**CONCEPT NOTE**

**Arab Joint Side Event**

*A Transformative Change for Sustainable Development*

التكامل العربي ... تغيير تحوّلي من أجل التنمية المستدامة

**Date:** Tuesday, 1st of July 2014

**Time:** 1:15 to 2:30 pm

**Venue:** Conference Room B, Conference Building, UN Headquarters

**Language:** English will be the main language of the event.

**Organizing partners:** Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), League of Arab States (LAS) and United Nations Development Programme/Regional Bureau for Arab States (UNDP/RBAS)

**Background**

The Rio+20 conference, through its many outcomes, brought fresh impetus to sustainable development. There is a real chance today for development to finally meet sustainability in a single development agenda, including a universal set of sustainable development goals (SDGs). The establishment of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development presents an opportunity for achieving the long called-for integration of the various pillars of sustainable development under one umbrella.

Mirroring this global change, the Arab region undertook during the past few years a series of consultations and debates that helped to distil a regional position vis-à-vis the new issues that were being tabled globally, notably the SDGs and the post-2015 agenda. These consultations, have presented an opportunity for the Arab countries to question existing socio-economic development paradigms, and reflect on the transformations needed to achieve regional aspirations. The fact that the region was undergoing social and political changes of its own, presented additional motivation for uncovering the real causes of failure and seeking reforms. ESCWA, LAS and other UN system organizations active in the region, were well-positioned to support these consultations, by convening various stakeholders, government and civil society, and pushing forward a regional development agenda.

One of the key recent milestones in the consultation process included the Arab High Level Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD), which was jointly organized by ESCWA in cooperation with UNEP, LAS, DESA, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Environment of Jordan, in Amman from 2 to 4 April 2014. The AFSD, which was being organized for the first time, supported regional preparations for the 2014 session of both the HLPF and the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR), and provided a platform for discussing: a) Regional progress on MDGs and enabling policies for accelerating progress; b) An Arab perspective on the SDGs, supported by an SDG proposal prepared by ESCWA; c) the Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development of LAS and its possible operational arms, including green economy investments. Furthermore, views were gathered regarding the envisioned modality and role of the AFSD as a mechanism for promoting an integrated and balanced approach to the three dimensions of sustainable development at the
regional level, monitoring and reviewing progress, and providing regional perspectives to the global agenda of the HLPF.

During the AFSD, and indeed throughout the consultative process, it was acknowledged that the achievement of sustainable development is beyond the capacities of one single Arab country. While action at the national level remains the cornerstone of development, regional integration is a much needed transformational change for sustainable development in the region. The Arab countries have much to benefit from deeper regional integration that covers economic, social and environmental spheres.

**Objective and themes**

The side event will examine the outcomes of recent Arab consultations on sustainable development, including the AFSD, from a regional integration lens. In particular, the side event will address the following issues:

a) Arab perspectives on SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda, and potential for working together as an Arab region in their achievement;

b) The envisaged role of the AFSD as a catalyst for regional integration;

c) The added value of an Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development under the LAS umbrella and available means for operationalizing it;

d) The role of ESCWA, LAS, and the UN system organizations active in the region in pushing forward a regional development agenda.

**Target audience**

The side event is open to all interested participants in the HLPF. Target audience includes HLPF participants from the Arab Countries and Arab Permanent Missions to the UN. Arab representatives in the OWG and Arab countries delivering national voluntary presentations during the AMR are particularly welcome. Major groups attending the HLPF will also benefit from the side event.