1st Meeting of the Thematic Working Group on the Millennium Development Goals
in the Arab Region (TWG on Arab MDGs)

Date: 23rd July 2009
Venue: UN House – Beirut

Aide-Memoire

1. Background:

The Thematic Working Group (TWG) on the Millennium Development Goals in the
Arab Region MDGs was established pursuant to the decisions of the Regional Coordination
Mechanism (RCM) taken at its 12th meeting held in Beirut on 13-14 September 2008. The 12th
RCM agreed on “the establishment of three proposed thematic working groups (TWGs), subsidiary
to RCM, focusing on MDGs in the Arab region, climate change, and food security, respectively.”

The 12th RCM designated ESCWA to be the “convening entity” of the TWG on MDGs in
the Arab Region. The 12th RCM also agreed that follow-up actions were needed, as follows:

(a) A draft action plan for the TWG shall be prepared on potential areas for collaboration;
(b) Date, venue and agenda of the first meeting should be set and announced to all entities
having expressed an interest in joining TWG.

2. Objectives of the TWG on Arab MDGs:

The Thematic Working Group (TWG) on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Arab Region aims at reviewing the emerging global issues mainly the International
Financial Crisis (IFC), and their challenges and implications on achieving the Millennium

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1 The Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), formerly known as the “Regional Coordination Group (RCG)”, was established pursuant to ECOSOC Resolution 1998/46, which recognized that “The team leadership role of Regional Commissions calls for their holding regular inter-agency meetings in each region with a view to improving coordination among the work programmes of the organizations of United Nations system in that region”. ESCWA has been holding RCM meetings since 1999.
2 TWG on climate change convened by UNEP-ROWA has agreed on the TOR (1st meeting, Cairo, 26 November 2008)
3 TWG on food security convened by FAO in cooperation with the World Bank
Development Goals in the Arab region. The TWG also aims to ensure coherence and synergy with on-going inter-agency cooperation mechanism in the Arab region between the UN system and the League of Arab States (LAS) for the production of a high quality, analysis-based, coherent and consistent flagship publication entitled “LAS-UN Joint Regional Report on the attainment of the MDGs in the Arab Region 2009/2010” (The Arab MDGs Report).

Building on the lessons learned from the previous collaboration experiences within the RCM, the proposed focus of the 1st meeting of the TWG will be on establishing more systematic and sustainable cooperation mechanisms to ensure the production of a high-quality Arab MDGs Report and related activities.

In this regard, ESCWA is presently preparing the draft terms of references (TOR) that will be sent shortly to the involved UN agencies and LAS for review, discussion and approval through the TWG webmail address: escwa-twmdg@un.org ahead of this 1st meeting of TWG. ESCWA is also preparing a draft action plan/mapping for the activities to be undertaken by the involved parties and a proposed budget for discussion and approval during the meeting.

The TWG Meeting is expected to discuss and agree on the proposed action plan/mapping of the TWG on Arab MDGs as well as the budget.

3. ESCWA Interdivisional Task Force on the Arab MDGs Report 2009/2010

In order to enhance the achievement of the objectives of the TWG on Arab MDGs, ESCWA established on 3 July 2008 an interdivisional Task Force (TF) on the Arab MDGs Report. The TF is coordinated by the Economic Development and Globalization Division (EDGD). The ESCWA TF on Arab MDGs is composed of focal points from the concerned substantive divisions, Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Division (PPTCD), and the Office of the Executive Secretary (OES). The ESCWA TF on Arab MDGs allows the concerned substantive divisions to have a more active role in the preparation of the flagship publication as well as more coordination and harmony in the production of their respective outputs in the ESCWA 2008-2009 work programme (another seven outputs) related to the MDGs in the region.


One of the major objectives of the 1st meeting of TWG on Arab MDGs is to discuss and agree on the main theme of the forthcoming Arab MDGs Report. The proposed main theme of this report is the "Impacts of the International Financial Crisis on the degree of attainment of the MDGs in the Arab Region". The justification for this proposal is obvious and is explained in the following paragraphs.

The current international financial crisis was described as the “crisis of the century”. This crisis imposed new challenges toward the attainment of the MDGs worldwide, particularly in the developing countries. These negative impacts are exacerbated by the facts that the global economy was already faced with two major crises. These are the food and energy crises.
In fact, the IFC had direct impacts on the oil sector, stock markets, banking sectors and sovereign wealth funds. In addition, the region witnessed a decline in foreign direct investments, tourism revenues, trade, and workers’ remittances. Therefore, tackling and mitigating the negative consequences of the IFC has become one of ESCWA’s main priorities. Likewise, the IFC impacts and effects cut across mandates of all UN agencies in the Arab region as well as the LAS.

In response to the crisis, the ESCWA, in cooperation with the International Labor Organization (ILO), convened a Regional High-Level Consultative Forum on the “Impact of International Financial Crisis on the ESCWA Member Countries: the Way Forward” in Damascus on 5-7 May 2009 (the Forum). The Forum provided a platform for member countries to exchange ideas and determine ways and means to deal with the international financial crisis and mitigate its impacts on the ESCWA member countries. The Forum was attended by high-level international experts on the various related subject. The outcome of the Forum included the adoption of the “Damascus Declaration on Responding to the International Financial Crisis in the ESCWA Region” on 7 May 2009 (the Declaration). The Declaration was sent to the President of the UN General Assembly in New York as a meeting document for the UN Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its impact on Development to be held in New York on 24-26 June 2009. Annex 1 of this aide memoire includes the adopted Damascus Declaration.

Because the international financial crisis is still unfolding, and upon discussion within the ESCWA TF on Arab MDGs, the major theme of the joint Arab MDGs Report was proposed to be the "Impacts of the International Financial Crisis on the degree of attainment of the MDGs in the Arab Region".

The TWG Meeting is requested to discuss and agree on the proposed main theme taking into consideration the high priority given to the subject by the UN General Assembly and the world international community, as well as the Arab Region.

5. Membership in the TWG on Arab MDGs:

The invitation for participation is extended to the Heads of all UN agencies and organizations working at the regional level in the Arab Region, and the Secretary General of the League of Arab States. The respective UN agencies and LAS are requested to nominate their focal points/representatives in the TWG on Arab MDGs no later than 30 June 2009. The focal points are strongly encouraged to participate at, and contribute to the 1st meeting of the TWG on Arab MDGs, in addition, of course to the production of the joint regional Arab MDGs Report 2009/2010.

6. The drafting group of the joint Regional Arab MDGs Report 2009/2010:

In order to ensure the production of a high-quality, analysis-based, coherent and consistent flagship publication, the 1st meeting of TWG will discuss and agree on a drafting group of 3-5 professionals who will be led by the convener of the TWG on Arab MDGs. This
drafting group will undertake the tasks indicated in the proposed/approved TOR of the
TWG on Arab MDGs.

7. **Organization**

    The meeting will be held in the UN House, Beirut, on 23rd July, 2009. The opening
session will start at 9:00 am. The meeting will adjourn at 15:00 p.m. on the same day.

8. **Reporting**

    The outcome of the 1st Meeting of the TWG as well as subsequent activities of the
TWG on Arab MDGs, will be reported to the 13th RCM meeting and the forthcoming
Regional Directors Team (RDT) meeting to be held during the last quarter of 2009.

9. **Correspondence and Administrative Issues**

    All correspondences to this meeting should be addressed to Mr. Nabil Safwat, Chief
of the Economic Development and Globalization Division, the convener of the TWG on Arab
MDGs on behalf of ESCWA, direct telephone no: 00961-1-978-438, fax. No: 00961-1-981-510,
e-mail: safwatn@un.org or escwa-twgmdg@un.org.

    The Focal point for the TWG on Arab MDGs dealing with all
administrative/logistical matters is Ms. Mona Fattah, Research Assistant, Economic
Development and Globalization Division, and the Secretary of the ESCWA TF on Arab
MDGs; direct telephone no: 00961-1-978-437; fax. no: 00961-1-981-510, e-mail:
fattahm@un.org or escwa-twgmdg@un.org.
Annex 1

DAMASCUS DECLARATION ON RESPONDING TO THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL CRISIS IN THE ESCWA REGION
7 MAY 2009

The Regional High-level Consultative Forum on the Impacts of the International Financial Crisis on ESCWA Member Countries: the Way Forward, held in Damascus on 5-7 May 2009 (“the Forum”),

Having discussed the impact of the international financial and economic crisis (“the crisis”) on ESCWA member countries,

Having also discussed the national, regional and international responses to the crisis and taken the views of experts, representatives of ESCWA member countries, regional and international organizations,

Hereby adopts this Declaration:

1. The Forum requests ESCWA member countries to take the following steps to respond more effectively to the crisis:

   (a) Take active measures to offset the repercussions of the crisis on their economies and, in particular, to mitigate its impact on economic growth, development and employment. The measures taken will depend on whether a country is oil exporting, has a more diversified economy, is a least developed country or is under occupation;

   (b) Adopt sustainable expansionary fiscal policies to boost domestic demand and shorten the period of low economic growth. Fiscal stimuli in ESCWA member countries should meet key development goals, and be coordinated and implemented in cooperation with the private sector and civil society. Such policies should primarily be targeted towards infrastructure, agriculture, industry, health, education, environment and social protection mechanisms;

   (c) Take measures to ensure greater cooperation with and support for the private sector, particularly in the real economy, with a special focus on small and medium-sized enterprises and the banking sector in those member countries facing capital reversal and liquidity crises;

   (d) Encourage national, regional and international funds to provide increased liquidity to those member countries facing liquidity crises. Such funds are required to strengthen the response to the crisis through measures that provide long-term financing for low and medium income countries in the region in order to enable them to meet the Millennium Development Goals;

   (e) Enhance the efficiency of regulatory frameworks in the financial sector to better serve the real economy;

   (f) Promote greater regional integration, particularly in monetary and financial affairs, and coordinate stimulus policies in order to improve the effectiveness of their response to the crisis;

   (g) Encourage sovereign wealth funds in the ESCWA region to increase their investment in the real economy of the region, in particular in those member countries with comparative advantage in agriculture and industry;

   (h) Pursue diversification vigorously to reduce dependency on the oil sector, by diversifying exports and investing in technology and infrastructure, thus expanding employment opportunities;

   (i) Facilitate intraregional flows of trade in goods and services, people and capital between ESCWA member countries to enhance regional integration;
(j) Promote South-South cooperation as part of the promotion of economic and technical cooperation between developing countries;

(k) Strengthen employment and social protection policies in the interest of ensuring decent work for all, including employment services, active labour market policies, unemployment insurance, sustainable and adequate pension policies, and complementary cash transfer programmes;

(l) Support the United Nations Conference at the Highest Level on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development (New York, 1-3 June 2009). This can be accomplished by actively participating in the Conference and providing inputs reflecting the needs of the region;

(m) Take proactive steps towards ensuring more active participation of developing countries, in particular those in the ESCWA region, in managing the global economy. The current crisis has proved the need for reform and, in particular, for a more representative, legitimate and thus effective management of the global economy. This cannot be achieved without the active participation of developing countries in global economic decision-making mechanisms.

2. The Forum supports the activities of ESCWA and requests the secretariat to undertake the following steps to assist member countries to respond more effectively to the crisis:

(a) Strengthen and enhance the role of ESCWA in representing the particular needs of the region in managing the crisis and in the deliberations of The Commission of Experts of the President of the United Nations General Assembly on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System;

(b) Undertake technical cooperation and capacity-building activities (such as seminars, workshops and technical missions), bringing together concerned entities in each country (such as the ministries of foreign affairs, trade, finance and the economy) in order to assist member countries to achieve both national and regional coherence in negotiating positions in respect of such matters of strategic importance as the current crisis;

(d) Play a catalyst role in bringing together member countries and Arab and Islamic financial institutions in order to enhance the role of such institutions in solving problems arising from and/or exacerbated by the crisis;

(e) Submit this Declaration to ESCWA member countries and to the President of the United Nations General Assembly for its inclusion in the background documents of the forthcoming United Nations Conference at the Highest Level on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development.