



**Economic Development and Integration Division
Economic Governance and Planning Section**



**First Joint ESCWA-UNCTAD-OECD COMPETITION FORUM FOR THE ARAB REGION
United Nations House, Beirut, 23-24 October 2019**

**Opening statement by Ms. Rola Dashti
Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and
Executive Secretary of ESCWA**

Excellencies,
UNCTAD and OECD colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to the opening of the first joint ESCWA-UNCTAD-OECD Competition Forum for the Arab Region, at the United Nations House in Beirut. Let me start by thanking you for your unwavering commitment to implementing this initiative, and for your sustained support after we had to postpone this Forum. Lebanon is undergoing dramatic political, social and economic changes. While these may have posed challenges to the organization of the Forum, they are also a stark reminder of the importance and timeliness of the agenda before us.

The United Nations represents a universal platform to build consensus for the common good. I am heartened that strong collaboration between three leading development institutions – ESCWA, UNCTAD and OECD - will serve our member States better towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. ESCWA, UNCTAD and OECD have prepared a comprehensive agenda for the first Arab Competition Forum, which addresses crucial matters of competition and development, including gender, inclusion, employment, economic growth and strengthening institutions.

Many of the issues that are going to be discussed over the next two days are testament to what can be achieved through international cooperation and regional leadership. I am delighted to see such expert delegations from most of our members States in this room. Your interest and presence are tangible indicators of the pertinence of this Forum. In 2015, with the assistance of OECD and UNCTAD, ESCWA embarked on a mission to close the competition-related knowledge and policy gap in the region.

ESCWA drew attention to competition-related achievements of Arab countries and the challenges the Arab region faces, and advocated for more resources to address the issue given that it permeates all areas of development. Today, ESCWA has not only expanded its competition-related work, but also partnered with expert institutions, such as OECD and UNCTAD, to strengthen coordination and policy coherence, both at the regional and inter-regional levels. Together, we support national capacity-building, provide technical cooperation and advisory services, and conduct detailed research and analysis to support evidence-based decision-making. Effective competition, competition policy, and consumer protection play a vital role in achieving sustainable development. This Forum will highlight invaluable contributions to SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 8 on employment, SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, and SDG 16 on effective institutions.

More and more institutional players are realizing the importance of competition and competition policy for sustainable development in the Arab region. In the spirit of a true “Partnership for Development” that already exists between our three institutions, I reach out to other stakeholders to join our initiative. Together, let us continue to advance competition and consumer protection-related work, to build a more peaceful, resilient and prosperous Arab region for all.

With the hope of establishing the Joint ESCWA-UNCTAD-OECD Competition Forum as an annual conference, I am confident that the next two days will pave the way for accelerated progress towards economic governance reforms, and improve understanding of the explicit link between competition and the 2030 Agenda.

I would like to thank Egypt and Oman, who have graciously offered to host the next iterations of the Arab Competition Forum. Thank you again for all your efforts and commitment. I pass the floor to Ms. Alia Abbas from the Lebanese Ministry of Economy and Trade, and to my colleagues Ms. Teresa Moreira from UNCTAD (who will address the meeting via video recording) and Mr. Antonio Capobianco from OECD.