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**REGIONAL AND GLOBAL PRIORITIES: THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (RIO+20) AND GOOD GOVERNANCE
DURING CONFLICT AND ASSOCIATED CRISES**

Summary

This document addresses two themes central to countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) region, namely preparation for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), which will be held in 2012, and good governance during conflict.

The Rio+20 Conference will be held in 2012, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/236 dated 31 March 2010 on the Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

The Conference will focus on the institutional framework for sustainable development, and a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, as both themes are pillars of sustainable development. Preparation for this Conference in the Arab region is undertaken by ESCWA in coordination with other organizations, in particular the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office for West Asia.

Moreover, international and national peacebuilding and development practitioners emphasize the centrality of good governance as a means of reconciliation, lasting stability and sustainable development. Good governance is a necessary precursor to peacebuilding, whereas its deficit is not only one of the most prominent root causes and drivers of conflict and its relapse, but also slows down socio-economic and political development. A series of mutually-reinforcing interacting variables are the driving forces of a governance deficit, thus compelling a different approach to governance in conflict-affected countries in the ESCWA region, which suffer from a discrepancy between de jure and de facto governance practice. Such variables, affecting the quality of governance in a causal relationship can also be the consequence of sustained governance malpractice. Some of these interacting variables include the lack of political will, weak State structure and external factors. In countries that suffer from occupation, internal conflict and political tension, greater coordinated efforts are required from all stakeholders in order to exercise good governance in the delivery of essential services.

Furthermore, sustainable peace, reconciliation and development are unrealizable without sound governance practice within the public sector, which must withstand the adverse effects of crisis, maintain vital infrastructure, and provide essential services, programmes and policies necessary for the achievement of national development goals in a conflict, post conflict or pre-conflict phase.

Member countries are called upon to discuss this paper and provide comments and suggestions thereto.

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I. UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (RIO+20)

1. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), will be held pursuant to a resolution issued by the United Nations General Assembly¹ in December 2009. The Conference, which will be held in 2012, will cover five fundamental issues, namely:

- (a) Securing renewed political commitment for sustainable development;
- (b) Assessing progress to date and the remaining gaps in implementation;
- (c) Addressing new and emerging challenges;
- (d) An institutional framework for sustainable development;
- (e) A green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

2. The Conference is expected to focus on the institutional framework for sustainable development and a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. Both issues will be extensively discussed in two reports currently prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in coordination with stakeholders, notably the League of Arab States. Since green economy represents a modern concept, the following section addresses the basic principles and significance of green economy to the Arab region, and presents a framework for an Arab green economy strategy.

A. GREEN ECONOMY IN THE ARAB REGION: GENERAL CONCEPT AND AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3. In 2008, the United Nations System launched the green economy initiative as part of a set of initiatives in response to the numerous intertwined crises that affected the international community, notably the global crisis, the food crisis and climate change crisis. Initially, the green economy concept focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but it later evolved to cover the necessary investments and actions required to raise all challenges of environment management, climate change and reduction of carbon emissions.

4. With respect to the definition of “green economy”, reference is usually made to the definition developed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), according to which a green economy can be defined as one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.² However, the approach to green economy and its priorities vary among the United Nations organizations according to their mandates or according to regional priorities when the United Nations regional committees are involved.

1. Benefits of the transition to a green economy

5. A number of stakeholders issued reports and studies on green economy, such as the latest report issued by UNEP in February 2011.³ All reports focused on the crucial environmental and socio-economic benefits of green economy, which can be summarized as follows:

(a) Addressing environmental challenges: the most important environmental benefits expected to be achieved include cutting greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing the management and efficient use of resources, ensuring waste reduction and better waste management, protecting biodiversity, and fighting forest degradation and overfishing;

(b) Stimulating economic growth: the UNEP report expected that green investments would accelerate global economic growth – especially long-term growth (2020 and beyond) – at a higher rate than the prevailing business as usual rate;

¹ General Assembly resolution 64/236 dated 31 March 2010 on the Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

² United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2010, *Green Economy Report: a Preview*, Nairobi, May 2010.

³ UNEP, *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*, 2011.

(c) Eradicating poverty and generating employment: the global transition to a green economy would create massive “green job opportunities” in several economic sectors. Investments in a more environment-friendly agricultural sector are expected to reduce rural poverty and migration, and positively contribute to food security. The green economy is also expected to reduce water and energy shortage by implementing strategies to streamline the consumption of natural resources and encourage investments in green infrastructure such as renewable energy, drinking water supply and sanitation.

2. General regional framework and major challenges

6. The transition to a green economy in Arab countries should take into consideration challenges, available opportunities, as well as the socio-economic and environmental situation in the region in order to crystallize a regional vision commensurate with regional specificities and priorities. Achieving sustainable development in the Arab region faces regional challenges, including:

(a) Political shifts: since early 2011, the Arab region has been experiencing very important political shifts that may generate different repercussions in terms of sustainable development. In particular, the green economy will be (positively or negatively) affected by potential changes in the control of natural resources in the region;

(b) Growing water scarcity:⁴ the Arab region faces multiple pressures and challenges threatening the sustainability of its already scarce water resources. In fact, natural water scarcity, coupled with dry and semi-dry climate, increases water evaporation and losses. Besides, water deficit is widening due to unsustainable consumption rates, especially in agriculture, as well as increasing water losses caused by outdated and poor distribution networks;

(c) Energy sector challenges: generally speaking, the Arab region faces difficulties in providing energy services for poor and remote areas where local communities use wood and agricultural wastes to meet their energy needs, thereby adversely affecting public health and environment especially when logging is applied. On the other hand, some Arab countries possess huge gas reserves which are not optimally tapped given the high expenses required for the export of liquefied gas and the absence of integrated intraregional networks for gas transportation. In the context of streamlining consumption and enhancing efficient use, the region is facing challenges to increase the contribution of renewable energy to the energy balance due to many hurdles. Moreover, the increase of oil prices will certainly boost the revenues of some countries in the region, yet it will generate financial crises and inflation in some industrialized countries, and since oil is re-exported to all countries of the region, this will create a negative impact on development in the poor and least developed countries;

(d) Food security risks: Arab countries, which rely on food imports, were affected by the global food crisis. The impact of global fluctuations in food prices varied among countries depending on their income levels and food subsidy policies;

(e) Population growth, particularly youth population:⁵ youth represent the largest demographic group in the Arab region, with a rapid growth rate compared to the remaining groups. The increasing number of youth creates a good opportunity for development provided that proper education and productive capacity are provided. It may also pose tremendous socio-economic and political challenges unless policies are developed to ensure the optimal use of youth potential, generate proper education and work opportunities, and encourage active participation in decision making and the public sector;

⁴ 2007

⁵ Population and Development Report Issue no. 4: “Youth in the ESCWA region: Situation Analysis and Implications for Development Policies”, ESCWA, 2009.

(f) Climate change and extreme weather events:⁶ the Arab region is expected to be among the most exposed regions to the potential impact of climate change which will undermine the implementation of national development plans, and pose a threat to human security and livelihoods. This impact is more likely to affect vulnerable and marginalized groups such as women, elderly people, children, and the poor. Besides, climate change is expected to affect several sectors such as agriculture, health, public safety and biodiversity, water desalination, tourism, water-generated energy production, fluvial navigation, and others;

(g) Unsustainable consumption and production:^{7,8} the rapid demographic growth, accelerated socio-economic development, rural migration, and some subsidy policies have contributed to unsustainable consumption and production patterns. Besides, the lack of efficiency in energy and transportation sectors has increased carbon dioxide emissions, and water consumption has increased despite the decrease in per capita fresh water. Moreover, waste mismanagement has created huge environmental problems.

3. Approaches and strategies towards a green economy

7. The green economy allows decision makers in Arab countries to choose from an integral set of socio-economic strategies and tools⁹ in accordance with the national status quo and available capacities. The following paragraphs provide a snapshot of several approaches that are not necessarily comprehensive but could give useful examples of available options including their drawbacks.

(a) Green stimuli packages and strategic public expenses: such as those allocated by Japan, South Korea, China and the United States.¹⁰ However, the large stimuli packages are not an available option to many developing countries, including some Arab countries especially those with a heavy public debt burden. Besides, this option raises questions about the long-term feasibility and sustainability of stimuli packages;

(b) Policies enhancing environmental efficiency: such as those assisting private companies to evaluate their environmental performance, providing investment incentives for environment-friendly production through fiscal initiatives, environmental efficiency certificates, and others. In the Arab region, it is important to develop special programmes to support green investment in small and medium enterprises in order to generate green employment and improve income;

(c) Green public purchases: such purchases will boost demand on environmental goods and services, and subsequently create a huge opportunity as well as a challenge in Arab countries. In fact, the creation of Arab “green” niche markets will help Arab business to play a pivotal role in international trade exchange in the future. However, it is feared that the transition to a green economy will pose some technical hurdles to trade by banning products and production operations that do not have an environmental performance or do not comply with the standards of industrialized countries;

(d) Investment in green infrastructure: such as investing in renewable energy projects, enhancing the efficient use of energy and water, designing modern energy-efficient buildings (or the so-called “smart buildings”) and investing in the sustainable and full-scale public transportation sector;

⁶ ESCWA, Item 3 of the Provisional Agenda – Regional and Global Priorities: Financial Crisis, Food Security and Climate Change, 2009.

⁷ ESCWA, Committee on Energy, seventh session, Strengthening the energy sector contributions to sustainable development, 2009.

⁸ Draft Agenda of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, twentieth session, Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production, 2008.

⁹ General Assembly document A/CONF.216/PC/7.

¹⁰ UNEP, “Japan and the Republic of Korea Launch Green New Deals”, Press Release, 9 January 2009. Available at: <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=556&ArticleID=6035&l=en>.

(e) Restoring and strengthening natural capital: by developing sustainable land management programmes, forestation and biodiversity programmes, and others. However, the successful implementation of these programmes often depends on empowering local businesses to manage shared resources based on clear and locally adapted rules;

(f) Environmental accounting and proper pricing mechanisms: environmental accounting, based on introducing the environmental dimension into economic activities, helps to set the right prices of goods and services, thereby conveying the right signals to producers and consumers, and encouraging them to adopt sustainable consumption and production patterns. The available tools in this context include eco-tax systems and payment for ecosystem services (PES). However, if not properly designed, these systems may have an adverse outcome affecting the poor;

(g) Research, development and technology transfer in the green sector: which require building partnerships among the private and public sectors, academic institutions, as well as research and development centres, and providing good financial mechanisms to spread the use of green technologies in Arab countries;

(h) New funding arrangements: Arab countries should create new funding mechanisms encouraging green investment. Besides, global funds could be used such as the Global Environment Fund (GEF) and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) to finance green investments and environmental protection projects;

(i) Training and capacity-building: close cooperation among research institutions, vocational training institutions and universities is crucial to obtain skilled labour capable of engaging in a green economy. It is also essential to implement and upgrade capacity-building programmes. Besides, the necessary time and costs needed for youth training or re-training in these new sectors represent a huge obstacle to green economic expansion due to the lacking skilled labour in advanced technological services.

B. PREPARATIONS FOR RIO+20 CONFERENCE AND GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF AN ARAB GREEN ECONOMY STRATEGY

8. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia undertakes preparation for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in the Arab region in cooperation with regional organizations including the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States and several stakeholders in the public and private sectors as well as civil society organizations, in order to adopt a clear and consistent Arab stance regarding the Conference topics, socio-economic policies, and potential work opportunities. The table below summarizes the most important steps in preparation for the Rio+20 Conference in the Arab region; some of which were finalized and others are still under preparation. It is worth noting that the following table is updated on an ongoing basis. The following paragraphs present fundamental principles and ideas in relation to this preparation.

4. *Fundamental principles in international forums*

9. Arab countries should have an active role in international forums related to green economy to ensure a fair transition to green economy and avert any relevant risks pertaining to it. These fundamental principles include:

(a) Emphasizing the flexibility of Arab countries in adopting approaches towards green economy that are tailored to their national and regional specificities and priorities. In this context, it is important to counter any unjustified conditions that may be imposed by developed countries against official development assistance (ODA) such as grants, loans and debt rescheduling;

(b) Implementing all Rio principles, particularly the common but differentiated responsibilities, the polluter pays, international cooperation in capacity building and technology transfer, and adopting an international economic system that is open and supportive;

(c) Countering green protectionism policies resulting from green technical standards which are implemented by developed countries and which restrict the access of non-compliant goods to their territories. Green technical standards are essential for the transition to a green economy, and should therefore be harmonized by Arab countries to avoid any additional obstacle to trade;

(d) Requesting developed countries to provide suitable, new and additional resources as part of the international funding of green economy, and ensuring access to funding for green investments in all environmental sectors and not only those aimed at mitigating the impact of climate change and reducing carbon emissions, while giving priority to technology transfer funding.

10. Those were the fundamental principles emphasized by developing countries and a number of Arab countries in the first and second meetings of the Preparatory Committee of the Rio+20 Conference, in spite of some diverging views.

1. General framework of an Arab ministerial green economy initiative

11. Drafting an Arab ministerial green economy initiative adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment will provide a unified framework of action, strengthen regional integration, and consolidate the stance of Arab countries at Rio+20 Conference to be held in 2012.

12. The initiative should underline the important participation of all sectors and ministries in the transition to a green economy, and adopt a participatory approach among stakeholders in the public and private sectors and in civil society. The proposed initiative should also be in line with the existing and agreed Arab initiatives, notably:

(a) The Arab Initiative for Sustainable Development issued before the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002);¹¹

(b) Regional programme for trade and environment capacity building in the Arab region (2003);

(c) Arab regional strategy for sustainable consumption and production (2009).

13. In order for Arab countries to make the right choice and identify the best approaches towards a green economy, the Arab Initiative should recommend developing a detailed regional economic model that analyses and evaluates the transition cost and the green economy capacity to stimulate economic growth in the region, generate employment opportunities, and reduce poverty, taking into account regional specificities, particularly the political shifts in the region. This model should be based on clear and detailed data which can be made available by drafting reports on the following issues:

(a) Documenting Arab green initiatives, best practice, and success stories in the region, and focusing on legislations and laws that encourage green investment and green funding mechanisms;

(b) Identifying and considering suitable indicators to measure green economy in the Arab region;

(c) Identifying green work opportunities in the Arab region, in addition to training and capacity-building needs that support innovation, research, development and transfer of green technologies.

14. ESCWA also suggests intensifying capacity-building programmes that empower stakeholders in the Arab public and private sectors to contribute to a successful transition to a green economy, and emphasizing the role of United Nations organizations and non-governmental development organizations in this field.

¹¹ League of Arab States, the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region, 2002.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE RIO+20 CONFERENCE IN THE ARAB REGION

Meeting	Date and venue	Expected goals
First Meeting of the Preparatory Committee	New York, 16-18 May 2010	Discussion about agreed technical topics for the Rio+20 Conference
Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region	Cairo, 16-19 October 2010	Discussion about preparations for the Rio+20 Conference in the Arab region
Regional Workshop on Trade and Environment: Developing the Environmental Goods and Services Sector in the Arab Region for Transformation into a Green Economy	Beirut, 15-16 December 2010	Discussion about the green economy concept and significance to the Arab region
Meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment	Cairo, 19-20 December 2010	Presentation by ESCWA of a document on green economy and a summary of ongoing preparations for the Rio+20 Conference
First Intersessional Meeting	New York, 10-11 January 2011	Report of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Third Roundtable Meeting on Sustainable Consumption and Production in the Arab region	Cairo, 26-27 January 2011	Discussion about the relation of sustainable consumption and production with green economy
Second Meeting of the Preparatory Committee	New York, 7-8 March 2011	Discussion of Rio+20 Conference themes
Fifth Meeting of ESCWA Technical Committee	Beirut, 6-7 April 2011	Discussion of a background paper on green economy and a regional roadmap to Rio+20
Fifteenth Session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism in the Arab Region	Beirut, 1 June 2011	Discussion of an Arab ministerial green economy initiative
Training workshop on green economy	Beirut, June or July 2011 (to be confirmed)	Training of concerned ministry staff on sectoral policy reforms for a green economy
Civil Society Advisory Group Meeting	Beirut, June or July (proposal – to be confirmed)	Discussion with civil society organizations about green economy
Seminar on Green Industries	Beirut, September 2011 (to be confirmed)	Discuss on Arab plan for green industries, notably small and medium industries
Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting of Rio+20 Conference	Cairo, 16-17 October 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion of three Arab regional reports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of sustainable development institutions and structures in the Arab Region • Regional evaluation report on green economy in the Arab region • Progress report on the implementation of the Arab Initiative for Sustainable Development - Formulation of an Arab declaration to confirm the political will to achieve sustainable development in the Arab region - Formulation of an Arab ministerial green economy initiative

Meeting	Date and venue	Expected goals
Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region	Cairo, 18-20 October 2011	Review of outputs of the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting
Second Intersessional Meeting	New York, 15-16 December 2011	Discussion of outputs of the First Intersessional Meeting
Meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment	Cairo, 21-22 December 2011	Confirmation of political commitment and approval of the Arab ministerial green economy initiative
Third Intersessional Meeting	New York, 5-7 March 2012	Discussion of outcome of Second Intersessional Meeting
Twenty-seventh Ministerial Session of ESCWA	May 2012	Possible adoption of a resolution on green economy in the ESCWA region
Third Meeting of the Preparatory Committee	Rio, 28-30 May 2012	Preparation of a draft of negotiating text
Rio+20	Rio, 4-6 June 2012	Roadmap and toolkit for transition to a green economy

Finalized activities



Current activity



Future activities



II. GOOD GOVERNANCE DURING CONFLICT

15. There is growing conviction among international and national peacebuilding and development practitioners about the centrality of good governance as a means for reconciliation, lasting stability and sustainable development.

16. The report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding¹² notes the potential existence of significant insecurity and political uncertainty in the immediate aftermath of conflict. On the flipside, the ending of hostilities generates high expectations for the provision of tangible political, social and economic gains. The report lists, among the most frequently requested assistance, support for the provision of basic services (water, sanitation, health and primary education), economic revitalization and the restoration of core government functions, in particular basic public administration and public finance.¹³ Such provisions and functions cannot be realized without sound governance mechanisms.

17. A background discussion document for the Seventh Global Forum on Reinventing Government entitled *The Challenges of Restoring Governance in Crisis and Post-Conflict Countries* concludes that “Without effective governance institutions – an effective government, a strong private sector, and a vital civil society – little can be done to bring about peace, reconstruct war-torn countries, and stabilize political, economic, and social conditions”.¹⁴

18. Good governance is therefore a necessary, albeit not the only, precursor to peacebuilding and its absence is one of the most prominent root causes and drivers of conflict and its relapse. A governance deficit also stunts socio-economic and political development. A series of mutually-reinforcing variables are the driving forces of a governance deficit, thus requiring a different approach to governance in countries suffering from conflict in the ESCWA region.

¹² Working definition of peacebuilding: currently, there is no consensus on the definition of peacebuilding. Former United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding expansively as “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict”. An Agenda for Peace: Report of the Secretary-General, (A/47/277-S/24111), para. 21.

¹³ Report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict, A/63/881-S/2009/304.

¹⁴ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *The Challenges of Restoring Governance in Crisis and Post-Conflict Countries*, (ST/ESA/PAD/SER.E/101), pp. 1 and 2.

A. THE INTERACTING VARIABLES OF CONFLICT

19. Indeed, conflict-affected countries in the ESCWA region suffer from a deficit between de jure and de facto governance practice.¹⁵ Governance deficits are characterized by numerous interacting variables which are mutually reinforcing because they affect the quality of governance and contribute towards sustaining one another. Moreover, their relationship to governance is not only one of causality, since they can also be the consequence of sustained governance malpractice. Some of these interacting variables include the lack of political will, weak State structure and external factors. The characteristics of each aforementioned variable are elucidated below.

1. *Lack of political will*

20. Lack of political will or commitment on the part of the ruling elite or decision makers to strengthening State institutions through the incorporation of good governance into the mainstream of governance practice is a significant cause of weak governance mechanisms within the public sector. Given the geopolitical volatility of the ESCWA region, external or internal security and stability concerns often come at the expense of significant governance-related reforms to public sector institutions.

2. *Weak State structure*

21. Understaffed departments, lack of resources for staff training, limited access to technology, obsolete administrative rules, procedures and regulations and low pay discourage creativity, innovation and motivation among public civil servants. In conflict settings, this fact is exacerbated by the general turmoil that transitional governments face.¹⁶ Without certainty of what the future holds, clear lines of authority or direction and lacking the investment in the civil service needed to develop skills in line with the latest technological and administrative innovations that meet the multiple challenges in conflict settings, it is difficult to expect the emergence of State institutions or a cadre able to lead peacebuilding or realize the development needs of a country prior to, in, or emerging from crisis.

3. *External factors*

22. External factors, whether regional or international, greatly influence national political, security and socio-economic dynamics in conflict-affected countries of the ESCWA region. This ranges from fermenting proxy wars to full-fledged occupations, which have traditionally played a negative role in building good governance practice in State institutions. Moreover, the spillover of conflict, such as conflict-driven displacement, has ramifications for neighbouring countries. Spillover effects can curtail the emergence of sound governance practice and structures.

B. TOWARDS A NEW GOOD GOVERNANCE PARADIGM IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES

23. Principles factored into most definitions of governance, such as the rule of law and transparent or accountable public institutions, are neither realizable in conflict-affected countries nor do they prevent relapse into the vicious cycle of conflict. This is simply due to the complex dynamics unleashed by the interacting variables examined above which have rendered State institutions too weak and ineffective to alter the status quo or break the pattern of conflict relapse. Consequently, good governance principles solely and strictly focused on the State and its institutions cannot apply in conflict settings. What is required

¹⁵ Global Integrity. *The Global Integrity Report: 2009 Methodology White Paper*. p. 1. Available at: <http://report.globalintegrity.org/methodology/whitepaper.pdf>.

¹⁶ UNDP, Democratic Governance Group, Bureau for Development Policy, 2010, *Fighting corruption in post-conflict and recovery situations. Learning from the past*.

is a governance paradigm for countries in conflict that would support strategies for the attainment of governance models described in related literature.

24. The starting point for such a paradigm is the argument that sustainable peace, reconciliation and development are unrealizable without sound governance practice resilient enough to withstand the adverse effects of crisis within the public sector and able to provide and maintain vital infrastructure, essential services, programmes and policies necessary for the achievement of national development goals in a conflict, post conflict or pre-conflict phase. At the same time, the public sector must also be positioned to mitigate, if not resolve, the structural root causes of conflict. In other words, enabling the public sector charged with essential service provisions should be the primary focus of local, national and international stakeholders. Their leading objective should be the exercise of good governance practice, enhancing technical capacity and establishing the necessary supporting infrastructure and administrative legislation.¹⁷

25. Effective governance mechanisms within public service providers, coupled with the discharge of their respective mandates, will enhance such peacebuilding efforts as establishing or re-establishing the network of social relations that facilitate the peaceful resolution of a conflict¹⁸ and significantly contribute to reconciliation processes that include the entire country, with its different ethno-religious communities or groups having conflicting political ideologies and loyalties.

26. It is also important to consider that recovery efforts in providing essential services and achieving reconciliation in a parallel fashion facilitate the attainment of common political ground and national purpose among diverging ruling elite, bridge differences among divided communities, enhance popular trust in State institutions, encourage national identity and give legitimacy to the emerging political system. Such a process would also strengthen the abilities of national institutions to address political fractures that could otherwise translate into conflict.

27. The challenge then is to find a way to strengthen institutions that deliver essential services in the midst of conflict. As mentioned above, the argument made here calls for a new paradigm or strategy, namely practicing good governance within the essential service sector as a peacebuilding catalyst. Within this context, good governance in conflict settings could be defined as the optimal utilization of resources by all stakeholders for the delivery of essential services to the entire civilian population, thereby mitigating the impact of conflict on development and strengthening peacebuilding efforts.

28. The terms “all stakeholders” and “the entire civilian population” in the context of conflict in the ESCWA region require some elaboration. For the sake of simplification, concerned stakeholders in conflict-affected countries are divided into national and international actors. At the national level, those that yield greater influence are the ruling elite, including leaders of factions, political parties, powerful non-State actors, or heads of armed militias. In most cases, the civil service is under their influence. Other influential stakeholders, aside from situations where foreign intervention is driven by geopolitical considerations, are international donors, multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the United Nations and international civil society. For the purpose of the aforementioned definition, international stakeholders are external/foreign actors that enjoy a certain amount of legitimacy and credibility and have political and economic influence on local actors. They have large financial and technical capacity, are able to wield decisions and implement development programmes. The second part of the definition refers to the beneficiaries of essential services. Here the use of the term ‘the entire civilian population’ must be emphasized, as conflict-affected countries in the ESCWA region generate spillover effects, in particular, conflict-driven displaced persons who often do not have access to essential services in their host countries. In some instances, the host countries themselves

¹⁷ Essential services are broadly defined as water, sanitation and electricity, health (primary and secondary), education (primary and secondary), rule of law or justice as well as security.

¹⁸ Mehler, A. and Ribaux, C., 2000, *Crisis Prevention and Conflict Management in Technical Cooperation*, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH., Germany, p. 33.

suffer from conflict and the inability to meet the essential service needs resulting from the sudden prolonged population surge or the presence of those who are permanently displaced.

29. The optimal utilization of resources by all stakeholders for essential service delivery simultaneously requires: (a) the political will or commitment on the part of the ruling elite or decision makers to good governance practice in essential service provision sectors; (b) enhancing the institutional capacity of those sectors in terms of human resources, infrastructure and administrative legislation; and (c) enhancing the coordination and focus of donors, multilateral entities and other international development actors in supporting essential service delivery.

30. The political will or commitment on the part of the ruling elite to incorporate good governance practice into the mainstream and place inclusiveness, transparency, efficiency and accountability in the forefront of the public sector is critical for the sustenance and efficiency of its emergence and operation.

31. Increasingly, over the last few years, good governance within the public sector has become a leading priority among decision makers, even more so given recent events in Tunisia, Egypt and other Arab countries. This prioritization stems from the realization of decision makers that improving public sector performance through administrative reform enhances credibility, legitimacy and economic growth, facilitates the attainment of full national development potential, builds the infrastructure for human security and social cohesion and is therefore essential for peace and security.

32. Nevertheless, strategies to pressure the ruling elite or decision makers into garnering the political will and commitment to separate essential service provision institutions from the realms of their internal political struggles are not readily apparent. Again, recent developments in Tunisia, Egypt and other Arab countries, provide ample lessons and tools that may be utilized for these purposes. Popular discontent was high in these countries due to such numerous causes as restricted access to essential services, corruption and lack of employment opportunities. The catalytic tool crystallizing discontent into popular movements was the use of social media apparatus and satellite networks to articulate grievances, raise public awareness and mobilize peaceful opposition in the form of demonstrations. At present, these tools have proven to be significant enough to pressure decision makers into providing essential services to all segments of the population. In other words, decision makers will increasingly look at essential service delivery as either a source of political capital or bankruptcy.

33. The generation of national institutional capacity and administrative reform, encompassing human skills, technical infrastructure and the administrative legal framework, is vital for strengthening the capacity of the public sector to reduce the impact of conflict on development, lead peacebuilding efforts and win popular trust, and bring legitimacy and credibility to State institutions. Enhancing institutional capacity involves the modernization of the public sector by implementing a 'rule by law' philosophy. There is a need to introduce and enhance respect for rules, effectiveness and efficiency into public administration, reflected in attempts to create a clear separation between strategic activities entrusted to politicians and the operational or managerial tasks generally under the remit of civil servants;¹⁹ to separate owner and manager roles and to replace political with economic criteria in the operation of State-owned enterprises; to combat and reduce corruption; to rationalize the machinery of government; to create a centrally-managed, professional civil service; and to reform the system of public finances. Capacity-building of public servants remains crucial as one of the components of strengthening institutions.

34. Improved, concerted efforts by development practitioners, such as donors and multilateral organizations, to support and prioritize the strengthening of State institutions through mainstreaming good governance practice in essential service delivery sectors is critical. It is noteworthy that in conflict-affected countries, donors and multilateral entities can draw on much greater technical and financial resources than

¹⁹ Giaouque, D., 2009, Modernization routes and relations between political and administrative spheres in Switzerland, *International Review of Administrative Sciences*. 75(4): 687-713.

are available to national institutions greatly weakened by the adversities of conflict and political tension. Foreign development practitioners must garner the commitment of local decision makers and jointly focus on improving essential service provision in order to:

- (a) Mitigate the impact of occupation, conflict and political tension on development;
- (b) Create a public sector resilient to conflict and able to deal with its adverse effects. This requires the establishment and training of a specialized technical cadre of civil servants that is supported by the following:
 - (i) Technological know-how and infrastructure;
 - (ii) Political elite ensuring their empowerment;
 - (iii) Adequate administrative regulations, procedures and compensation at the work place.
- (c) Strengthen national capacity to optimally negotiate, plan and dispense with international development assistance, directing it to essential service provision and enhancing other priority areas;
- (d) Create a peacebuilding platform where all national groups participate in articulating their needs and strengthening essential service delivery with the overarching goal of protecting it from internal political struggle and with the aim of building common political ground and national purpose.

35. Significantly, international assistance needs to be a concerted, coordinated effort with long-term commitment by donors and development practitioners. Building effective and efficient State institutions in line with national development vision and aspirations is a long-term process. Moreover, technical support must ensure the development of indigenous good governance practice that is tailored to local needs and aspirations.

C. ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED BY THE SECTION FOR EMERGING AND CONFLICT-RELATED ISSUES IN THIS FIELD

36. In countries that suffer from occupation, internal conflict and political tensions, greater coordination is necessary between all stakeholders with respect to the three crucial factors briefly outlined above in order to mainstream good governance in essential service delivery. It was argued that an optimal and effective essential service sector resilient to the adversities of conflict or occupation is a strategic entry point for mitigating the impact of conflict on development and strengthening peacebuilding efforts. With regard to the theme of governance in conflict and in an attempt to cater to the suggested paradigm discussed above, the Section for Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues (ECRI) of ESCWA has undertaken a series of activities within its current work programme. Some of these are as follows:

1. *Analytical activities (2011)*

37. The Section prepared a study on governance and conflict relapse. The purpose of the study is to explore the link between weak governance and conflict in the ESCWA region through the analysis of various political, economic and social interacting variables. This study then proposes a new governance paradigm that highlights mechanisms of effective essential service delivery, resilient to geopolitical volatility, as a means to build peace, and government legitimacy in conflict-affected countries.

2. *Field projects (2011)*

38. With the intention of providing support and mobilizing resources for enhancing and modernizing the public sector within member countries, ECRI contributed to the development of the Iraq Public Sector Modernization Project, of which it is an implementing partner. In order to identify the most suitable

modernization and enhancement interventions, ECRI has taken responsibility for performing functional reviews and perception surveys.

39. Within the Supporting Decentralization and Local Governance in Iraq for Service Delivery project, ECRI partnered with four national institutions for the implementation of the Situation Analysis Assessment performed at the national level. Within the same project, ECRI facilitated the exposure of senior decision makers from the central and local level to successful models of local governance and decentralized structures in Italy and Egypt, with emphasis on the enhancement of public services. The exposure of Iraqi decision makers to lessons learned from the region and Europe facilitated the identification of several improvement areas within the Iraqi public sector. These activities are expected to culminate in a National Decentralization and Local Governance Conference in 2011, during which senior Iraqi officials will endorse the results and recommendations of the Situation Analysis Assessment and transform them into policy recommendations and strategies to enhance governance and service delivery at the local level.
