A. Background

Good governance remains a critical ingredient for socio-economic development as well as for peacebuilding. In light of the development challenges facing Western Asia, in conflict affected countries in particular, the consecration of good governance practices is all the more pressing but continues to face a wide range of obstacles. The most serious challenges within the public sector remain the depletion of human resources and physical infrastructure as well as the desperate need to upgrade and develop outdated administrative practices. These practices have rendered public institutions unable to cope with the increasing demand for essential services. If not addressed, such a state of affairs will continue to curtail the development of the political and economic systems at the national and regional levels, seriously hindering the attainment of national development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In developed and developing nations, reform and improvement initiatives of the public sector’s performance may have been influenced in some cases by interest groups aiming to capitalize on state resources for narrow local interests, which are not necessarily concurrent with national interests. The influence of such interest groups varies from country to country in Western Asia and beyond. Reform initiatives have also suffered from the inadequate expertise of civil servants or public officials. It is hence crucial to introduce good governance practices as a developmental mean, targeting civil servants through tailored capacity-building modules, in order to raise the awareness of the general public and decision-makers that good governance practices are a conduit for the economic well-being of all members of society, particularly those countries suffering from conflict and political instability. Human capital development on the basis of results-based management, under the overarching principles of human rights, anti-corruption and performance management, is critical for institution-building of the public sector. Such human capital development is also essential to sustain and drive reform, including the facilitation and the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As such, reform of the public sector remains essential but should be tackled within the socio-economic needs context and not the political context.

The simplification of administrative procedures and processes, the delivery of basic services during times of crisis and the involvement of civil society in the public sector are areas that
need to be developed and strengthened in order to ensure the establishment of a transparent, cohesive, and most importantly, efficient public sector.

These practices have also been explored through the lens of private sector involvement in public life, specifically through the spectrum of corporate social responsibility, which ensures a responsible involvement of the private sector in developmental activities. The successful design and implementation of development policies and programmes and the provision of an efficient, cost-effective and responsive public sector would nurture a sustained environment that would facilitate the emergence of a strong and vibrant private sector and civil society able to assist and complement state institutions in meeting development goals, including the MDGs.

The Unit for Emerging and Conflict Related issues (ECRI) at ESCWA in partnership with UNDP-Iraq has implemented a project entitled “Capacity Building of the Iraqi Public Sector”, which constitutes an initiative to support local management reforms of Iraqi public institutions. The goal of the project was to improve the capacity of the National Center for Consultancy and Management Development (NCCMD) to develop and implement strategies for management development of the overall Iraqi public sector institutions. This joint ESCWA-UNDP Iraq initiative yielded a number of lessons learned with regards to public sector management and reform processes, and is expected to provide participants at this meeting with a practical example of good governance initiatives in conflict afflicted countries. The meeting will also examine other successful initiatives in the region, such as the models developed in Dubai, where good governance practices have played a leading role in the improvement of essential service delivery by the public sector.

B. Objectives of the Regional Expert Group Meeting

• Present concepts and experiences of good governance practices as a vehicle for development, conflict mitigation and peace-building;
• Assess and build on past experience in capacity building as a means to instigate reform and institutionalize good governance practices, including the lessons learned through the collaboration of ESCWA and UNDP Iraq.
• Ascertain the best means to introduce concepts of human rights, performance or results based management, human capital development, accountability and transparency into state institutions in crisis afflicted countries
• Highlight challenges at the national and regional levels that hinder the achievements of good governance practices, including ethno-sectarian tensions, outdated administrative practices, clientelism and inadequate infrastructure and human resources.
• Articulate future pragmatic interventions to enhance good governance practices in conflict affected countries, such as the examination of e-governance, public-private partnerships and other modules that would serve to enhance the delivery of essential services by the public sector;
• Examine possible good governance interventions or programs that would mitigate the impact of conflict on development and support peace-building efforts.

C. Themes of the Expert Group Meeting
• Governance and Development
• Challenges to Good Governance in Conflict Affected Countries: Meeting Development Needs
• Regional Expertise to Support the Enhancement of Local Good Governance Practices in Conflict Affected Countries
• Success Models Enhancing Good Governance Practices from ESCWA Member Countries
• Nation-Building in Conflict Affected Countries: Strengthening the Public Sector through Capacity Development
• Towards a More Effective Governance: Norms and Mechanisms

D. PARTICIPANTS

The EGM will bring together regional and international experts on good governance, development and conflict issues, and representatives of the public and the private sectors concerned with development policies in countries in the region.

E. DATE AND VENUE

The EGM will be held at the UN-House in Beirut, Lebanon, from 24 to 25 February 2009.

F. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Due to budget constraints, ESCWA will unfortunately only be able to cover the participation of experts that will be conducting presentations. Other participants are expected to participate at their own expense.

G. LANGUAGE

Arabic and English will be the working languages of the EGM. Simultaneous interpretation in both languages will be provided.

H. CORRESPONDENCE

Kindly address all correspondence related to the EGM to ESCWA through:

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