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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**

**FOLLOW-UP TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS  
ADOPTED BY THE COMMISSION AT ITS TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION**

**Summary**

This report presents the actions taken by the secretariat to follow up the implementation of the resolutions that were adopted at the twenty-fourth session of the Commission on the various issues of interest to member countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and on which the work of the Commission is focused. The resolutions are as follows:

- 269 (XXIV). The role of ESCWA in the light of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document and the subsequent change process;
- 270 (XXIV). Macroeconomic policy for financial stability;
- 271 (XXIV). Strengthening the role of ESCWA in addressing the impact of conflict and instability within the context of social and economic development;
- 272 (XXIV). Youth employment in ESCWA member countries;
- 273 (XXIV). Follow-up to the development of the Information Society in Western Asia;
- 274 (XXIV). The establishment of the ESCWA Technology Centre;
- 275 (XXIV). Technical cooperation, partnership development and resource mobilization;
- 276 (XXIV). Strengthening statistical capacities in the ESCWA region;
- 277 (XXIV). Social development policies;
- 278 (XXIV). Increasing the role of women in decision-making with respect to conflict prevention and peacebuilding;
- 279 (XXIV). Follow-up to implementation of components of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq.

**RESOLUTION 269 (XXIV). THE ROLE OF ESCWA IN THE LIGHT OF THE 2005 WORLD SUMMIT OUTCOME DOCUMENT AND THE SUBSEQUENT CHANGE PROCESS**

1. At its twenty-fourth session, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted resolution 269 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on the role of ESCWA in the light of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document and the subsequent change process. In that resolution, ESCWA member countries were called upon to work towards achieving the goals and objectives that were endorsed in the 2005 World Summit Outcome as an integral part of their national plans and strategies; and United Nations entities working in the region of Western Asia were urged to provide coordinated support for regional needs and to focus on making progress aimed at realizing those goals. Moreover, the resolution requested the Executive Secretary to increase coherence and synergy, and to foster partnerships and cooperation with other regional United Nations organizations through ESCWA's leading role in the Regional Coordination Group (RCG); to continue to play a catalytic role aimed at enhancing cooperation with regional organizations, particularly the League of Arab States (LAS) and its subsidiary bodies and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); to increase cooperation with the other regional commissions in order to share experiences and replicate best practices; and to keep member Governments informed of the outcomes of the United Nations reform process that have programmatic implications. The Executive Secretary was further requested to report on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution to the twenty-fifth session of the Commission.
2. The secretariat has undertaken various activities pursuant to that resolution, which are summarized below.
3. The eleventh meeting of RCG, which took place in June 2006, addressed issues related to monitoring the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the regional level and to collaborative initiatives aimed at achieving MDGs. Under these two headings, United Nations entities working in the region agreed to provide coordinated support for achieving MDGs in the Arab region.
4. The meeting concluded in forging partnerships among the various participating United Nations entities in the region in the following areas: (a) the joint preparation of the 2007 MDG report for the Arab region with the participation of LAS, which focused on youth as a cross-cutting main theme; (b) the establishment of a Working Group on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region, with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as the lead agency; (c) the mapping of United Nations activities on gender and youth at the regional level, which is set to be led by ESCWA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); (d) the preparation of a regional media strategy and priority action plan through a core group comprising, among others, UNDP, United Nations Information Centres (UNICs) and ESCWA; and (e) identification and development of a regional initiative and/or programme aimed at developing reliable, timely and transparent statistics for monitoring MDGs, including gender statistics, in order to accelerate the engendering of MDGs, with ESCWA and UNDP as the lead agencies.
5. Additionally, LAS was invited to participate in the eleventh meeting of RCG, which marked a first such participation and during which LAS agreed to play a part in preparing the 2007 MDG report for the Arab region.
6. As a result of efforts by ESCWA aimed at enhancing cooperation and collaboration with a number of subsidiary bodies of LAS, three memoranda of understanding were signed, namely: (a) with the Arab Women Organization in 2006 with regard to cooperation on women empowerment and capacity-building issues; (b) with the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO) in October 2007 on industrial statistics and indicators, research and technological development, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); and (c) with the Arab Labour Organization (ALO) in February 2008 on cooperation and the implementation of diverse development activities in areas of common concern.
7. Other activities included as follows: (a) building partnerships with the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development (AAAID) on a revolving microcredit fund for South Lebanon; (b) cooperating on common activities with the Statistical Committee in the area of sustainable development and

environmental indicators of priority to the Arab region; (c) cooperating with the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting (GOIC) on industrial indicators and information systems for industrial information; (d) contributing towards training statistical officials on relevant databases and their applications with the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS); and (d) cooperating with LAS and the World Bank/PARIS21 in order to include Arab countries in the programmes of the Accelerated Data Programme (ADP) and the International Household Survey Network (IHSN), and to establish a webpage on statistical development in the Arab region.

8. Within the framework of enhancing cooperation with other regional commissions, an agreement was signed in May 2007 between ESCWA and the North Africa Office of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) aimed at the following: (a) supporting jointly the development efforts of countries in North Africa by sharing knowledge and expertise; (b) encouraging South-South cooperation between member countries of the two commissions; and (c) promoting coherence and synergies of United Nations development work in order to accelerate the process of regional integration in the Arab region and in close collaboration with international and regional organizations, particularly LAS.

9. In addition, the periodic meetings of the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions and the annual meetings of the chiefs of programme planning ensured greater collaboration through contacts, deliberations and exchanges of information and experiences. Moreover, this increased cooperation and coordination between the regional commissions was reflected by their joint contributions and inputs to the Economic and Social Council and to the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence with regard to United Nations reform.

10. Other forms of cooperation between the regional commissions include the preparation of Development Account project proposals for the sixth tranche (2008-2009), which focuses on migration and development and the joint implementation of a number of these projects, thereby sharing experiences and replicating and documenting best practices.

11. Similarly, through the Inter-agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on MDG Indicators, regional commissions and agencies are set to share best practices on modes of coordinating the work of international agencies with governmental offices through the national statistical offices. ESCWA also participated in a number of national meetings within the context of the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

12. Furthermore, ESCWA participates in the annual sessions of the Commission for Social Development, the Commission on Population and Development, the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Statistical Commission and the Commission on the Status of Women, thereby sharing experiences in those areas with other regional commissions and member countries.

13. One of the outcomes of the twenty-fourth session of the Commission was the decision to establish the Technical Committee aimed at enhancing consultations between the members of the Commission and its secretariat on substantive development issues. The adverse political and security situation in Lebanon, the host country, necessitated repeated rescheduling of the first meeting of the Technical Committee, which was eventually convened on 16-17 January 2008. In addition, Government officials are kept informed of programmatic and substantive developments at the United Nations in general and in ESCWA in particular through the sessions of the seven subsidiary intergovernmental committees of ESCWA, and through the regular meetings of the Advisory Committee of Ambassadors.

#### **RESOLUTION 270 (XXIV). MACROECONOMIC POLICY FOR FINANCIAL STABILITY**

14. At its twenty-fourth session, ESCWA adopted resolution 270 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on macroeconomic policy for financial stability. In that resolution, the Commission expressed its concern with regard to the challenges associated with the development of the financial sector in facing volatility in market

behaviour. It further requested the secretariat to monitor and analyse the situations and possible consequences of financial market instability in economic and social development in the region; to undertake regular and timely forecasts and policy analyses, and to disseminate those analytical outputs and recommendations to the widest possible audience; and to call upon Governments and the private sector to promote intraregional investments for economic diversification.

15. Pursuant to that resolution, the secretariat has been monitoring on a daily basis the economic, financial and social situations in the region, thereby compiling and archiving quantitative and qualitative data for routine analyses. This has yielded the following observations: (a) GCC economies succeeded in minimizing the negative effects that stemmed from their stock market adjustments by introducing policy and reform measures in the regulatory frameworks of their capital markets; (b) stock markets in the more diversified economies (MDEs) recovered in the second half of 2006 and macroeconomic stability was preserved; (c) while the economy of the region has benefited from ample liquidity and strong domestic demand, the inflationary trend has hampered the growth of national income in real terms; and (d) the economic situation remains fragile given the significant dependency on revenues from hydrocarbon products and their spillover effects.

16. Within the framework of enhancing the dissemination of economic analyses and forecasts and of promoting the work of ESCWA, several publications and technical material were prepared and made available in print and online, including the *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region 2005-2006* (August 2006), the *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region 2006-2007* (May 2007), *Economic Trends and Impacts, Issue No. 4: Foreign Aid and Development in the Arab Region* (January 2007) and various *Regional Economic Estimates and Forecasts* (April 2006, January 2007, June 2007, December 2007).

17. Furthermore, a regional workshop on composite economic indicators for short-term economic forecasting was organized in Amman in March 2007, which aimed at strengthening the economic and financial infrastructures of member countries in order to promote intraregional investment and economic diversification, and to assist in establishing timely economic forecast systems. This technical cooperation activity was implemented along with the analyses and policy recommendations aimed at advocating pro-poor macroeconomic policies through the optimal mixture of fiscal and monetary policies and institutional designs.

**RESOLUTION 271 (XXIV). STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF ESCWA IN  
ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT AND INSTABILITY WITHIN  
THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

18. At its twenty-fourth session, ESCWA adopted 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. In that resolution, the Commission requested the secretariat to intensify its endeavours aimed at enhancing the capacity of member countries in order to assess, predict and respond to socio-economic and political challenges posed by conflict and instability; called on the Executive Secretary to affirm the independence of approaches to issues related to conflict and lack of stability, and to mobilize additional human and financial resources aimed at supporting the above-mentioned activities; and requested the Executive Secretary to submit a report to the twenty-fifth session of the Commission on the progress achieved in this regard.

19. Pursuant to that resolution, ESCWA has undertaken a number of normative and operational activities. Specifically, various reports were compiled and drafted in 2006 and 2007 aimed at monitoring and analysing the repercussions of conflict and instability on socio-economic development in the region, including weekly political reviews; a biannual report on the impact of conflict on social, economic and political development

in the region; and the note by the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

20. Moreover, ESCWA has played an active role in identifying the socio-economic development needs of those member countries that are suffering from crises and instability. Within that context and in consultation with leading experts in Lebanon, a concept paper was formulated in the aftermath of the July-August 2006 war in that country, entitled "Lebanon's rebuilding and revival: A policy paper with initiatives". Equally, a number of papers on the capacity-building needs of Palestine in the area of trade, public finance, investment promotion and enterprise development were prepared and presented to a workshop in Ramallah on 19 February 2008. These undertakings are part of ESCWA's preparations for the Asian-African Conference on Palestine, in particular on capacity-building assistance, which is scheduled to be held in Indonesia in May 2008.

21. Furthermore, ESCWA endeavoured to assist members that suffer from crises or unstable conditions in terms of formulating and implementing policies and work plans that cater to their specific needs. A number of meetings, workshops and training courses were held within the framework of development under crisis conditions, with the aim of enhancing the capacities of relevant public and civic institutions in order to provide necessary services under severe conditions. These activities included two expert group meetings, namely Development under Crisis Conditions (Beirut, 27-28 June 2006) and Fostering Partnerships between International and Regional Private Sector Institutions and their Counterparts in Crisis-stricken Countries (Beirut, 12-13 December 2007); two training courses on the delivery of services under crisis conditions; and a regional workshop on the management of water provision under crisis. Additionally, the Commission implemented a large number of capacity-building programmes and courses for various public and civic institutions, particularly in Iraq. These programmes, which cover a wide spectrum of fields, including good governance, management and project formulation, have resulted in the training of hundreds of public servants and civil society activists in that country.

22. ESCWA was also active in terms of formulating and implementing operational activities for the rehabilitation and development of conflict-stricken areas, including, among others, the E-Caravan project in South Lebanon; a revolving micro-credit project targeting SMEs in South Lebanon; the Iraqi Networking Academies Project; Multipurpose Technology Community Centres (MTCCs) in support of the Employment Creation Programme in Iraq; the Smart Community Project (SCP) in Iraq; capacity-building of the public sector in Iraq; a project proposal aimed at supporting peaceful coexistence and communal harmony among adolescents in Iraq through non-formal education; and a proposal aimed at reducing ethno-sectarian tensions in the Arab region.

23. In addition, forging partnerships between stakeholders in conflict-stricken areas and their regional/international counterparts was mainstreamed into a number of activities in order to ensure efficiency. In that regard, a number of ESCWA activities and projects yielded public-civic partnerships, intraregional partnerships and national-regional-international partnerships.

#### **RESOLUTION 272 (XXIV). YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES**

24. At its twenty-fourth session, ESCWA adopted resolution 272 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on youth employment in ESCWA member countries. In that resolution, the Commission called upon member countries to include youth policies in their national development strategies by mainstreaming a youth perspective in all planning processes, preparing national youth policies and devising national plans of action for youth employment in order to limit the migration of the skilled workforce. Member countries were also called upon to submit up-to-date and accurate statistics on youth unemployment; to collect data on all youth-related issues on a regular basis in order to establish national databases and for monitoring and preparing national reports; and to undertake studies on the factors that lead to unemployment and their impact. Moreover, the resolution encouraged member countries to exchange well-qualified youth labour in order to

help to circulate financial resources within the region. The secretariat was requested to contribute to the development of a broad set of statistical indicators on youth employment and to devise a mechanism for the establishment of a system aimed at providing information on Arab labour markets. Additionally, the Executive Secretary was requested to submit a report on the progress made in implementing this resolution to the Commission at its twenty-fifth session.

25. The secretariat has undertaken various activities pursuant to that resolution, which are summarized below.

26. Through a series of relevant activities, ESCWA succeeded in shedding light on the implications of development caused by a growing youth population. Specifically, the Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region (Beirut, 15-17 May 2006) and the third issue of the *Population and Development Report* addressed how the marginalization of youth impedes the formulation of coherent population policies that are necessary in order to avoid the potential trade-off between population momentum, unemployment and the pressure for further migration. Furthermore, ESCWA's strategic framework for 2010-2011 was formulated to cater for youth issues and the promotion of an inclusive and enabling environment.

27. Currently, ESCWA is working on a strategic vision paper, which is set to serve as the basis or guiding instrument for the formulation and development of a regional project on youth. This pilot project is based on a participatory approach that is set to involve the youth, Governments, the private sector, civil society, leading non-governmental organizations (NGOs), LAS and specialized United Nations entities. Within the social policy programme of ESCWA, youth plays an integral part in the social policy approach that cuts across demographic, social, economic and cultural dimensions. Youth issues centre on social equity and equal opportunity in matters of access to basic education and skills, access to decent employment and resources, and economic and social integration.

28. Additionally, ESCWA has developed a youth module on its Statistical Information System (ESIS), which is posted on the ESCWA website, and is currently compiling a regional database from available national sources and such international sources as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). The youth database, which is disaggregated by gender, provides up-to-date and accurate national and international statistics on youth economic activity, unemployment rates, population characteristics, illiteracy rates, educational attainment and such health-related issues as fertility, disability and smoking rates.

#### **RESOLUTION 273 (XXIV). FOLLOW-UP TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY IN WESTERN ASIA**

29. At its twenty-fourth session, ESCWA adopted resolution 273 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on the follow-up to the development of the information society in Western Asia. The resolution called on the secretariat to extend its technical assistance and cooperation to member countries aimed at formulating and implementing strategies and plans of action related to information and communications technology (ICT), including the Regional Plan of Action for Building the Information Society (RPoA), capacity-building plans for the adoption and collection of ICT indicators for policymakers, mechanisms for fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships and implementing ICT applications for socio-economic development. Moreover, the resolution called upon the secretariat to participate actively in the implementation of RPoA and to provide an update on the progress made in that regard. It also requested the Executive Secretary to submit a report to the Commission at its twenty-fifth session on the follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Tunis Agenda, implementation of the plans of action with regard to the progress achieved in member countries, and the efforts exerted by ESCWA in that regard.

30. The secretariat has undertaken various activities pursuant to that resolution, which are summarized below.

31. ESCWA produced the “Guidelines for the formulation and implementation of ICT strategy” in order to assist policymakers in the region in formulating ICT policies and strategies, based on which ESCWA has assisted Yemen on its national e-strategy, and Jordan in the preparation of a research and development strategy for the ICT sector. In addition, ESCWA organized a workshop on ICT policies, strategies and plans of action and formed a network of ICT policymakers as a result of a workshop on capacity-building for ICT policymaking. Within the framework of providing member countries with technical assistance, three capacity-building workshops on ICT indicators adoption and data collection were organized by ESCWA in collaboration with regional and international organizations, including the global Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development. These workshops focused on the internationally agreed core ICT indicators, while exploring the regional experiences in ICT measurement and the use of household and business surveys for data collection. Moreover, in 2007, ESCWA published a booklet, entitled “Guidelines for ICT indicators measurements” (in Arabic) to formalize the process of adopting, collecting and analysing ICT indicators;<sup>1</sup> and produced with the Arab Institute for Training and Researches in Statistics (AITRS) the Arabic version of the Partnership’s publication, entitled “Core list of ICT indicators”.

32. Additionally, ESCWA organized two training workshops on public-private partnerships for ICT initiatives and the Expert Group Meeting on Regional Networking and Partnership for the Information Society Development (Beirut, 5-6 September 2007). These meetings aimed at building the capacities of member countries and enhancing collaboration between the public and private sectors and NGOs in the region. Partnership and networking were equally explored through a meeting on open-source software solutions for the public sector, which showcased the collective benefits that can be derived from the development and cooperation process.

33. Furthermore, ESCWA followed up on the implementation of RPoA, which was enriched in 2007 with three additional projects proposed by LAS, by collaborating with the Arab Working Group on ICT Strategy and preparing its plan of action. ESCWA also established an information society portal as a regional online tool aimed at coordinating and organizing partnerships among the region’s stakeholders on the implementation of RPoA.<sup>2</sup> The transparency and accessibility of the portal allows member countries to assess directly the progress made and gives all stakeholders the opportunity to participate fully in the development of the information society in the region.

34. In support of Governments and all stakeholders in the region, the secretariat produced the 2007 edition of the “Regional Profile of the Information Society in Western Asia” and the national profiles for member countries.<sup>3</sup> These profiles cover all WSIS action lines and advances in ICTs related to achieving the MDGs, and show the progress made by member countries in relation to WSIS outcomes.

#### **RESOLUTION 274 (XXIV). THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ESCWA TECHNOLOGY CENTRE**

35. At its twenty-fourth session, ESCWA adopted resolution 274 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on the establishment of the ESCWA Technology Centre. The resolution approved, in principle, the establishment of the ESCWA Technology Centre as defined in the pre-feasibility study; and requested the secretariat to follow up with member countries with respect to the hosting of the Centre and securing its sources of

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<sup>1</sup> The booklet is available at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/ictd-07-tech1-a.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The information society portal is available at: <http://isper.escwa.org.lb/isper/>.

<sup>3</sup> These profiles are available at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/wsisis/profiles.html>.

finance. The resolution also requested the secretariat to take the necessary actions aimed at establishing the Centre and to submit a report to the twenty-fifth session of the Commission in this regard.

36. The secretariat has undertaken various activities pursuant to that resolution, which are summarized below.

37. During the first quarter of 2007, ESCWA used funds from the regular programme of technical cooperation to initiate the implementation of a number of activities as recommended in the pre-feasibility study. Within that context, a team of four experts reviewed and assimilated experiences of partnerships in technology and related matters in the Arab region, the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (APCTT) and ESCWA. The major outcome of this exercise was the preparation of a detailed draft report, entitled "Assessment of regional needs and priorities and identification of implementation mechanisms". This draft report was subsequently discussed online and reviewed by a panel of experts from the Arab region and Europe prior to its submission to an expert consultation meeting, which was convened in Amman on 6-7 November 2007, with the collaboration of the Royal Scientific Society in Jordan. In total, 24 Arab and international experts, including experts from ESCWA member countries, attended the meeting and recommended revisions to the report, which is submitted to the Commission as a background paper.

38. The Executive Secretary pursued concrete efforts towards the establishment of the Centre by conferring with the ambassadors of member countries accredited to Lebanon, updating member countries of the progress made in that regard, and exploring avenues for funding and hosting the Centre. Within that context, while several countries have expressed interest in hosting and funding the Centre, only two countries, namely, Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Arab Republic, have officially registered their interest. The above-mentioned assessment, which was submitted to ESCWA member countries, provides comprehensive information pertaining to the regional priorities, structure and mechanisms, financial models and functions of the proposed Centre. Official visits to the potential host countries are envisaged in order to promote the Centre and discuss funding and hosting terms.

#### **RESOLUTION 275 (XXIV). TECHNICAL COOPERATION, PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION**

39. The twenty-fourth session of ESCWA adopted resolution 275(XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on technical cooperation, partnership development and resource mobilization. The resolution requested the secretariat to continue implementing the ESCWA Technical Cooperation Strategy and to take appropriate measures aimed at launching the technical cooperation information and knowledge-sharing network; and to prepare a specific plan of action for partnership development and resource mobilization. Moreover, the resolution requested the Executive Secretary to report on its implementation to the twenty-fifth session of the Commission.

40. The secretariat has undertaken various activities pursuant to that resolution, which are summarized below.

41. The secretariat undertook the following activities: (a) various reports were issued during 2006 and 2007 aimed at highlighting the key activities of the technical cooperation programme of ESCWA; (b) a brochure was produced to outline the scope and content of the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC); (c) the project committee was established aimed at increasing the impact of ESCWA technical cooperation projects by providing overall policy direction, quality control and recommendations for improving key aspects of project management in line with established priorities and criteria; (d) field missions to various member countries were undertaken in order to evaluate the advisory services provided during 2006-2007 and to assess the projected needs of those countries for technical assistance during 2008-2009; and (e) an internal system for planning, monitoring and evaluating ESCWA projects was developed, thereby improving the delivery, effectiveness and efficiency of technical cooperation.



42. In the area of launching the technical cooperation information and knowledge-sharing network, which aims to strengthen technical cooperation among ESCWA member countries, ESCWA convened a meeting in October 2007, which attracted national focal points from all member countries. The meeting agreed on the terms of reference and goals of the network, in addition to the range of activities it is set to undertake. Moreover, ESCWA started to develop a web page for the technical cooperation network aimed at ensuring continuous knowledge-sharing, exchanging lessons learned and encouraging cooperation among member countries. The web page is set to feature a dedicated link for each member country in order to facilitate and enhance the interaction and exchange of ideas.

43. With regard to the request to prepare a specific plan of action for partnership development and resource mobilization, ESCWA established a task force aimed at fund-raising and mobilizing resources. The task force prepared an action plan,<sup>4</sup> which will take stock of the funding situation in ESCWA and identify the challenges and opportunities that can affect its performance in that respect. Additionally, the plan of action will propose a series of time-bound measures aimed at boosting the visibility of ESCWA and at enhancing its credibility among international donors as a key partner for fostering regional development and integration. It will also suggest means of engaging multinational corporations and corporate donors in order to promote close collaboration with ESCWA, thereby acting both as funders and as potential partners in terms of embracing socially responsible issues. Moreover, a database has been established aimed at incorporating the different generic groups of donors in the public and private sectors, in addition to international agencies and development funds from within and outside the ESCWA region. It provides information on the thematic interests of identified donors, eligibility criteria, areas of expertise and potential modes of partnership with ESCWA member countries.

#### **RESOLUTION 276 (XXIV). STRENGTHENING STATISTICAL CAPACITIES IN THE ESCWA REGION**

44. At its twenty-fourth session, ESCWA adopted resolution 276 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on strengthening statistical capacities in the ESCWA region. In that resolution, the Commission called upon member countries to improve their national institutional statistical frameworks, including national statistical development strategies (NSDS), in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics of the United Nations Statistical Commission; urged member countries to intensify their efforts to strengthen their statistical capacities aimed at producing and disseminating reliable and timely indicators of progress, thereby achieving national and international development goals, including MDGs; and requested the secretariat to continue its efforts to support member countries in developing national capacities through expert group meetings, training workshops and advisory services, and to improve the coverage, quality and comparability of qualitative statistics and data, particularly in such emerging fields as the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses and MDG-related issues. Additionally, the Commission expressed in that resolution the importance of meeting the increasing demand for statistics and statistical indicators by mobilizing additional resources in order to support the efforts of member countries in developing their national capacities through workshops, advocacy campaigns and training; to work in close collaboration with member countries, to continue to develop and maintaining repositories of data and development indicators, including MDGs, and to make these available for public access and evidence-based policymaking; and to urge donor Governments and agencies, regional and international financial institutions and the private sector to support ESCWA in its efforts to assist member countries in building their national statistical capacities. Furthermore, it requested the Executive Secretary to submit a report on the progress made in that regard to the Commission at its twenty-fifth session.

45. The secretariat has undertaken various activities pursuant to that resolution, which are summarized below.

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<sup>4</sup> See annex.

46. With respect to the improvement of institutional frameworks, ESCWA collaborated with PARIS21 in terms of organizing the Third Forum to Enhance Arab Statistical Capacity (Sana'a, 17-18 April 2007). The Forum stressed on the need to develop NSDS and to complete them by 2008. Setting NSDS enables countries to operate efficiently along the standards set out in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and develops the production of quality statistics within the national statistical system. Within that context, ESCWA had undertaken a study on needs assessment of the national statistical offices in the ESCWA region in which it benchmarked the institutional set-up and level of implemented activities against the Fundamental Principles, and identified gaps and needs in order to strengthen the capacities of member countries. With the aim of enhancing the capacities of member countries in completing their strategies for the development of statistics at a sectoral level, ESCWA organized, in collaboration with PARIS21, the Workshop on the Design of National Strategies for the Development of Statistics: Mainstreaming Gender in Sectoral Statistics (Istanbul, Turkey, 24-26 March 2008). Moreover, pursuant to the recommendation of the Statistical Committee at its seventh session (November 2006), ESCWA prepared a report on strengthening the role of statistical systems at the national level in line with the Principles of Official Statistics, which has been submitted to the Commission as a background document.

47. Within the context of strengthening statistical capacities, ESCWA led the preparation of the report, entitled "The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2007: A Youth Lens". Additionally, it prepared two technical papers, namely, on gender and MDGs, in close collaboration with other United Nations agencies; and on health and MDGs. The first paper represents an informative guide for countries in order to prepare gender-sensitive national reports, and the second paper reports on progress made by countries in achieving health-related MDGs. In addition, a draft proposal aimed at reflecting the priority issues of the Arab region and at measuring the progress of Arab societies as a customized extension of the MDG framework was prepared for the second World Forum on Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies (Istanbul, Turkey, 27-30 June 2007). Furthermore, with the aim of increasing the accessibility of data on MDGs and enhancing the capacity of member countries to maintain a central repository of data for MDG monitoring, ESCWA has pursued capacity-building activities in its member countries on issues related to MDGs by implementing such field projects as Statistical Literacy and Capacity-building for MDG Monitoring. In addition, the manual on "Indicators for Policy Management" was translated into Arabic and distributed to the national experts who attended three ESCWA workshops. Finally, ESCWA contributed towards enhancing the national expertise in monitoring MDGs by organizing the Regional DevInfo 5.0 Workshop (Cairo, 18-22 September 2006).

48. Pursuant to the request of the seventh session of the Statistical Committee, ESCWA organized its first Working Group of Heads of National Statistical Offices in the ESCWA Region in 2007. The Working Group, whose meetings are held in years during which the Statistical Committee does not convene, aims to discuss the latest statistical developments and to consult with the secretariat on its work programme and related activities.

49. ESCWA continued to develop and maintain repositories of data and development indicators, including on MDGs. Currently, three main applications are in use and are being systematically updated, namely: (a) ESIS, which contains 17 modules in specialized economic, social and environmental areas; (b) a specialized database on International Merchandise Trade Statistics; and (c) the application of DevInfo, which has been customized by ESCWA such that MDG indicators on health include data on national health for ESCWA member countries.<sup>5</sup> In addition and as a result of continuous capacity-building efforts by ESCWA, Palestine and Jordan have completed the development of their national repositories of data on DevInfo software within the framework of the Statistical Literacy Project.

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<sup>5</sup> The three databases can be accessed at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/main.asp?division=sd>.

50. In terms of meeting the demand for services by ESCWA in the field of statistics, a substantial number of additional resources were mobilized during 2006-2007. Three projects and related activities, which were funded from the Development Account, were initiated in 2006, namely, on the informal sector, merchandise trade and environment statistics. Using funds under RPTC, ESCWA enhanced the statistical capacities of member countries in terms of organizing technical training workshops in various areas, including demographic projections, sampling design, trade in services, national accounts, quality of statistics, drafting resolution, population and housing censuses, gender statistics, time use and statistics in policymaking.

51. Moreover, several donor Governments and agencies, regional and international financial institutions and the private sector provided support to ESCWA in several activities, particularly in building national statistical capacities.<sup>6</sup>

52. Initiatives in statistics were largely carried out in close cooperation with other regional entities, including LAS, GOIC, AITRS and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In addition, a memorandum of understanding on joint statistical activities and other initiatives was signed with AIDMO.

### **RESOLUTION 277 (XXIV). SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES**

53. At its twenty-fourth session, ESCWA adopted resolution 277 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on social development policies. In that resolution, the Commission acknowledged the urgent need of member countries to strengthen their capacities in order to achieve comprehensive, equitable and sustainable development; urged member countries to adopt an integrated social policy approach; and called upon them to make use of the analytical, technical and advisory services that ESCWA provides in that field. The Commission requested the secretariat to follow up on the implementation of integrated social policies in member countries and to organize an Arab forum on social policy, with the aim of increasing interest in integrated and effective social policy, promoting dialogue and the exchange of views, and strengthening coordination mechanisms in public policymaking.

54. The secretariat has undertaken various activities pursuant to that resolution, which are summarized below.

55. Within the context of strengthening the capacity of member countries for the adoption of an integrated social policy approach, ESCWA prepared the "Second Social Policy Report: From Concept to Practice".<sup>7</sup> The report serves as an important advocacy tool aimed at providing practical guidelines for policymakers and practitioners in the region. Additionally, ESCWA submitted a report on social policies and national development strategies to the sixth session of the Committee on Social Development (Amman, 5-7 March 2007).<sup>8</sup> The report served as a launch pad for discussions with Governments on the importance of mainstreaming and integrating social policy across all public policies. Furthermore, ESCWA prepared ad hoc comparative experience briefing notes on selected social policy instruments by drawing on regional and global experiences and lessons learned in the establishment of economic and social councils, and on various

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<sup>6</sup> Within that context, the activities of ESCWA were supported financially (or resource persons were provided) by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Arab States (UNDP-RBAS), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United States Census Bureau.

<sup>7</sup> More information is available at: [http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetings/editor/Download.asp?table\\_name=eventDetails&field\\_name=id&FileID=868](http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetings/editor/Download.asp?table_name=eventDetails&field_name=id&FileID=868).

<sup>8</sup> ESCWA, "Report on Social Policies and National Development Strategies" (E/ESCWA/SDD/2007/IG.1/3).

social observatories. ESCWA also completed national profiles on social policies in four member countries, namely, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait and Oman;<sup>9</sup> and is revising the national reports of Bahrain and Egypt on the basis of the observations made by those countries.

56. Given intensified advocacy and outreach efforts by the secretariat, both member countries and non-ESCWA countries continued to express a keen interest in adopting ESCWA's approach. Specifically, three countries have adopted the integrated social policy approach, with an additional four other countries that are actively pursuing ESCWA's advisory and technical services in that area. This was matched by the increasing number of advisory services extended to these countries and territories, namely, Morocco, Oman, Palestine and United Arab Emirates. Equally, Qatar and Saudi Arabia expressed formal interest in this approach.

57. Among the salient results in this respect, ESCWA is actively supporting the implementation of an integrated social policy project in three countries of the region. In Bahrain, ESCWA is working with the Ministry of Social Development in order to develop a second phase of the project aimed at building the policy advisory capacity of the Social Policy Unit. ESCWA proposed the establishment of a national working group that could build on the outcomes of the National Conference on Integrated Social Policy (Manama, 24-25 April 2006). In Egypt, ESCWA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Solidarity, co-organized the National Conference on Integrated Social Policy (Cairo, 7-8 February 2007). A national ad hoc expert committee, which was established subsequent to that Conference, is being supported by ESCWA through technical advisory services aimed at putting forward specific and actionable recommendations that promote an integrated approach to social policy. In Sudan, ESCWA has successfully initiated a process of national consultation in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare, which has resulted in two subnational meetings and one expert group meeting in that country aimed at elaborating the Sudan Social Policy Country Profile. Moreover, a national conference is expected to be convened in 2008 as a culmination of the national dialogue process.

58. Equally, ESCWA is preparing to launch a similar project in Palestine in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning. Similar initiatives aimed at implementing specific social policy instruments are currently underway with the Ministry of Social Development, Family and Solidarity in Morocco; the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training in Oman; and the Executive Office in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates.

59. The regional forum on social policy is scheduled to take place during the 2008-2009 biennium during which ESCWA intends to launch the second integrated social policy report in order to advocate its concept and approach among member countries. The postponement of the forum was necessary in order to allow sufficient time to prepare the required material and to showcase the approach with concrete tools and benefits from lessons learned in the implementation of pilot projects.

#### **RESOLUTION 278 (XXIV). INCREASING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING WITH RESPECT TO CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING**

60. At its twenty-fourth session, ESCWA adopted resolution 278 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on increasing the role of women in decision-making with respect to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The resolution requested member countries and the secretariat to take account in their plans and programmes of the exceptional needs of women living in unstable conditions. Additionally, the resolution urged member countries to increase the representation, participation and empowerment of women at all levels of decision-making and in conflict-resolution and peacebuilding processes. It also called upon the secretariat to examine the situation of women in those member countries that suffer from occupation, war and conflict; and to build

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<sup>9</sup> These national profiles for the four countries are available under the following symbols: E/ESCWA/SDD/2007/Technical Paper.1; E/ESCWA/SDD/2007/Technical Paper.2; E/ESCWA/SDD/2006/Technical Paper.1; and E/ESCWA/SDD/2006/Technical Paper.2.

their capacities in the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. It further requested the Executive Secretary to submit a report to the Commission at its twenty-fifth session on the progress made in implementing the resolution.

61. The secretariat has undertaken various activities pursuant to that resolution, which are summarized below.

62. ESCWA undertook a study on the impact of war and armed conflict on the advancement of women in the Arab region. The study was presented and discussed during the Expert Group Meeting on the Advancement of Women Under War and Conflict Situations (Abu Dhabi, 13 March 2007). The recommendations of the Meeting were subsequently discussed and adopted in the final document of the third session of the Committee on Women.

63. Moreover, a study on the social and economic situation of Palestinian women was presented to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-first session.

64. In 2007 and within the context of efforts aimed at providing assistance to member countries in gender mainstreaming national policies, plans and programmes, including to such conflict-stricken countries and territories as Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, the secretariat held two subregional training workshops on gender mainstreaming, and one regional workshop on gender budgeting.

65. Within the framework of increasing the representation of women at all levels of decision-making in member countries and as part of its extrabudgetary technical cooperation activities planned for 2008-2009, ESCWA is set to organize a capacity-building workshop for women parliamentary candidates aimed at training them on leadership skills and on making full use of the media in order to promote the rights of women in general and of the political participation of women in particular.

66. In response to that resolution, ESCWA refocused its work programme for the 2008-2009 biennium in order to take into account the exceptional needs of women living in unstable conditions and to include them in peacebuilding and conflict-resolution processes. Specifically, the activities for 2008-2009 include the forthcoming publications of such flagship studies as "Status of Arab women: Means to strengthen the role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding", which will be carried out jointly with the Arab Women Organization; and a technical study, entitled "Guidelines on the protection of the rights of women in the ESCWA region through the proper use of UN resolutions and international protocols on war and armed conflict", which will be prepared in coordination with OHCHR.

#### **RESOLUTION 279 (XXIV). FOLLOW-UP TO IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPONENTS OF THE INTEGRATED TRANSPORT SYSTEM IN THE ARAB MASHREQ**

67. At its twenty-fourth session, ESCWA adopted resolution 279 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on follow-up to the implementation of components of the Integrated Transport System in the Arab Mashreq (ITSAM). That resolution urged member countries to complete the implementation of the plan of action for the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq by the specified date; and to initiate the implementation of the plan of action for the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq. Moreover, those member countries that had not signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Maritime Transport in the Arab Mashreq, or approved or acceded to it, were urged to do so at the earliest possible opportunity in order to ensure its full ratification and, subsequently, in order to implement and apply its articles at the national and regional levels. The resolution requested the secretariat to advocate the issues of road safety in the region, including capacity-building and dissemination of awareness, and to follow up and submit an annual report to the Committee on Transport on the progress made in the following areas: the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq;<sup>10</sup> the priority routes, namely, M40 and M45; the

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<sup>10</sup> The text of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq is contained in document E/ESCWA/TRANS/2001/3.

Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq;<sup>11</sup> the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Maritime Transport in the Arab Mashreq; the national committees for the facilitation of transport and trade; and road safety.

68. The secretariat has undertaken various activities pursuant to that resolution, which are summarized below.

69. In terms of implementing the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq and in recognition of the obstacles faced by member countries in that regard, ESCWA requested members that had ratified the Agreement to fill out a tailored questionnaire. To date, a total of 10 member countries have responded to the questionnaire. Moreover, member countries that had not completed tables 1 and 2 of the action plan of that Agreement were urged to provide ESCWA with those tables no later than 30 June 2006. Ten countries have already responded to this request.

70. The Committee on Transport at its eighth session (Beirut, 27-29 March 2007) discussed the implementation of the Agreement on International Roads in member countries and recommended that the above two actions be undertaken by concerned countries. Moreover, member countries were urged to review the related information mentioned in the follow-up report, entitled "Review of action taken in the field of transport since the seventh session of the Committee on Transport: Follow-up of implementation of the recommendations made by the seventh session of the Committee on Transport" (E/ESCWA/GRID/2007/IG.1/4 (Part I)); and to provide ESCWA with their comments and updates no later than 30 June 2007.

71. Additionally, ESCWA prepared a thorough report on the follow-up to the implementation of the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq and submitted it to the ninth session of the Committee on Transport (Beirut, 26-28 February 2008).<sup>12</sup>

72. Within the context of the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq, ESCWA requested member countries that had ratified the Agreement to complete a questionnaire, which was specifically designed to follow up on the status of its implementation and the obstacles faced. To date, only Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic have responded to this request. Member countries that have not signed or ratified that Agreement were also urged to do so at the earliest possible date in order to accelerate its implementation. In addition, the Committee on Transport at its eighth session (Beirut, 27-29 March 2007) discussed the implementation of the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq and requested member countries that had yet to respond to ESCWA's questionnaire or had yet to sign or ratify the Agreement to take all the necessary measures for its endorsement.

73. Furthermore, LAS adopted the Arab Railway Network (ARN) on 21 November 2007, which comprises 18 routes, including 16 that are incorporated in ESCWA's Agreement on International Railways. Within the framework of ARN, three out of the 16 routes are set to extend to Arab countries in Africa. In that regard, LAS requested ESCWA to prepare the geographic information systems (GIS) map of ARN based on the same specifications and numbering that have been adopted by the secretariat.

74. Since its adoption during the twenty-third session of the Commission in May 2005, ESCWA has continued to follow up with member countries on the ratification of the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Transport Cooperation in the Arab Mashreq. This sustained effort by the secretariat has resulted in formal approval by five member countries, thereby allowing the entry into force of the Memorandum on 4

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<sup>11</sup> The text of the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq is contained in document E/ESCWA/TRANS/2002/1.

<sup>12</sup> The report is available under the following symbol: E/ESCWA/GRID/2008/IG.1/4 (Part I)/Add.1.

September 2006. Oman is in the final stages of ratification and is set to become a member. Equally, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are in the process of becoming members. In addition, some countries, namely, Oman and Yemen, have issued ministerial decrees in relation to the implementation of the Memorandum. However, ESCWA continued to urge member countries that were not parties to the Memorandum to speed up their efforts aimed at ratifying it; and to appeal to the signatory countries to start implementing the Memorandum at the national and regional levels. Furthermore, in order to broaden the scope of implementation and increase its signatories, ESCWA continued to cooperate and coordinate with LAS through the Technical Committee for Maritime Transport, thereby encouraging Arab States that are not members of ESCWA to adopt and implement the Memorandum.

75. In February 2007, ESCWA also organized an expert group meeting on the implementation of the Memorandum, which culminated in the approval of an action plan for its implementation. This action plan was subsequently adopted by the eighth session of the Transport Committee (Beirut, 27-29 March 2007), following the incorporation of some modifications.

76. In the area of road safety, ESCWA signed a memorandum of understanding with the Youth Association for Social Awareness (YASA), which is an active NGO on issues related to road safety, aimed at undertaking various joint activities in the region, including relevant lectures, seminars and media campaigns. Moreover, ESCWA issued the second part of the study aimed at assessing road safety in ESCWA countries, which covered Egypt, Iraq, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.<sup>13</sup>

77. Additionally, ESCWA secured additional funds from the International Automobile Federation, Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP) and the World Bank in order to carry out advocacy programmes on road safety issues in the region. ESCWA also participated in the Muscat Regional Road Safety Conference (Muscat, 4-6 September 2006), whose main objective was to exchange knowledge related to road safety issues and to enhance the capacity of officials in the various sectors of road safety.

78. In collaboration with GRSP and the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO/EMRO), ESCWA organized a training seminar on road safety management and distributed a booklet on that topic in Cairo in December 2006. Moreover, ESCWA offered advisory services to the Ministry of Transport in the Syrian Arab Republic related to drafting a road safety strategy, preparing the terms of reference for undertaking the study, and participating in relevant discussions.

79. In addition, the following activities were undertaken within the context of the First United Nations Global Road Safety Week (23-29 April 2007): (a) ESCWA approached the concerned ministers in the region in order to establish both focal points and national committees for the Week, which resulted in the naming of seven national focal points; (b) in collaboration with WHO and GRSP, ESCWA convened a special one-day training for focal points on the toolkit that was prepared by the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration; (c) ESCWA served as a member of the global coordinating committee for the Week and posted the relevant activities of member countries on a dedicated website; (d) ESCWA participated in various global activities of the Week, including the Youth General Assembly;<sup>14</sup> (e) ESCWA participated in the Second Stakeholders Forum on Global Road Safety (Geneva, 25 April 2007) and presented an overview of the road safety situation in Western Asia and the short- and long-term needs of the region; and (f) ESCWA is set to organize a follow-up workshop with youth representatives from the region aimed at discussing the implementation of the Youth Declaration that was adopted during the Road Safety Week.

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<sup>13</sup> This study is available in Arabic under the following symbol: E/ESCWA/GRID/2007/13.

<sup>14</sup> The youth representative from Lebanon was named the chairperson of the Youth General Assembly, which was attended by more than 400 youth who represented more than 100 countries.