

**Statement by Ms. Rima Khalaf**  
**Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations**  
**Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**  
**Marking the opening**  
**of the Arab High-level Forum on Sustainable Development**  
**Amman, 29-30 May 2016**

Mr. Imad Fakoury, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation of Jordan,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the third Arab High-level Forum on Sustainable Development, and thank you for your attendance. I would like to express my appreciation to Jordan for hosting the Forum, and to the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation for his presence here today and for the Ministry's assistance in organizing this event. I would also like to thank the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Population Fund for their collaboration with ESCWA to ensure the Forum's success.

The world has adopted a technically and politically integrated sustainable development agenda that stretches to 2030, comprising four inextricably linked elements: the political Declaration and its guiding principles, the programmatic framework with its 17 Goals, the means of implementation, and the follow-up and review process. These elements are the focus of our attention at this meeting. We must strive to avoid the fragmentation that plagued the Millennium Development Goals and impeded their full achievement.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sustainability is not simply a question of continuity. It is a transformation in today's world, ensuring dignity for present generations and security for future generations.

"Transforming our world" is the aim of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. An aim that has imposed itself on a world destroyed by war and conflict, consumed by poverty and need, and smothered by environmental degradation and climate change. These challenges must be overcome to ensure the continuity of life on this planet. They are universal in nature and scope, in cause and consequence. One cannot be tackled without the others, and their effects are equally devastating.

We, citizens of the Arab region, are painfully aware of the gravity of these three challenges. We suffer their repercussions daily; they affect our culture, environment, economy and society. Development is the tool to successfully address these challenges, but this success is preconditioned on directing all mental, ethical, institutional, economic and human capacities towards that desired transformation. This can only be achieved with the commitment and participation of all: individuals and groups, Governments and parliaments, civil society and the private sector, and centres of expertise. Transforming the Arab world is a complex task, but not an impossible one. It is a pressing responsibility and an urgent necessity, a human and ethical duty to lift the region from its bleak present towards a brighter future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A steady and firm transformation towards sustainable development in the Arab region requires addressing the chronic and urgent challenges that threaten our countries and societies, epitomized by foreign occupation and armed conflict. Sustainability entails liberating Palestine and reclaiming Palestinian national rights in full; and ending war, conflict and in-fighting in all their forms. Sustainability demands methods to cement peaceful political evolution, and tackle moral, social, national and institutional degradation. It is vital

to bridge knowledge gaps in education systems and scientific research; resolve skills shortages; and develop our information systems including the media. Government systems, institutions and mechanisms must be reformed to ensure true citizen participation.

It is the responsibility of regional organizations to work with member States and guide them in national development planning, so as to “nationalize” the 2030 Agenda in accordance with country priorities. National leadership, however, does not entail isolating a country’s development path from the many concerns and issues that surpass its borders, and that affect and are influenced by its national priorities. Achieving national goals relies significantly on tackling transboundary situations and priorities.

The United Nations, represented today by around 20 agencies, is dedicated to ensuring coherence between global, regional and national approaches, while remaining committed to human rights and to providing sincere technical support to countries and development actors. ESCWA is committed to its mandate that includes broadening communication methods and dialogue platforms, and to supporting partnership and participation in the development of our countries and societies.

The Arab Forum on Sustainable Development is an ideal setting for discussing our countries’ accomplishments and concerns, and exploring paths for achieving the new development goals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The 2030 Agenda, its principles, goals, targets and means of implementation provide a historic opportunity to revive development thinking and effective sustainable planning. They offer a chance to secure justice and welfare, and to drive integration between Arab countries towards achieving our peoples’ aspirations for a better world - a world where they can enjoy peace, security and justice, and live in harmony with their fellow man and environment, sheltered by institutions that protect human beings and the planet and that promote sustainability. The world seems to be currently going in an opposing direction to sustainability; which calls for extracting the concept from the realm of discussion and placing it firmly in reality, because sustainability, in language and in practice, is about survival and the continuity of life.

Thank you.