



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

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Session Two: Implementation at the regional and sub-regional level

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Statement by Mr. Mohamed Ali Alhakim

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Mr. Chair,
Your excellencies,
Distinguished delegates and colleagues,

It is a personal pleasure to address this room in my new capacity as the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, ESCWA.

Our Commission serves 18 Arab countries in a region that is unique in its attributes and challenges. Arab countries share with pride a common history, language, and aspirations for regional integration and solidarity. Despite the varied development trajectories of the sub-regions, our member states have a commitment to an Arab vision for moving forward.

And they look to us, **as the regional commission in particular**, to support that vision, and to identify the opportunities for coherence and integration. They expect from ESCWA the substantive support and the convening power to bring everyone around the same table, to ensure that all Arab women and men, girls and boys, are advancing together.

However, striving for sustainable development in the Arab World has possibly never been harder. Our region is experiencing some of the world's greatest political and humanitarian crises. The displaced in countries like Syria are in the millions. Infrastructure and services in Middle Income countries like Jordan and Lebanon that host refugees are stretched to the breaking point. A number of countries are in crisis and the conflicts in Libya and Yemen are reversing already meagre development gains. The forces of violent extremism are now a serious threat to peace and development. Moreover, our region continues to suffer with the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the longest occupation in modern history.

The effects of occupation and violence in any one country are felt throughout the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 2030 Agenda places people at the heart of sustainable development. However, millions of the people we serve are today uprooted, jobless, and their ties with communities and the state brutally severed.

Our challenges therefore make it painfully clear: We need peace, we need political solutions, we need inclusive democratic structures. As the Regional Commission, ESCWA **will continue to speak loud and clear at the global stage: the Arab world needs peace. This is a regional responsibility, and it is also a global responsibility.**

However, the Arab world also needs sustainable development. We cannot afford to wait for the conflicts to end. We cannot use conflict as an excuse to do less. **And this is our vision and our commitment at ESCWA: we aim to double our efforts to equip member states with the knowledge, capacity, data, and tools to preserve development gains, and create opportunities for advancement.**

ESCWA provides the space for the countries of the region to come together **and develop integrated policy frameworks to move the region forward.** We foster dialogue between key stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental, and harness partnerships in support of the 2030 Agenda. The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development is one example of working closely with **our main partner, the League of Arab States, and with the UN Family to implement the Agenda.**

Next week, you will hear the distinguished representative of Morocco, Chair of this year's Arab Forum, deliver the regional message of the Arab world to this Forum. At the national level, Arab countries are fully engaged with the 2030 Agenda processes. Countries are putting together institutional frameworks and introducing legislative changes to ensure a robust implementation of the Agenda. You will also hear that there is a consensus on regional priorities and an agreement that a number of SDGs and development priorities cross national borders. For example:

- Eradicating poverty and ensuring prosperity in Arab countries require/s a regional methodology to measure and analyze poverty and inequality, which is at the heart of our mandate as a regional commission;
- To tackle poverty, we must tackle unemployment. In the Arab world, no one country can reduce unemployment without addressing the regional migration trends that send young men and women looking for opportunities in other countries. Our work on migration aims to address exactly that nexus;
- We also need collective efforts to address the depletion of natural resources and the environmental degradation caused by climate change;

➤ Achieving sustainable development in the Arab region means eliminating all barriers to women's economic and political participation.

These are only a few examples of issues that are common and transboundary: they present regional challenges, they demand regional solutions.

As the regional commission, we are also doubling our efforts to broker the regional and global partnerships to support and finance sustainable development.

This is our vision for regional work on sustainable development: bring the region together to drive implementation at the national, sub-regional and regional levels and support **the global call to leave no one behind.**

Thank you.
