Session Brief
Session 1: Overview of the main outcomes from Rio+20 and implications for the Arab region

Date/Time: Wednesday 29th May, 10:30 – 12:30
Venue: Main Conference Room, Dubai Policy Academy
Moderator: Ministry of Economy, UAE
Panellists:
- H.E. Dr Yousef Abu-safieh, Minister of Environment, Palestine
- Dr Rashid Ahmad Al-Kuwari, Assistant Under-Secretary for Environmental Affairs, Ministry of Environment, Qatar
- Dr Djamel-Eddine Djaballah, Director, Department of Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development, LAS

Expert Presenters:
1. Overview of agenda and context for meeting
   Ms Roula Majdalani, Director, SDPD, ESCWA
2. Keynote address (video message)
   Ms Amina Mohammed, Secretary-General’s Special Advisor for post-2015
3. Implications of main outcomes from Rio+20 for the Arab region
   Dr Anhar Hegazi, Former Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCWA

ESCWA Coordinator: Mr Cameron Allen (allen6@un.org)

OBJECTIVES:
The objectives of this session are to:
- Provide an overview of the meeting objectives and desired outcomes;
- Explore the main outcomes from Rio+20 and their implications for the Arab region and provide the context for the following sessions which will focus specifically on SDGs, green economy, the institutional framework for sustainable development, and regional/national implementation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
1. In the context of post-Rio+20, what are some of the key regional and national challenges and priorities for implementing sustainable development in the Arab region? Can the green economy, SDGs and enhanced institutions for sustainable development help to address these challenges and priorities?
2. What are the key international processes stemming from Rio+20 that are of interest to the Arab region and how can the region best stay engaged in these processes? In this regard, what are some key messages from the Arab region to the international community?
3. What role can regional organizations such as LAS, ESCWA and UNEP play in supporting Arab countries?

BACKGROUND FOR SESSION:
Rio+20 renewed the international community’s political commitment to sustainable development and assessed progress and implementation gaps and new and emerging challenges. The outcome document for the conference, entitled The Future We Want, sets the global agenda for sustainable development over the coming years and includes a number of key outcomes with implications for the Arab region, in particular: the establishment of a high-level political forum (HLPF) for sustainable development; a process to develop Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the adoption of green economy as a tool to achieve sustainable development; and new commitments relating to means of implementation and thematic issues.

The implications of these outcomes for the Arab region are still unfolding and it is important that the region takes stock of this emerging international framework and the opportunities and challenges it
presents for the region. It is also critical that the region remains engaged in international negotiations and processes that are shaping these key outcomes, including the CSD-20, the HLPF, the Open Working Group for the development of the SDGs, and the intergovernmental committee for developing a financing strategy for sustainable development.

In the lead up to Rio+20, an Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting (RPM) was coordinated in Cairo by ESCWA, UNEP and LAS in October 2011 and brought together representatives of Arab countries from the economic, social and environmental spheres, as well as representatives of civil society and major groups, to formulate recommendations on the Rio +20 objectives and themes and renew the political commitment to sustainable development. The outcome of the RPM was a set of agreed commitments in relation to sustainable development and was followed by the Arab Ministerial Declaration on Rio+20, which outlined the region’s perspectives and priorities to be presented at Rio+20.

With the outcomes of Rio+20 now agreed, and building upon the Arab Ministerial Declaration, it is time for the region to operationalise these outcomes in accordance with regional priorities and circumstances. The Arab RIM will discuss the best way forward and map out a sustainable development agenda for the region that is meaningful for Arab countries and addresses the ongoing challenges faced by the region and takes advantage of regional opportunities.

Sustainable development recognizes the inter-linkages across the environmental, social and economic dimensions; that human wellbeing is linked to both economic opportunity as well as a healthy natural resource base. Rio+20 underscored the need for countries to build their capacity for integrated decision making based on sound science and analysis and recognizing the various inter-linkages, tradeoffs and synergies in the challenges we face.

The natural resource endowments of the Arab region have played a major role in shaping regional development opportunities. While some countries in the region have abundant energy resources (both renewable and non-renewable), the region has the lowest freshwater availability per capita of any region in the world. This water scarcity combined with the declining availability of arable land raise serious issues with regard to food security in the region. These deficits are largely bridged by imports and over-exploitation of finite resources which is unsustainable in the long-term.

Energy security is also becoming a concern for oil-importing countries where energy import bills place a significant burden on public finances and vulnerability to global oil price volatility. For oil exporting economies, high oil prices and growing social demands have led to increased government expenditure on wages and salaries, which can increase vulnerability to negative oil price shocks. Meanwhile, the region’s abundant renewable energy resources remain largely untapped.

Demographic trends in the region are placing additional pressure on scarce environmental resources as well as on governments to provide jobs and access to basic energy, water and sanitation services. The Arab population has tripled since 1970 and over half the region’s population live in cities. More than half the region’s population is below the age of 25 and is increasingly mobile. Millions of jobs need to be created each year to service this growing demand.

While significant progress has been made on human development in all Arab countries and some countries enjoy stable growth and development, others face complex emergency situations. Peace and security is a major challenge in some parts of the region. Social unrest, foreign occupation, conflicts and wars, as well as political tensions in neighbouring regions, are seriously hampering development efforts. The Arab region also remains the least industrialised middle-income region in
the world which has limited its ability to develop a strong private sector that generates productive employment for youth.

This complex range of inter-linking environmental, social and economic challenges underscores the need for sustainable development based on integrated decision-making across the three dimensions. Rio+20 provides some new tools in this regard: the development of SDGs can help to provide the overall strategic direction and framework for measuring progress that is universal yet relevant for all countries; the green economy provides policy tools that can be used to transform our economies so that they are low-carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive; and enhanced institutions can provide the mechanisms for facilitating integrated decision-making and accelerate implementation.

**Session Structure:**

For this session, there will be a moderator, 2 expert presenters and 2 panellists, with the total time allowed being 1 hour 30 minutes. The expert presentations and interventions from panellists aim to inspire and provide food for thought for the ensuing discussions by governments and major groups and form the core component of each session. The maximum duration should be approximately 45 minutes, allowing approximately 45 minutes for interventions from the floor (governments first, followed by other stakeholders) and any closing remarks from the panel, presenters and moderator.

With this in mind, it would be greatly appreciated if you could keep your interventions/presentations within the following time guidelines:

- **Moderators:** 3 minute introduction and 3 minute conclusion;
- **Expert presenters:** 10 minute PowerPoint presentations; and concluding remarks.
- **Panellists:** 3 to 5 minute interventions; and 1-2 minutes concluding remarks as required in response to comments/questions from the floor.

The session is broadly structured as follows:

- Please go to the head table 5 minutes before the start of your session for a quick meeting between moderators, speakers, panellists etc.
- At the start of the session, the Chair will handover to the Moderator.
- The Moderator will provide a brief introduction to the session, outlining the objectives for the session, the discussion questions, and introducing the Expert Presenter(s) and the Panellists (based on their bionotes).
- The Moderator will then handover to the expert presenter(s) for their presentations.
- The Expert Presenter(s) will move to a presentation podium and provide a 10 minute (maximum) PowerPoint presentation.
- The Moderator will then outline the key discussion questions for the session and will call on the Panellists one at a time to make 3-5 minute maximum interventions (panellists will remain seated for their interventions).
- After the Panellists have spoken, the Moderator will open the session up for interventions from meeting participants focusing on the discussion questions (governments first, then other stakeholders). The Moderator will moderate the session so that interventions are short (maximum 3 minutes) and that approximately 20 minutes remain for closing remarks.
- In response to any questions raised, the Moderator can then invite the Expert Presenter(s) and/or Panellists as required to make closing remarks or clarifications (3 minutes each maximum).
- The Moderator and/or Chair will take the last 3-5 minutes of the session to summarize key points made and will hand back to the Chair to close the session.
FURTHER READING – BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- Arab RIM background paper on implications of Rio+20 for the Arab region (Dr Anhar Hegazi)
- The Future We Want – outcome document from Rio+20;
- Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting report.

BIONOTES:

H.E. Dr Yousef Ataalla Abu-safieh is Minister of Environment, Palestine. Dr Abu-safieh completed a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science at the American University of Beirut, and holds a PhD in Environmental Science from the University of Texas. Dr Abu-safieh was appointed PA Minister of Environment Affairs in Aug. 1998 until 2013 Minister, was nominated Chairman of the PLC Committee on Natural Resources in Aug. 1998, held various administrative and academic positions at local universities and became a delegate to the Middle East peace negotiations, working as part of the Multilateral Working Group on Environment. Dr Abu-safieh has or has held membership of a number of boards and committees, including Chairperson of the WHO/EMRO Advisory Committee for Health and Environment, Palestine Higher Council for Education, International Society of Environmental Epidemiology, and the Board of the European-Arab Cooperation Center. In addition, Dr Abu-safieh has authored several publications on the issue of water and the environment in Palestine.

Dr Rashid Ahmad Al-Kuwari, Assistant Under-Secretary for Environmental Affairs, Ministry of Environment, Qatar (Bionote - TBC)

Dr Djamel-Eddine Djaballah is the Director, Department of Environment, Housing and Sustainable Development and Plenipotentiary Minister to the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States. He has previously held positions as Advisor to the Minister of Planning and Urban Development in Algeria as well as the Advisor to the President of the Algerian Government. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in economics, a Masters degree in economics, and a PhD.

Ms Roula Majdalani is the Director of the Sustainable Development and Productivity Division of UN ESCWA. The Division promotes cooperation among ESCWA countries on the sustainable management of natural resources with a focus on water, energy and green production. Ms. Majdalani holds a masters degree in Urban and Regional Planning from Syracuse University (New York). She joined the United Nations in 1989, in Baghdad, Iraq, as Human Settlements Officer and worked in the areas of housing policies, urban development and infrastructure. She served between 1993 and 1994 in South Africa as a Political Observer in the UN Peace Building Mission. From 2002 till 2007, she worked with SDPD as First Economic Affairs Officer dealing with issues related to water resources and capacity building in the water sector. During the period 2007-2010 she worked as Chief of the Technical Cooperation Section in the ESCWA Program Planning and Technical Cooperation Division (PPTCD).

Ms Amina Mohammed was born in Nigeria and was appointed in July 2012 by the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon as Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning. Ms. Mohammed brings to the position more than 30 years of experience as a development practitioner in the public and private sectors, as well as civil society. She was the CEO/Founder of the Center for Development Policy Solutions and was also Adjunct Professor of the Master’s Programme for Development Practice at Columbia University in New York. Prior to that, Ms. Mohammed served as the...
Senior Special Assistant to the President of Nigeria on the MDGs after serving three Presidents over a period of six years. She was charged, in 2005, with the coordination of the debt relief funds (USD 1 billion per annum) towards the achievement of MDGs in Nigeria. Ms. Mohammed served as coordinator of the Task Force on Gender and Education for the United Nations Millennium Project, from 2002 to 2005. Ms. Mohammed has served on numerous international advisory panels and boards, including the Global Development Program of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Secretary General’s Global Sustainability Panel, the Hewlett Foundation on Education, African Women’s Millennium Initiative, the ActionAid International “Right to Education Project”, the Millennium Promise Initiative, and the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China. She is a Governor of the International Development Research Centre in Canada, and currently chairs the Advisory Board of UNESCO Global Monitoring Report on Education. Ms. Mohammed received the National Honours Award of the Order of the Federal Republic in 2006 and was inducted in the Nigerian Women’s Hall of Fame in 2007.

Dr Anhar Ibrahim Hegazi is the Director of the Energy Efficiency Unit in the Egyptian Cabinet of Ministers and Former Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA. Dr Hegazi holds a PhD in Mechanical Power Engineering “Solar Energy Applications” from the Faculty of Engineering, Cairo University. Dr Hegazi has 42 year of experience on energy and related environmental issues at national, regional and International levels. She collaborated with several academic institutions, regional and international organizations including the league of Arab States “LAS”, USAID, EU and UN bodies. Dr Hegazi has recently held positions as the Director, Energy and Green Development Consultants, and Director of the Sustainable Development and Productivity Division of ESCWA. Her experience covers: (1) energy planning and policy development; (2) leading multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural teams; (3) sustainable energy institutional development; and (4) development and implementation of technical assistance activities.