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REPORT

CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON ESTABLISHING A COMMITTEE ON EMERGING ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENT UNDER CRISIS AMMAN, 11 DECEMBER 2013

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held a consultative meeting with its member States on establishing a committee on emerging issues and development under crisis, tasked with identifying ESCWA priorities, monitoring challenges and developing approaches and strategies to tackle those challenges. The meeting was held in Amman on 11 December 2013 and was attended by member State representatives and ESCWA officials. Its aim was to discuss the form, tasks, membership and mandate of the prospective committee.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) strives to follow the rapid developments in the Arab region, especially in terms of conflict, occupation and other emerging issues that negatively affect economic and social development. To build its capacities in handling emerging issues and development in conflict settings, ESCWA decided, in 2006, to establish the Section for Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues, which was upgraded to the level of a division in 2012, pursuant to ESCWA resolution 271, (XXIV) of 11 May 2006, on strengthening the role of ESCWA in addressing the impact of conflict and instability within the context of social and economic development; and ESCWA resolution 282 (XXV), of 29 May 2008, on mitigating the impact on development of conflict, occupation and instability in ESCWA member countries. To continue such efforts and enhance its efficiency in monitoring, analysing and implementing programmes and projects to build the capacities of member States in addressing conflict repercussions and their root causes, ESCWA, in 2009, began work on establishing a committee on emerging issues and development under crisis tasked with identifying priorities, monitoring challenges and developing approaches and strategies to tackle those challenges. In 2012, the Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues Division presented a report at the twenty-seventh ESCWA Ministerial Session in which it suggested holding a consultative meeting in 2013 on establishing the committee.¹ In response, ESCWA held such a meeting with member States to discuss the establishment of the committee, its form, tasks, membership, mandate and terms of reference; and to determine the necessary steps for its operationalization. The consultative meeting was held in Amman on 11 December 2013 and was attended by representatives of 14 member States and several ESCWA officials.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The consultative meeting on establishing a committee on emerging issues and development under crisis issued several recommendations, the most important of which included the following: establishing an intergovernmental committee under the title “Committee on Emerging Issues and Development under Crisis”; inviting the ESCWA secretariat to prepare a new draft of the committee’s terms of reference, goals, framework, tasks and mandate on the basis of proposals by the Technical Committee in the light of ESCWA economic, social and development responsibilities pursuant to resolution 292 (XXVI), and present the draft at a meeting of senior officials to be held within the framework of the preparations for the twenty-eighth ESCWA Ministerial Session.

II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

A. STEPS TAKEN BY THE ESCWA SECRETARIAT TO ESTABLISH A COMMITTEE ON EMERGING ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENT UNDER CRISIS

3. Mr. Tarik Alami, Director of the Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues Division, gave a presentation on the efforts made by the ESCWA secretariat to establish a committee on emerging issues and development under crisis. The ESCWA Technical Committee, at its third meeting, held on 21 and 22 July 2009, issued a recommendation to establish a task force within the Technical Committee to study the establishment of a committee on emerging issues and development under crisis, aimed at strengthening the role of ESCWA in peacebuilding, mitigating the impact on development of conflict and drafting a recommendation in that regard for submission at the twenty-sixth ESCWA Ministerial Session.² Subsequently, the ESCWA secretariat, on 23 September 2009, invited member States to join the task force, noting that discussions would take place through correspondence. Liaison officers were then appointed between ESCWA and 10 member States, namely Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, to assist in establishing the committee. The ESCWA secretariat launched the

¹ E/ESCWA/27/5/(Part II).

² E/ESCWA/2009/C.3/6.

discussions on the committee's proposed form and tasks and noted the suggestions and comments from member States in a draft it had prepared on the topic. Following those serious efforts, ESCWA, at its twenty-sixth Ministerial Session, issued resolution 292 (XXVI) of 19 May 2010 on upgrading the Section for Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues to the level of a division and establishing a specialized committee on emerging issues and development under crisis. The resolution calls on member States to continue to seek the achievement of peace and stability in the region and remedy the root causes of conflict within a framework of economic and social development programmes; enhance development efforts, in particular in countries affected by conflict and occupation; promote public sector institutional capacity-building efforts in view of the contribution of such efforts to addressing emerging issues and conflict; formulate policies, programmes and strategies at the national and regional levels with a view to addressing the repercussions of conflict and instability in member States, preventing potential conflict and addressing the roots of such conflict and instability; and contribute to the mobilization of financial and human resources to support development efforts in situations of instability and foster preparedness of member countries to address potential future conflict.

4. Pursuant to the above resolution, member States agreed to upgrade the Section for Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues to the level of a division to enhance ESCWA capabilities to undertake the following tasks:

(a) Monitor and analyse emerging issues and present recommendations, practical proposals and programmes to tackle them;

(b) Develop and implement programmes, projects and activities to mitigate the impact of conflict and instability and contribute to peacebuilding efforts;

(c) Identify and meet institutional needs to achieve the Millennium Development Goals;

(d) Develop and implement projects and programmes to build institutional capacities in member States in planning and management so as to empower them to face current and possible future crises and challenges.

5. ESCWA member States agreed to establish a committee on emerging issues and development under crisis comprising their representatives, following additional consultations on the committee's tasks and mandate. Pursuant to United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution 2011/3 on upgrading the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia Section for Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues to the level of a division and establishing a specialized committee on emerging issues and development under crisis, of 18 May 2011, the ESCWA secretariat decided to restructure the Section, from the date the upgrade came into effect (1 January 2012), including increasing the number of staff and reviewing the nature of activities and expertise necessary for successful implementation. This process required professional staff to work in development and build institutions using their expertise in conflict, its indirect effects, conflict resolution and public sector reform.

6. The Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues Division presented a report to the twenty-seventh ESCWA Ministerial Session in 2012, containing a proposal to hold a consultative meeting in 2013 on establishing a committee on emerging issues and development under crisis. The committee would hold its first meeting following the expected approval of its establishment at the twenty-eighth ESCWA ministerial session in 2014.³

³ E/ESCWA/27/5/(Part II).

B. BUILDING THE CAPACITIES OF THE EMERGING AND CONFLICT-RELATED ISSUES
DIVISION BY ESTABLISHING A SPECIALIZED COMMITTEE

7. Few member States were affected by instability, conflict or occupation when the Section for Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues was established in 2006. Since 2011, the situation has changed, with rising instability and an increase in political and security crises; and the continued Israeli occupation of Arab land. Since 2011, there has been an increase in the probability of new conflicts and crises occurring in the Arab region, especially in the light of the challenges posed by democratic transitions and other changes undertaken in several ESCWA member States.

8. The situation requires ESCWA, particularly its Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues Division, to build its capacities to follow developments in the region and monitor patterns that could affect the development process and to intensify consultations with stakeholders, including Governments, public and civil institutions, and national and regional experts. Capacity-building goals include developing approaches, strategies and initiatives to assist member States face crises and challenges resulting from political transitions, mitigate their negative effects on development and establish institutions capable of driving development, even in times of crises. Such plans and programmes should be developed on the basis of member States' priorities. The ESCWA secretariat is determined to complete consultations with member States to develop a common vision regarding the nature, goals, tasks and structure of the committee.

1. *Goals of the committee*

9. The following are the goals of the prospective committee:

(a) Providing a platform for discussion between stakeholders and experts in member States to exchange opinions on the effects of crises and occupation, especially the Israeli occupation, at the national and regional levels; on ESCWA activities aimed at mitigating such effects on development; and on building the capacities of member States to face resulting challenges;

(b) Increasing the ESCWA secretariat's understanding of the effects of crises, the Israeli occupation and emerging issues on development; assisting the secretariat in clearly depicting the situation in the Arab region at international events; and supporting the secretariat in implementing activities and initiatives that are more specific to Arab countries, their needs and priorities;

(c) Increasing ESCWA activities aimed at driving development in crisis situations, facing challenges and emerging issues and building partnerships at the national and regional levels to that effect.

2. *Proposed form of the committee*

10. Regional commissions comprise several types of specialized committees, including ministerial committees, mixed committees consisting of experts from various sectors and government institutions and committees made up of researchers, experts and activists. In general, the form and tasks of a committee are decided on the basis of its expected goals. At ESCWA, specialized committees are divided into two types: governmental subcommittees, comprising representatives of relevant ministries in member States; and consultative committees, such as the Consultative Committee on Scientific and Technological Development and Technological Innovation that consists of distinguished specialists with a wealth of experience in their field. To tackle emerging issues and crises, the ESCWA secretariat is of the opinion that either committee type would achieve the desired goals, especially if supported with effective terms of reference.

Annex I*

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