Introduction:

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the Arab NGO Network for Development and the Ministry of Economy and Trade in the Lebanese Republic, are organizing a “High Level Expert Group Meeting on the Preparation of the Arab Countries for the 7th WTO Ministerial Conference”, to be held in Beirut, Lebanon during 11-12 November 2009. The Meeting comes in response to the efforts of the organizers to increase the capacity of the Arab Countries to meet the challenges arising from the international financial and economic crisis and their respective implications on international and regional trade, as well as, on the multilateral trading system. The meeting also aims to address the issues raised by the agenda of the Doha Development Round of negotiations of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and assess the possibilities of consolidating and coordinating Arab positions on these issues.

The General Council of the WTO has recently announced the convening of the 7th WTO Ministerial Conference, due to take place in Geneva, Switzerland, during 30 November to 2 December 2009, in line with Article IV, Paragraph 1 of the WTO Agreement which requests the convening of the Ministerial Conference every two years. The Main theme of discussion shall be:

“The WTO, the Multilateral Trading System and the Current Global Economic Environment”

Objectives of the High-Level Expert Group Meeting:

The EGM aims to provide through a synopsis of the latest issues to be addressed by the Agenda of 7th WTO Ministerial Conference and highlight the controversial negotiations’ issues. The two-day discussions and deliberations also aims to address the positions of the Arab countries regarding these issues and investigate the possibilities of consolidating and coordinating them.

The following topics will pose as the main themes of discussions:

1- The international financial and economic crisis and its respective implications on the Multilateral Trading System.

2- The implications of the financial and economic crisis on the foreign trade sector in the Arab countries

3- Lessons learnt from the International financial and economic crisis and its implications on the formulation of trade policies in the Arab Countries, and their participation in the Multilateral Trading System.
4- Developments in the Doha Development Round of Negotiations: Issues of dispute in agriculture, Non-Agriculture and Market Access (NAMA), and services, and respective positions of developing countries including Arab States.

5- The economic implications of commitments made by the Arab countries in the GATS in view of the financial and economic crisis

6- Towards a Trade Facilitation Agreement and its implications on the Arab region

Country working papers:
The organizers welcome position working papers presented by participants from concerned ministries in the Arab countries. It is aspired that these position papers will address one or more of the thematic issues addressed by the meeting and reflect their own country’s positions and future prospects. Ample time will be allocated to present these working papers, provided that the organizers (and Specifically ESCWA, which is acting as the focal point for this EGM) are notified of the country’s intent before 15 October and the draft of the working paper is sent electronically (MS word format) to ESCWA before 30 October 2009 for reproduction and distribution purposes.

Place and date of the meeting:
The meeting will be held in one of Beirut’s hotels in the Lebanese Republic, during 11-12 November 2009. The registration of the Meeting will begin at 8:30 a.m. on 11 November and the Meeting will end at around 17:00 p.m. (Beirut time) on 12 November 2009. Participants will be notified on the venue of the meeting in due course.

Participants:
Representatives from:

- Arab Ministries concerned with trade and trade negotiation issues.
- Arab and regional organizations: League of Arab States, Arab Monetary Fund, Arab Industrial Development Organization, Arab Agricultural Development Organization, Arab Economic and Social Development Fund, Programme for Financing Arab Trade, Kuwait Development Fund, General Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture for Arab Countries, among others.
- Arab civil society and non-governmental organizations.
- Experts and researchers in trade related issues.
- Experts from the economic media.
Language of the meeting:

Arabic and English languages with direct interpretation.

Visas:

Entry visas can be obtained from the embassies of the Republic of Lebanon in the participant’s respective countries, when applicable. If needed, the organizers of the EGM will facilitate the obtaining of visas provided that the organizers are notified in advance and before 25 October 2009 of the participants’ names and passport information.

Travel and Accommodation:

Travel and hotel accommodation are to be borne by the participants themselves unless otherwise notified. For hotel reservation and other logistics including the room rates which were obtained for the meeting please consult the EGM’s website on the following links towards mid October 2009:

- [http://www.annd.org/](http://www.annd.org/)

Correspondence:

For further correspondence and related information on participation kindly contact the organizers on one of the following addresses:

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