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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda
Beirut, 24-25 January 2019

Information note

I. BACKGROUND

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for a transformative approach towards addressing development challenges and driving change for an inclusive world where no one is left behind. The 2030 Agenda demands the effective engagement of an expanding group of actors, including parliamentarians, in driving sustainable development and monitoring and following up on progress at the national level. Through their functions of representation, legislation, oversight and budgeting, parliamentarians have the potential and responsibility to ensure accountability, inclusivity and transparency as countries work to achieve sustainable development for all.

Parliamentarians played a key role in the post-2015 period that led to the 2030 Agenda. Paragraphs 45, 52 and 79 of the Agenda confirm parliaments' essential role in ensuring the effective implementation of national commitments on sustainable development, and in representing their constituents as important actors in national development work. The Agenda identifies good governance as both a goal and an enabler of sustainable development. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 calls on countries to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". However, the role of parliamentarians is not confined to SDG16: they should engage in the implementation and oversight of the entire 2030 Agenda.

"Through laws and spending decisions, [parliaments] can contribute significantly to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals – our blueprint for peaceful, resilient societies on a healthy planet." — *UN Secretary-General António Guterres* on the first commemoration of the International Day of Parliamentarism (30 June 2018).

Within this context, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Islamic Development Bank Group, held the Regional Seminar for Parliamentarians in the Arab Region on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations House in Beirut on 8 and 9 November 2017. The first of its kind in the region, the seminar aimed to raise awareness among parliamentarians in the Arab region on their important role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its follow-up and review at the national and regional levels. The seminar offered participants the opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences on the role of parliaments in driving sustainable development issues. It concluded with a set of key messages and a draft regional action plan to enhance the role of parliaments and parliamentarians in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

The draft regional action plan – a living document – called for the annual convening of a meeting for parliamentarians in the Arab region on the 2030 Agenda. In the light of this recommendation and the outcomes of the 2018 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD), the Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda in the Arab Region will be held annually. The Parliamentary Forum this year will be **co-organized by ESCWA, UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank Group, in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)** in Beirut on 24 and 25 January 2019.

A. JOINT EFFORTS FOR EMPOWERING PARLIAMENTARIANS IN THE ARAB REGION

The annual Parliamentary Forum falls under a partnership between ESCWA, UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank, aimed at empowering parliamentarians in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda by undertaking the following:

(a) Building the capacity of parliamentarians in the Arab region in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda;

(b) Strengthening the performance of Arab parliaments so as to enhance their responsiveness, inclusiveness and support for sustainable development.

ESCWA and UNDP have a mandate to facilitate the engagement of stakeholders, including parliamentarians, by raising awareness on the 2030 Agenda, building capacity, offering support and providing a venue for dialogue among different stakeholders. ESCWA leads the regional follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, mainly through the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, by engaging with all stakeholders from the Arab region, including parliamentarians. ESCWA also provides advisory services and technical support on topics and processes relevant to the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, including voluntary national reviews (VNRs).

UNDP provides technical assistance to parliaments worldwide. One of its priority areas under the Strategic Plan 2018-2021 is accelerating structural transformations for sustainable development and building more effective governance systems that can respond to global realities. Inclusive governance systems, to which parliaments are central, are crucial to the promotion of just and peaceful societies and to sustainable development in general, including eradicating poverty and building resilience to shocks and crises.

The Islamic Development Bank is an international financial institution with a membership of 57 countries. Its mission is to promote comprehensive human development, with a focus on the priority areas of alleviating poverty, improving health, promoting education, strengthening governance and increasing prosperity. The Bank aims to foster economic development and social progress in member countries and in Muslim communities in non-member countries. It is a project financier, developer, advisor and investment mobilizer for member countries in the public and private sectors.

UNDP, the Islamic Development Bank and ESCWA have recently launched a joint initiative entitled “Parliaments for the 2030 Agenda – Empowering parliamentarians to implement the Sustainable Development Goals”. As a part of this initiative, the partners are collaborating, through technical and financial contributions, in the organization of the Parliamentary Forum.

B. REGIONAL AND GLOBAL FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW PROCESSES

The Arab Forum on Sustainable Development is the primary regional mechanism for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region: its outcomes give voice to the region at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The AFSD report sets out key messages resulting from regional dialogue and preparatory meetings on selected sustainable development topics that are a priority to the region but also align with the HLPF theme. AFSD is characterized by its participatory approach involving government representatives, parliamentarians, regional and international institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, academic and research centres, and the media.

The Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda in the Arab Region is designed to provide participants with the opportunity to engage in key regional follow-up and review processes. It will result in key messages that will feed into AFSD, thus encouraging parliamentarians to make their voices heard at AFSD and HLPF to ensure that their needs and interests are adequately reflected.

Another important follow-up and review mechanism is voluntary national reviews, which is a State-led process where individual countries report on progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda to HLPF. Countries are called upon to ensure the inclusiveness of their national reviews and that all stakeholders, including parliamentarians, are involved as development partners in the implementation, monitoring, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. Voluntary national reviews submitted to HLPF in 2016, 2017 and 2018 reveal considerable variations between countries on parliaments' engagement in the VNR process. However, parliaments' role and participation have increased recently.

II. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

A. FOCUS OF THE 2019 PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

The 2019 Parliamentary Forum will address the broader framework of the 2030 Agenda. It will be thematically aligned with the theme of the 2019 HLPF: "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality". The Parliamentary Forum will focus on the SDGs to be reviewed in detail at the 2019 HLPF, namely SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

B. OBJECTIVES OF THE 2019 PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

The 2019 Parliamentary Forum will build on ongoing efforts to enhance the awareness of parliamentarians on their role in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. The following are its main objectives:

- (a) Progressive outreach to a wider net of parliamentarians and stakeholders, to build a platform for detailed assessment of parliamentarians' engagement with the 2030 Agenda in the region;
- (b) Enhanced engagement of parliamentarians with regional and global processes in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, including the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development;
- (c) Peer learning, knowledge exchange and support to parliamentary communities on the 2030 Agenda in Arab countries.

C. FOCUS AREAS

Building on the discussions and outcomes of the 2017 Regional Seminar for Parliamentarians, the 2019 Parliamentary Forum will delve deeper into parliamentary engagement, including establishing thematic and specialized committees and engaging with other stakeholders such as the media, civil society and national statistical offices. The following topics are proposed for discussion at the 2019 Parliamentary Forum:

- (a) The integrated approach to sustainable development and the implications of applying the principles of integration and interlinkages across sectors to the functions of parliaments. Members of parliament need to go beyond considering a draft law or an initiative from within their purview towards critically examining whether laws or initiatives are reflective of the principles of the 2030 Agenda, how their decisions will affect the implementation of other national development priorities, and how other stakeholders can be involved for effective SDG integration;

(b) The application of an integrated approach to selected parliamentary functions, such as budget reviews, including necessary steps, parliamentary institutional readiness, supporting tools, and organizational issues such as interdisciplinary committees;

(c) Review of parliamentary mechanisms for the SDGs put in place by Arab and other countries;

(d) Review of parliamentary engagement for the 2030 Agenda in Arab countries in terms of participating in national institutional structures (such as national committees on SDGs or the 2030 Agenda), taking part in preparing development plans and policies, monitoring implementation, and contributing to national mechanisms for follow-up and review, including voluntary national reviews;

(e) Parliamentary involvement in the VNR processes, aimed at enabling participants to take the discussion to their own parliaments and advocate for a larger role in follow-up and review;

(f) Engaging in dialogue with national statistical offices on the 2030 Agenda's requirements for reliable and disaggregated data, with a view to ensuring that the legislative process is effectively targeted towards national sustainable development priorities. The dialogue will also cover institutionalized relations between parliaments and national statistical offices;

(g) Overview of the SDGs to be reviewed at the 2019: SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13, and 16 and the annually reviewed SDG17. Emphasis will be placed on the impact of those SDGs in Arab countries and their interlinkages with broader regional development issues.

The sessions will feature case studies and examples from the region and beyond on the topics of discussion. Existing mechanisms and initiatives will be presented to provide guidance for participants on active and effective engagement in the 2030 Agenda.

D. OUTCOME OF THE 2019 PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

The 2019 Parliamentary Forum will conclude with a set of recommendations and key messages for presentation at the 2019 AFSD. The recommendations will chart the way forward and identify specific needs that fall within the broader framework of the draft regional action plan.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL AND LOGISTICAL DETAILS

A. DATE AND VENUE

The Parliamentary Forum will be held at the United Nations House in Beirut on 24 and 25 January 2019.

B. WORKING LANGUAGES

Arabic and English are the working languages of the Parliamentary Forum. Simultaneous interpretation for both languages will be provided.

C. PARTICIPANTS AND REGISTRATION

The Parliamentary Forum targets parliamentarians from Arab countries, including representatives from upper and lower houses. Participants will also include experts from regional and international organizations, United Nations entities and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Other stakeholders will include government representatives and non-governmental organizations. To confirm attendance, please complete the online registration form before 4 January 2019 through the following link: <https://reg.unog.ch/event/26039/registration/>.

D. DOCUMENTATION

Confirmed participants will receive an annotated agenda and supportive materials. Documents will be made available online at the following website: <https://www.unescwa.org/events/2019-arab-parliamentary-forum-2030-agenda>

The following documents will also serve as reference materials for the discussions:

(a) ESCWA, Report of the 2018 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, 2018. Available from <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/arab-forum-sustainable-development-2018-final-report-en.pdf>;

(b) ESCWA, Report of the regional seminar for parliamentarians in the Arab region on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2017. Available from <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/seminar-parliaments-agenda-2030-final-report-en.pdf>;

(c) UNDP, Islamic Development Bank and Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption, Parliament's role in implementing the sustainable development goals: A parliamentary handbook, 2017;

(d) IPU and UNDP, Parliaments and the Sustainable Development Goals: A self-assessment toolkit, 2016;

(e) IPU, Regional Seminar on the Sustainable Development Goals and Gender Equality for the Parliaments of the Middle East and North Africa (Alexandria, Egypt, 18-20 September 2018). Available from <https://www.ipu.org/event/regional-seminar-sustainable-development-goals-and-gender-equality-parliaments-middle-east-and-north-africa/documents>.

E. TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

All participants are expected to inquire about their visa requirements to Lebanon and secure visas ahead of their anticipated travel date. ESCWA can provide assistance in exceptional cases upon request. Travel details will be communicated to participants upon confirmation of attendance.

F. CORRESPONDENCE

All correspondence regarding the logistical arrangements of the Parliamentary Forum should be addressed as follows:

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