities and needs for rebuilding databases, data sources and necessary capacities, and ways to cooperate with international and local actors. Participants highlighted modern technologies that could be used in conflict situations, such as remote sensors, geographic information systems and AI, in addition to the data provided by social media platforms. It was, however, pointed out that obtaining data from some sources, such as mobile systems, required cooperation protocols between operators and service providers. Discussions focused on the importance of data quality and statistical systems management, collaborative work in developing emergency response methodologies, the use of modelling and the applicability of the humanitarian-development nexus. Participants concluded that, in view of its importance in coordinating rescue and rapid response operations, information must be made available when disasters occurred.

### **Special session 12**

#### **Reform priorities of the multilateral system from a civil society perspective**

47. The session was moderated by Manar Zaiter, Research and Programmes Officer, Arab Non-Governmental Organization Network for Development (ANND). The panellists were Mohamad Said Saadi, Adviser, ANND; Medani Abass, Director, Nidaa Organization, the Sudan; and Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director, ANND.

48. Statements and discussions focused on the need for a multifaceted approach to reforming and transforming global governance, including the establishment of agreed international frameworks to ensure fairer representation of the countries of the South, the promotion of nationally owned reforms through a rights-based population-led approach, and the creation of an enabling environment for social movements to ensure

the participation of groups at risk of neglect and build prosperity for future generations. Speakers mentioned the need to uphold the right to development and self-determination. The issues raised included the need to tackle centralized decision-making, end the use of the veto in the Security Council, and review the voting mechanisms of IMF and the World Bank to ensure that developing States were more equitably represented in decisions affecting their economies. Participants addressed the limited capacity of international organizations to follow up on human rights concerns. In particular, they referred to the violations committed by the Israeli occupation forces on Palestinian territory and the war on Gaza. Participants pointed out that the restrictions imposed on civil society and the media made it difficult to engage in discussions about development in the Arab region. They stressed that the Arabic language should be seen as a development tool, and that priority should be given to the recommendations made by civil society to the Summit of the Future.

## **D. Special events**

### **Arab SDG business round table: Partnerships for accelerating the SDGs**

49. The forum was moderated by Yasser Akkaoui, Founder, Kapital Concept, and Publisher, Executive Magazine, Lebanon. Guy Ryder, Under-Secretary-General for Policy, was special guest. Panellists included: Nasser Al Maawali, Deputy Minister of the Economy of Oman (virtually); Mona Fayed, Assistant Minister for Sustainable Development Affairs, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Egypt; Rana AlDababneh, Corporate Communication and Sustainability Chief Officer and Member of the Executive Committee, Orange Jordan; Zakaria Al Haj Hammoud, Senior Adviser, Union of Arab Banks; Najoua Zhar, Economic Adviser, Union of Arab Chambers; and Maissa Abou Adal Ghanem, Chief Sustainability Officer and Board Member, Holdal Group, Lebanon (virtually). Alexandra Tarazi, Senior Regional Programmes Manager for the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, United Nations Global Compact, also participated.

50. The round table highlighted the initiatives of Governments in the Arab region aimed at supporting the private sector and enhancing its role in sustainable development by developing basic infrastructure, undertaking legal reforms, providing financing and investments, boosting partnerships for development projects, and formulating specific goals to be achieved in cooperation with, and with support from, the private sector, as part of national development plans and economic diversification plans. The dialogue made clear that such government initiatives were intended to respond to the challenges that continued to be faced by the private sector in the Arab region, including regulatory obstacles, complex procedures for setting up companies and obtaining licences, and weak infrastructure and transparency. On the private sector side, the session touched on examples of companies that had made principles of sustainability part of their culture, incorporated them into their strategies, and expanded corporate social responsibility to include women and youth, climate change, capacity-building and digital inclusion. The discussion highlighted the growing interest in measuring corporate performance in terms of environment, society and governance. It stressed the importance of international initiatives on information and data collection, including those of the United Nations Global Compact. The session concluded by emphasizing the shared responsibility of government, the private sector and regional and international organizations, as well as the importance of transitioning from a culture of quick short-term profits to a culture of growth that took into account sustainable development in the long term.

## E. Closing session

51. In closing, the Chair of the Forum, Sa'ïd al-Saqri, Minister of Economy for Oman, thanked ESCWA, the League of Arab States and the United Nations system operating in the region for organizing the Forum. He underlined the commitment of Oman to convey the Arab Forum's messages to the high-level political forum to be held in New York from 8–17 July 2024, and shared some of the main messages with the attendees.

52. Mounir Tabet, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA, thanked Oman for chairing the Forum. He also expressed gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of the Forum for sharing ideas, experiences and solutions, and for their commitment to equitable sustainable development in the region.

## III. Participants

53. Some 1,370 participants took part in the Forum, 423 in person at the United Nations House in Beirut, and 947 virtually. The attendees included high-level representatives of governments and parliaments, civil society, youth groups, think tanks, the private sector, regional organizations from the Arab world and beyond, regional actors involved in sustainable development, supreme audit institutions, funds in the Arab region, a number of media organizations, and the organizing entities, namely, United Nations agencies and organizations operating in the Arab region, the League of Arab States and ESCWA.

54. Some 22 Arab countries were represented at the Forum, in person or virtually, by government delegations or their embassies. They included: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and the State of Palestine.

55. The United Nations and its organs were represented at the Forum by the Deputy Secretary-General of the Organization, the President of the Economic and Social Council and representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Coordination Office (DCO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Volunteers (UNV), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Department of Operational Support (DOS), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and a large number of United Nations resident representatives in Arab Countries.