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Empowering the Private Sector, Investment in Youth and Fighting Unemployment on UN-ESCWA Agenda

Strengthening and empowering the private sector, unemployment and employment in the Arab world, especially from the angle of reinforcing the role of youth, are issues that UN-ESCWA Executive-Secretary, Bader Omar AlDafa tackled in two interventions he made in Kuwait and Qatar.

On 12 November 2008, AlDafa spoke of the private sector's share in the region's economies, solutions to the issues facing it and the role UN-ESCWA assumes in assisting member countries, in the context of the forum on "Arab Economic Integration from the Private Sector's Perspective", co-held by the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) and the General Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture for Arab Countries, on 11-12 November, in Kuwait City.

"There are several successful examples of private sector participation in the economies of the region. However, the sector remains far from handling the key role we hope it could take on in the economies of Arab countries. Enabling this sector and empowering it necessarily goes through legal, institutional, and organizational reforms. For its part, the private sector should suggest new and creative alternatives learned from successful experiences and should assume an effective role in the productive and service sectors", AlDafa said.

He considered that UN-ESCWA can take on a vital role in assisting member countries on this level. The Regional Commission works for example on "strengthening cooperation with private sector institutions and trade chambers to

benefit of their support in implementing new and creative projects, drafting analytical studies and organizing capacity-building workshops; transmitting expertise, experiences, and best practices from European and Asian countries, and looking into adapting and implementing them in the Arab region".

The two-day meeting discussed many issues, mainly focusing on legislation, policies, and procedures needed to remove obstacles facing Arab economic integration and creating an enabling environment to develop the Arab private sector, which would assume its developmental and social role on the national and regional levels.

Unemployment as Arab Region's Dilemma

AlDafa tackled the issues of unemployment and work opportunities from the angle of "Arab Regional Cooperation in Youth-related Social Spheres", at the "Arab Forum on Development and Employment" organized by the Qatari Labor Ministry and the Arab Labor Organization (ALO), on 15-16 November, in Doha, Qatar.

Addressing the meeting, AlDafa remarked that the labour market knows constant and quick shifts and turns, which can sometimes be hard to expect and keep pace with. Despite the high growth registered in the Arab region, estimated at an average of 6 percent yearly in 2003-2007, the effect of "this growth over unemployment rates remained limited. Unemployment in the Arab region is the highest worldwide. The first ALO-issued Arab report on employment and unemployment noted that Arab un-

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Transport Sector in the Region: Institutional Frameworks and Legislation

Under the patronage and in the presence of Syrian Transport Minister Ya'rob Suleiman Badr, UN-ESCWA held an expert group meeting on the "Harmonization of Institutional Frameworks and Legislation in the Transport Sector in the UN-ESCWA Region", on 12-13 November 2008, at the Meridien Hotel, Damascus.

Nabil Safwat, Officer-in-Charge of the UN-ESCWA Economic Development and Globalization divi-



Empowering the Private Sector, Investment in Youth and Fighting Unemployment on UN-ESCWA Agenda (Cont.)

employment represents 14 per cent of the total work force, while the number of unemployed youth is 25 per cent". Despite gains that women made in access to education, these gains were not mirrored in their economic participation. On the other hand, "unemployment is highest in most Arab countries among the educated. This is an indication to the mismatch between their competences and labor market needs on the one hand and their knowledge and the economic cycle on the other".

Responding to these challenges, Arab countries attempt to create jobs and employ work-seekers, but efforts are still lacking. Innovative solutions are required,

such as designing youth-targeted training and educational programs to enlighten them on the importance of work and its true value.

Youth: a Priority

AlDafa also ascertained that "youth issues are at the heart of UN-ESCWA concerns and programs. The Commission is careful to discuss these issues and possible solutions to them in the context of integrated social policies; strengthen production sectors that rely on the work force; and link training and educational programs with labor market needs". UN-ESCWA has also issued many studies on the nature of the labor market in the Arab

region, and regional cooperation frameworks. In cooperation with other UN agencies and organizations, as well as the League of Arab States (LAS), it has issued a detailed report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Arab region. The report underlined priority issues for Arab youth, including the increase of job opportunities.

The "Arab Forum on Development and Unemployment" witnessed the participation of 25 ministers of economy, education, training and labor in Arab countries, alongside local business organizations, relevant Arab and international organizations, economic experts, civil society organizations, and Arab businesswomen associations. ■

Transport Sector in the Region: Institutional Frameworks and Legislation (Cont.)

sion and head of Transport Team, delivered an opening statement on behalf of Executive Secretary Bader Omar AlDafa, going over the aims of the meeting and UN-ESCWA achievements in the area of transport. In his opening speech, Minister Suleiman Badr pointed to the achievements, programs and work plans of the Syrian Transportation Ministry concerning infrastructure, legislation, administrative and institutional development; the private sector's role; human resource training; road safety and other issues.

Participants spoke of the current status of the region's transport system, and UN-ESCWA's proposal to develop the integrated, multimodal transport system in the Arab region. They

discussed the current status of institutional frameworks and legislation in some UN-ESCWA countries, and some good practices worldwide. The meeting also dealt with the close cooperation between UN-ESCWA and the League of Arab States (LAS), in drawing up the unified multimodal transport agreement among Arab states, which was approved by the 21st Session of the Arab Transport Ministers Council (Port Said 29 October 2008), and what has been applied in some components of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM). Concluding the meeting, participants recommended adopting a few points, the most important concerning proposals to harmonize institutional frameworks and legislation in UN-ESCWA transport sector, while others



relate to the implementation of ITSAM.

The meeting gathered representatives of UN-ESCWA member countries, concerned with transport in general and institutional frameworks and

legislation in the transport sector in particular. Participants included officials, technical experts, legal consultants, and experts in transport, road safety, trade facilitation, and concerned Arab organizations and unions. ■

Address

P.O. Box 11-8575, Riad El-Solh, Beirut-Lebanon
Tel.: 961-1-981301; Fax: 961-1-981510

e-mail: webmaster-escwa@un.org
website: www.escwa.un.org