Opening remarks by Ms. Rima Khalaf, Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA

On the occasion of a side-event of the 2nd meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

**Arab Integration ... A Transformative Change for Sustainable Development**

*1 July 2014*

Ms. Sima Bahous, Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP

Ms. Shahira Wahbi, representative of League of Arab States

H.E. Mr. Mootaz Ahmadein Khalil, Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this side-event, which is being organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Development Programme. We are meeting on the side-lines of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to share with you the results of our regional consultations on SDGs and post 2015 processes. Such consultations aim to ensure that our regional priorities are well reflected in the global agenda and notably at the HLPF. Here I wish to commend the Arab members of the Open Working Group for their active involvement in SDGs negotiations.

Distinguished guests,

It is unlikely that the post-2015 agenda will address all the priorities of Arab countries particularly in light of the current socio-political transformations in some, and the heightened level of violence in others. Such violence along with the persistence of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the longest foreign occupation in contemporary history, has intensified human suffering and significantly increased the number of refugees and internally displaced persons. While the region encompasses less than 5% of the world population, it has become the source of more than 50% of its refugees; and the number is rising.
Amidst this aggravated situation, the region needs to double its efforts to achieve sustainable development while struggling to establish security and stability. It is important to pursue both tracks simultaneously. There cannot be development without stability, nor can there be stability without freedom and equitable development. The international community will be well advised to fulfil its commitments to support countries facing such challenges.

ESCWA has worked with the League of Arab States and UNEP to formulate an Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development that captures the nexus between peace and security, sustainable development, and social justice. We are now working on taking this strategic framework to an operational level based on solid regional partnerships, and innovative financing mechanisms.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on Post-2015 Agenda called for major transformative changes. The regional consultations with state and non-state actors on post-2015 identified three interlinked processes that can lead to the desired transformation. The first was the protection of the rights, dignity and security of all; the second was the establishment of diversified economies that can generate decent jobs and achieve social justice. And the third focused on the revival of Arab culture and restoration of its historical vigour.

Enhanced Arab cooperation in the political, cultural, and environmental spheres and an integration scheme that is open to the rest of the world are essential for achieving this transformative agenda while actively engaging in the global economy. Recent ESCWA estimates indicate that simple procedures towards economic integration would increase Arab gross domestic product by over US$ 750 billion within a few years and would create more than 6 million new job opportunities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ESCWA is proud to have established strong ties with the League of Arab States, the UN system and the Member countries in the field of sustainable development. Such cooperation has resulted in a number of important accomplishments including the formulation of a homogenous Arab perspective regarding the post-2015 agenda and the SDGs. This regional perspective, I hope, will allow the Arab region to have a stronger voice during the on-going negotiations.

I thank you all for participating in this side event.