UNDP Opening statement at the Arab Integration - A Transformative Change for Sustainable Development
New York, 01 Jul 2014

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Excellencies, Ms. Under Secretary-General, Colleagues, Friends:

On behalf of the Regional Bureau for Arab States of UNDP and as Chair of the MENA and Arab States Regional United Nations Development Group, I am pleased to be here today.

I am honoured to take the floor after Her Excellency Dr. Rima Khalaf Hunaidi, who has done much to further the cause of Arab integration for sustainable development. And I am delighted to be in the company of each of you who each in her or his way is advancing this cause which we all hold so dear.

The political events around the region demonstrate the importance of strengthening the Arab development agenda. And the integration issue looms large if the region is to recover from these hardships.

We are meeting at an important time for the vital agenda of regional integration and sustainable development. The world is moving quickly towards the target date for the Millennium Development Goals.

At the same time Member States are taking important steps towards a post-2015 development agenda through the ongoing inter-governmental process where sustainability is at the centre of the discussions and consultations.

The current eight-day meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development will surely play a pivotal role in shaping and concretizing inter-governmental thinking towards an integrated and universal sustainable development agenda.

I am pleased that the work undertaken in this Forum will benefit from a range of perspectives, including the views of the League of Arab States, Arab Governments, UN experts and others.

I am also pleased that your dialogues will benefit from insights that have emerged through the nine national dialogues on post-2015 that we as the UNDG organized across the Arab States region last year, the regional Arab Development Forum we organized in April 2013, in Amman, as well as views from regional consultations organized by ESCWA. These consultations have been powerfully supplemented by strong Arab participation in the global My World survey, which for the first time invited people worldwide to express their priorities for a future development framework to the international community and Member States.

Each of these consultations and inputs point clearly to aspirations across the Arab States region for a development framework that has sustainability at its core, in the fullest sense and in each of its dimensions.

They also point clearly to a strong appreciation of the importance of integration in the Arab States region.

We know in this region that there is a powerful sense of shared purpose. But there is considerable room for growth in regional integration, and we are hopeful that Member States will continue to seize opportunities to move together towards fuller sustainability.

Our aim, in the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, is to contribute to Arab integration at two levels. In terms of policy content, we are working through the creation and support of expert networks and region-wide exchange of experience. There is much we can learn from one another, within the Arab World, including through the confrontation of viewpoints, and creation of consensus on such vital issues as gender equity and women’s rights, governance issues and parliamentary reform, and youth empowerment — issues that are at the heart of UNDP’s
Strategic Plan and Regional Programme, and issues that certainly contribute to deeper Arab integration.

At the practical level, our Aid for Trade project carried out in partnership with the League of Arab States and with the support of the Islamic Development Bank, is already achieving results in facilitating intra-Arab trade through supporting the reduction of barriers, greatly enhancing integration at the economic level. We aim to continue and sharpen this support in particular as the Arab countries move towards the entry into force of the Arab Customs Union by 2015.

Moving ahead, across the UNDG and within UNDP we are committed to continuing to provide support to Member States as they move towards renewed agendas.

The post-2015 agenda and the Sustainable Development goals are a critical opportunity for a renewed compact to end poverty and put the world on a sustainable path towards advancing human development.

Once we receive the agenda that Member States agree, we look forward to leveraging our experience, expertise and field presence to helping national partners to move towards implementation with a view to achieving results that make concrete improvements in people’s lives and in countries’ courses.

Indeed over 2014 we are organizing consultations in seven Arab countries on implementation issues in the context of a new development framework.

We are also looking forward to working with Member States to help build the capacities needed to ensure the most effective and the fullest monitoring of progress towards any new targets. It will be important to know as quickly as possible where expanded efforts are needed, and to continue to learn together which policies can be the most effective to deliver on development across the region and indeed to share our insights with others around the world.

Next January the Arab States will have an excellent opportunity to move forward on sustainable development and regional integration during the Fourth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, to be held in Tunis. I further reaffirm our commitment as UNDP to work closely with the League of Arab States, the Government of Tunisia, ESCWA and other partners to provide every support to ensure this meeting is considered a success and brings Arab countries ever closer in the quest for sustainable development.

Please know that in the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, and the Arab States and MENA Regional UNDG, we are committed to continuing to support you in the cause to see regional integration and sustainable development as two sides of the same coin, inseparable for development now and in the future.

With this in mind I am pleased to anticipate your deliberations today, and I wish you every success in contributing to ensure that this High Level Political Forum fulfils its promise as a true catalyst for sustainable development, including at the regional level.

Thank you.