I. Background and Justification

The continued political tensions and conflict in the Middle East show little sign of abating, highlighting the challenges of pursuing sustainable development goals in the midst of conflict. The impact of conflicts in the region is felt not only in terms of stunted economic growth, but also has broader social, economic and political ramifications across the Middle East and beyond.

The current regional instability makes traditional models and mechanisms of development difficult to pursue. In conflict-affected countries, recurrent political crises and persistent violence often mean that circumstances on the ground overtake even the best-laid development plans. Even in countries without open conflict, regional instability and domestic political crises often result in unpredictable changes in government as well as donor policies, which frustrate development efforts.

The great challenge of international agencies concerned with promoting peace and development in Western Asia is assisting countries in their pursuit of long-term, sustainable growth in a region where events change rapidly.

Working with member states, local and international civil society need to enact development schemes that assist countries in attaining the Millennium Development Goals, even in unfavorable security and political environments. Development efforts in an unstable and volatile Western Asia can be enhanced through bringing together a wide range of expertise, including the abundance of homegrown knowledge. For example, while the Palestinian territories remains an area of conflict, it has developed skilled human resources that have gained the expertise to manage situations that are in a continued state of flux. International organizations such as the ESCWA need to be responsive and flexible enough to be able to take advantage of such resources.

ESCWA, through its regional role and diverse areas of expertise, is uniquely poised to contribute to efforts to address many of the economic and social development challenges
facing countries suffering from conflict and instability at present. The main conflict and post- 
conflict areas in which the Commission has been active during the past five years are Iraq, 
the occupied Palestinian territory and Southern Lebanon. In order to consolidate and further 
develop these activities, ESCWA established, as of January 2006, the Unit for Emerging and 
Conflict Related Issues (ECRI). ECRI is designed to assist peace-building efforts in Western 
Asia through analysis, policy/project formulation and implementation. As such, ECRI’s 
mandate and activities are in line with current UN reform efforts, in particular with regard to 
the establishment of the Peace Building Commission and its support unit at the UN 
secretariat.

The proposed expert group meeting and its deliberations are expected to reach a common 
understanding of the impact of conflict on socio-economic and political development in the 
region. It will identify means of assisting member states in pursuing their Millennium 
Development Goals despite instability and political volatility. Furthermore the meeting will 
propose avenues of policy making which may address some of the roots causes of tension in 
countries not yet in open conflict.

II. Objectives

- Ascertain the impact of conflict and instability on socio-economic and political 
development in the region.
- Identify particular challenges to pursuing long term development in the conflict 
afflicted countries of Western Asia
- Assess best practices for development under crisis conditions applicable to Western 
Asia, particularly in Iraq and the occupied Palestinian territory.
- Discuss means by which development can be used as a tool for conflict prevention/ 
mitigation in Western Asia.

III. Main Topics

- The impact of real/perceived instability in Western Asia on the achievement of 
national development goals
- Current regional trends leading to instability and conflict: Causes and potential 
courses of action
- Challenges and options for development in conflict afflicted countries such as Iraq 
and the occupied Palestinian territory.
- Best practices in using development aid as a conflict prevention/ mitigation tool: 
lessons learned in Lebanon, Iraq, the occupied Palestinian territory, Afghanistan and 
beyond
- From conflict to post conflict situations: Managing the transition, experiences from 
Iraq, Kosovo and Afghanistan
- The role of regional partnerships in pursuing development amidst instability: 
Strengths and weaknesses of international and local approaches?

IV. Participants

The meeting aims to bring together a wide range of experts and practioners in development 
that have worked in crises afflicted countries in the Middle East, Asia, Europe and Africa.
Stakeholders, including beneficiaries of development aid and government decision makers from countries like Iraq and the occupied Palestinian territory, will take part in the deliberations. Participants will also be drawn from concerned multilateral organizations known for their expertise in conflict-afflicted countries.

V. Sponsorship

The expert group meeting is co-sponsored by ESCWA and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

VI. Preparation and Presentation of Papers

The following are guidelines for the preparation of papers:

- Participants interested in making presentations are requested to submit an abstract of their paper by end April 2006. The full text of accepted papers should be received by mid June 2006 in order to allow sufficient time for reproduction and distribution before the meeting.
- Final versions of papers should be submitted electronically in print-ready format.
- Authors should provide complete bibliographical references for all information and statistical information provided.

VII. Logistical Arrangements

Date and Venue: The meeting is scheduled to be held in the United Nations House in Beirut, Lebanon from 27-28 June 2006.

Working Language: English and Arabic will be the official languages of the meeting. Simultaneous interpretation will be available between Arabic and English.

Documentation: Papers presented to the seminar will be reproduced for circulation.

Travel and hotel: Additional information regarding the recommended hotel and other logistical information will be sent mid-May along with the meeting agenda.

VIII. Correspondence

Correspondence pertaining to the meeting may be addressed to:

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Day 1

9:30 – 11:30 Opening remarks
Mr. Samir Farah, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Representative, Lebanon
Mr. Joseph Saba, Country Director, MENA region, World Bank
Ms. Mervat Tallawy, Executive Secretary, ESCWA

Panel I
The Impact of Crisis: Trends and Emerging Challenges in Western Asia

Panelists
Mr. George Corm, Former Lebanese Minister of Finance
Presentation: Impact of Crisis and Emerging Challenges in the Region

Mr. Asaad Abukhalil, Department of Politics, California State University
Intervention: Future Sources of Conflict and Instability, Political Trends

Mr. Mustapha Hamarneh, Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan
Intervention: The Impact of Conflicting Interests of Political Actors on the Arab Region

Mr. Walid Khadouri, Chief Economic Editor, Al-Hayat Newspaper
Intervention: Oil: Source of Conflict/Crisis and Means for Post-Conflict Development?

Discussion

11:30 – 12:00 Coffee Break

12:00 – 13:30 Panel II
Sustainable Development under Crisis: Framework and Mechanisms

Panelists
Mr. Oren Murphy, ESCWA/ECRI:
Presentation: The Role of Development Aid in Mitigating or Exacerbating Conflict
Mr. Atif Kubursi (ESCWA – Deputy Executive Secretary)
  Intervention: Economic Integration as a Mechanism to deter conflict and crisis

Mr. Jamil Mattar, Independent Consultant
  Intervention: The Ability of Arab States to Mitigate Conflict and Assist Crisis Afflicted Countries: Past, Present and Potential Mechanisms

Discussion

13:30 – 14:30  Lunch Break

14:30 – 15:30  Panel III
Managing Transitions: Best Practices in Using Development Aid for Conflict Prevention

Panelists
Mr. Roman Poeschke, Priority Area Manager, Crisis Prevention, Urban Development, State Reform and Democracy, GTZ
  Presentation: Utilizing Development Aid for Conflict Prevention: Successes and Failures in the Arab Region

Mr. Ray Jennings, Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars
  Intervention: Strategic Use of Aid to Pursue Peace: Successes and Failures (Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo)

Mr. Stephane Nicolas, ACTED (Agence d'Aide à la Coopération Technique Et au Développement)
  Intervention: Community Mobilization to Cement Peace Processes: Experiences from Afghanistan and Tajikistan

Discussion

15:30 – 17:30  Panel IV
Sustainable Development Amidst On-Going Conflict, National Experiences and Best Practices: Iraq

Panelists
Mr. Mehdi al-Hafez, former Iraqi Minister of Planning
  Presentation: Development Planning under Crisis in Iraq

Ms. Alia Al-Dalli, UNDP-Iraq
  Presentation: Development Aid and Conflict Prevention: Iraq, A Case Study

Mr. Ali Sada, Development Alternatives Incorporated
**Intervention:** The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding and Development Planning/Implementation

Mr. Kamal Field Al-Basri, Chairman of Iraq Institute for Economic Reform

**Intervention:** The Role of the Public Sector in Sustaining Development Efforts during Crisis: Lessons Learned in Iraq

Mr. Jaafar Diaq Jaafar, Consultant

**Intervention:** Challenges to Post Conflict Reconstruction

Discussion

**Day 2**

**09:00 – 11:00**

Panel V

**Sustainable Development Amidst On-Going Conflict, National Experiences and Best Practices: Occupied Palestinian Territory**

**Panelists**

Mr. Samir Abdalla, Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS)

**Presentation:** Development Amidst Conflict and Occupation: The Case of Palestine

Mr. Mahmoud El-Khafif, UNCTAD

**Presentation:** Palestinian War Torn Economy: Aid, Development and State Formation

Ms. Francine Pickup, OCHA, Head, Research and Analysis Unit

**Intervention:** The Humanitarian Situation and its Constraints to Economic Activity and Development: The Barrier and Internal Closures

Mr. Ahmed Sourani, Director of Projects & External Relations Dept. Agricultural Development Association (PARC)-Gaza

**Intervention:** Linking Issues of Conflict Transformation and NGOs’ Developmental Programs in Palestine

Mr. Alam Jarrar, Palestinian Non-governmental Organizations (PNGO)

**Intervention:** Role of Palestinian Civil Society in Meeting Development Needs Amidst Occupation, Lessons Learned

Mr. Jihad Mashal, Palestinian Medical Relief Services,
Intervention: Meeting the Medical Needs of the Population, the Experience of Palestinian Civic Institutions

Mr. Prey Joachim, GTZ Country Director – Palestine
Intervention: Development Assistance in a Conflict Ridden Environment, possibilities and constraints

Discussion

11:00 - 11:30 Coffee Break

11:30 - 13:30 Panel VI
Development Under Uncertainty: Lebanon

Panelists:
Mr. Kamal Hamdan, Consultations and Research Institute, Lebanon
Presentation: Post War Recovery, progress to date and future Prospects

Mr. Dimianous Katar, former Lebanese Minister of Finance
Intervention: Public Sector Reform and Privatization, An Incentive for Development?

Mr. Salim Nasr, POGAR – UNDP
Intervention: The Politics of Development, Good Governance, Clientalism and Patronage Networks

Mr. Oussama Safa, Head, Lebanese Center for Policy Studies
Intervention: The Social Costs of Instability and its Impact on Communal Tensions

Discussion

13:30 – 15:00 Lunch Break

15:00 - 17:00 Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Discussion