



UN-ESCWA 25th Session: Important Discussions and Decisions



The UN-ESCWA 25th Ministerial Session hosted in the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, on 26-29 May 2008, was marked by key events. Held under the theme of "Financing for Development in the ESCWA region", and under the auspices of President Ali Abdallah Saleh, the Session witnessed the approval of the membership of Sudan in UN-ESCWA, the launching of the report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Arab Region for 2007, as well as the Information Society Portal for the ESCWA region (ISPER). Issues of special importance to the region, such as financing for development and regional cooperation for the implementation of the MDGs, also constituted the subjects of roundtable held for the occasion. The Republic of Yemen was elected to chair the Session, while the representative of Jordan was named First Vice Chair and Qatar Second Vice Chair, and the representative of Palestine was named Rapporteur.

The session was held over two segments: the first on the technical level, on 26-27 May 2008, the second on the ministerial level, on 28-29 May 2008.

In his inaugurating address, the Executive Secretary pointed out the UN-ESCWA work to facilitate cooperation among member countries, with the aim of achieving regional integration, which is the cornerstone to strengthen development efforts in the region. Such cooperation helps in facing up to urgent issues, such as the environment, climate change, the global food crisis, and achieving the MDGs.

An Information Portal and the MDGs in the Region

The Session was marked by the launching of the Information Society Portal of the ESCWA Region (ISPER), which provides decision makers, researchers and stakeholders alike with clear information on the status of member countries and presents it to the WSIS; assists member countries in the process of planning and improving performance; allows local authorities to compare the status of its countries with that of others; assesses cooperation and foster partnerships for regional integration within globalization and a knowledge-based economy.

The report of "The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2007: A Youth Lens", which UN-ESCWA launched during the Session, highlighted the considerable disparities in living conditions and in progress towards the MDGs between Arab sub-regions and individual countries. The report also said that future progress towards the attainment of the MDGs in the Arab region depends to a large extent on the ability of national authorities to address the needs and challenges of young people- which account for more than 20 per cent of the total Arab population- and motivate them as an essential factor for social, political and economic change. It also pointed out that governments in the Arab region should pay particular policy attention to the specific needs and priority issues of this demographic group, which are: education and employment; political, social, and cultural participation; and environmental sustainability and health issues.

Financing for Development

Speakers at the ministerial roundtable on "Financing for Development in the

ESCWA Region” stressed on the importance of enhancing the investment atmosphere with respect to political threats and placing national plans and committing to them to provide assistance based on national priorities. They also focused on the importance of medium-term planning and placing national programs that identify the priorities and expenditures.



Discussions focused on new issues that emerged since the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus. They called for adopting new measures to increase self-independence in the production of nutritional products; increasing agricultural and residential spaces to benefit from the hike in prices; reducing nutritional product import; modernizing the management and guiding expenditure; increasing strategic cooperation between southern countries; and promoting ties between developing and industrial countries to ensure full partnership.

Achieving the MDGs



Speakers in the ministerial roundtable on “The Regional Cooperation to Imple-

ment the Millennium Development Goals” suggested devising a comprehensive plan for cooperation in order to resolve the problem of unemployment of youths through the development of educational curricula and employment creation. They referred to a decrease in the bulk of aid offered to developing countries, stressing the need for the commitment to pledges that were made by donor countries to increase developmental assistance and the provision of needed resources in an organized manner for the achievement of MDGs. They also stressed the importance of achieving equality between the sexes by boosting the participation of women in the various working fields and considering the case of women empowerment when planning financing and its uses. They considered that globalization did not come up with enough benefits for developing countries, and that the regional and international atmosphere weakens the developmental opportunities in Arab countries, specifically conflict-ridden countries.

The MDG report pointed out that additional global and regional support is specifically needed for people living in conflict-ridden Iraq and Palestine and in the six Arab Least Developed Countries - Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen - where extreme poverty is widespread and maternal, child, and infant mortality rates remain very high. The report notes that peoples of Arab Least Developed Countries and of conflict-ridden countries face difficulties in achieving the MDGs.

Important Recommendations

The Session adopted a quorum of recommendations pertaining to the following subjects: fighting climate change in the Arab Region; Integrated Social Policy; the Commitment of Member Countries to International Criteria for Strengthening National Statistical Systems; Gender Statistics for Equality and the Empowerment of Women; Strengthening Statistical Capacities for Evidence-based Policy making; Alleviating the Effects of Conflict, Occupa-



tion and Instability pm the Development of Countries of the Region; and Calling for Regional Action to Implement the “Monterrey Consensus” in Western Asia.

Participants in the Session urged the UN-ESCWA Secretariat to finalize the preparations related to the selection of the country that will host UN-ESCWA Regional Technology Centre. They also called for completing preparations for establishing an Arabic Language Centre at UN-ESCWA to boost the organization’s role in promoting the Arabic language.

Participants in the Session recommended offering various forms of support to the Yemeni Republic in order to implement the activities that the country is working on at the developmental level to implement the MDGs.

Held every two years, the UN-ESCWA Ministerial Session is considered the main governing body of the Commission, which decides on its policy. It gathered a quorum of representatives of the 13 member countries of UN-ESCWA, at the ministerial level, senior officials and eminent persons from the host country (Yemen), as well as embassies accredited to Yemen. Representatives of UN agencies; States Members of the UN that are not members of the Commission; governmental and non-governmental organizations; donor agencies and funding institutions; regional experts, and academia and national media institutions, in addition to regional and international media agencies accredited in Yemen also participated in the Session.

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