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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

## Report

### **Regional seminar for parliamentarians in the Arab region on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Beirut, 8-9 November 2017**

#### **Summary**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and the Islamic Development Bank Group, held a 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 main aim of the seminar was to raise awareness among parliamentarians in the Arab region on their vital role in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and to identify ways to strengthen their role in implementing, following up on and reviewing the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels. The seminar comprised four sessions, during which participants reviewed the components of the 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), follow-up and review mechanisms, voluntary national reviews, indicators, implementation mechanisms, and related global and regional processes and forums. The seminar offered participants the opportunity to exchange knowledge and expertise on parliamentary experiences in some Arab countries in driving sustainable development issues. It concluded with a set of key messages and a draft action plan on strengthening the role of parliaments and parliamentarians in implementing, following up on and reviewing the 2030 Agenda.

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## Introduction

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, set out in General Assembly resolution 70/1, of 25 September 2015, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, calls for an integrated approach to tackle development challenges and for concerted efforts from all parties to achieve transformative change towards an inclusive and fair world where no one is left behind. It also calls for stronger participation from a wide group of actors, including parliaments and their members, to drive sustainable development and monitor progress at the national level. Parliamentarians significantly participated in global processes that paved the way to the post-2015 period, culminating in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The Declaration contained in resolution 70/1, particularly paragraphs 45, 52 and 79, confirms parliaments’ essential role in ensuring the effective implementation of national commitments on sustainable development and in representing populations, as active bodies in national development work. The 2030 Agenda contains several Goals and targets on good governance and its importance in promoting sustainable development efforts, particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.<sup>1</sup>

2. In this context, and pursuant to the recommendation issued at the 2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development on organizing a regional meeting for parliamentarians, ESCWA, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Islamic Development Bank Group, held a 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 main aim of the regional seminar was to raise awareness among parliamentarians in the Arab region on their vital role in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and to identify ways to strengthen their role in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels. The sessions and discussions aimed to inform participants about the components of the 2030 Agenda, including the SDGs, follow-up and review mechanisms, voluntary national reviews, indicators, implementation mechanisms, and related global and regional processes and forums. The seminar offered participants the opportunity to exchange knowledge and expertise on parliamentary experiences in some Arab countries in driving sustainable development issues. It concluded with a set of key messages and a draft action plan on strengthening the role of parliaments and parliamentarians in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

3. The present report sets out the main topics discussed at the four sessions, and the key messages emerging from the seminar.

### I. KEY MESSAGES

4. Participants at the regional seminar for parliamentarians in the Arab region on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development issued the following key messages:

(a) Development issues are strongly linked to major national policies and trends. The 2030 Agenda is a global gateway for joint action towards achieving inclusive, fair and sustainable development. SDG 16 stresses the importance of building effective, transparent and accountable institutions that formulate policies through a participatory approach and respond to the needs of all social groups;

(b) Parliaments play a key role in achieving the 2030 Agenda, in line with country priorities. They are responsible for drafting and approving legislation and development plans, and ensuring their conformity with international conventions. Parliaments are also tasked with reviewing, amending and approving public budgets in the light of development priorities to ensure that they meet development needs. Moreover, they are responsible for monitoring government work, which is essential to combating waste and corruption. Lastly, parliaments

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<sup>1</sup> Target 16.6 requires the development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, and target 16.7 requires ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

ensure that policies and programmes meet citizens' needs and priorities; they are familiar with those needs because of the close relationship between parliamentarians and their constituencies;

(c) Strengthening parliaments' role in implementing the 2030 Agenda requires increased participation in monitoring its implementation by contributing to the voluntary national reviews at the national level, and participating in the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development at the regional level, and in the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at the global level;

(d) In view of the challenges and difficulties facing the Arab region, parliaments play a major role in achieving peace and security and preventing conflict, which is a principal goal of the 2030 Agenda. Parliaments provide a space for dialogue and for cementing social consensus, and a platform to include all political parties and social groups in the decision-making process;

(e) Strengthening parliaments' role and openness requires organizing their relationships with government institutions, including national statistical offices, regulatory organizations and independent national institutions, to facilitate access by parliamentarians and parliamentary committees to the information they need to effectively fulfil their functions;

(f) Partnerships between parliaments, civil society, the private sector and houses of expertise, among others, support parliaments' representative role, strengthen their relationship with the electorate, and provide them with the necessary expertise and information;

(g) Achieving the SDGs requires breaking with some traditional modalities of work and developing parliaments' working methods to strengthen integration at all levels, in line with the integrated and inclusive nature of the 2030 Agenda;

(h) Inclusive and integrated development requires parliaments to adopt an integrated approach when approving budgets to ensure the optimal distribution of resources, in line with national priorities and the SDGs;

(i) Strengthening Arab parliaments' role in achieving the 2030 Agenda requires building their institutional capacity regarding all political components such as parliamentary blocs and committees, and administrative components including departments, staff, research centres and parliamentary libraries;

(j) Strengthening parliaments' role also requires disseminating knowledge on the 2030 Agenda. To achieve that, it is possible to develop practical parliamentary handbooks consistent with the Arab region's specificities based on the parliamentary guide prepared by UNDP programme on the 2030 Agenda. It is also possible to establish an electronic platform to exchange knowledge and expertise between parliamentarians in the Arab region;

(k) Regional networking contributes to the exchange of information and expertise, and encourages parliaments to follow developments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Establishing a network of parliamentarians for development in Arab countries will promote collaboration between the region's parliaments, and will result in annual meetings to review parliaments' work in implementing the 2030 Agenda and in preparing for the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development;

(l) In this context, it is necessary to prepare an action plan on strengthening the role of parliaments and parliamentarians in implementing, following up on and reviewing the 2030 Agenda, and to transform the action plan into a work programme at the national and regional levels. The action plan's aim is to build knowledge and capacity and strengthen regional collaboration. ESCWA, UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank Group will be responsible for its implementation. The box below sets out the draft action plan on strengthening the role of parliaments and parliamentarians in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

**Draft action plan on strengthening the role of parliaments and parliamentarians in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda**

A. REGIONAL LEVEL

1. Engage in regional and global follow-up processes by undertaking the following:
  - (a) Holding a meeting to review annual developments in parliament and parliamentarians' activities related to the 2030 Agenda, including the following:
    - Preparing messages and recommendations for submission to the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, held annually;
    - Conducting an annual review of parliamentarians' participation in implementing the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs to highlight their impact, success and the outcomes of their work.
  - (b) Participation of parliamentarians in the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development;
  - (c) Preparing a regional report on parliamentary contributions to the 2030 Agenda, to be published biennially.
2. Support dialogue between Arab parliaments to form a regional parliamentary group to exchange experiences and expertise, and facilitate parliamentarians' access to knowledge that will assist them in playing an effective development role.
3. Build the capacity of parliamentarians and parliaments to play a role in development through the following:
  - (a) Publishing a guide for parliamentarians that reflects the Arab region's specificities and that builds upon previous guides, especially the guide prepared by UNDP, the Islamic Development Bank Group and the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption entitled "Parliament's role in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals";
  - (b) Preparing training material annexed to the guide, covering parliamentary functions and sustainable development priorities;
  - (c) Developing a guide on preparing strategic development plans for parliaments.
4. Organize training workshops on priority issues for the Arab region, as required.

B. NATIONAL LEVEL

1. Support the preparation of national parliamentary action plans on the SDGs, containing capacity-building activities for parliamentarians in implementing the 2030 Agenda given the interlinkages between the principles enshrined in the 2030 Agenda and their main functions, especially transparency and accountability in the field of financing for development.
2. Increase parliamentarians' knowledge of the 2030 Agenda and build the capacity of parliamentarians and parliaments in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda through the following:
  - (a) Organizing workshops for parliamentarians;
  - (b) Organizing workshops for administrative staff in parliaments;
  - (c) Providing support on the 2030 Agenda to parliamentary committees in general, and particularly to those concerned with the 2030 Agenda, if they exist.
3. Organize workshops to discuss the opportunities available to parliamentarians in strengthening development work and following up on the implementation of the SDGs, with reference to their parliamentary powers.

## II. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

5. The seminar comprised four main sessions, each concluding with a general discussion on the key issues covered.

### A. SESSION ONE THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

6. Mr Khaled Abdel Shafi, Director of the UNDP Regional Hub in Amman, chaired the first session. Participants reviewed the general context of the 2030 Agenda, focusing on the concept of sustainable development including the principles of justice, inclusiveness and partnerships between all stakeholders.

7. Sir Hugh Bayley, a former member of the British House of Commons and former Social Security Minister, made a statement in which he confirmed the interlinkages between sustainable development and political action. He gave an overview of his personal experience in parliamentary work, stressing his commitment to tackling development issues over the years, including health care and poverty reduction. He listed some of his achievements when he chaired the International Development Committee in the House of Commons, notably doubling financial assistance for Africa to forge economic partnerships and strengthen good governance. He mentioned the key conclusions he had drawn from implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), mainly dialogue and communication with local communities to understand their needs and the challenges they faced, which was also a priority for the 2030 Agenda. He said that parliaments' role was not limited to SDG 16, but also covered several SDGs related to education, economic growth and climate change, in addition to adopting sustainable development plans and holding the government to account.

8. Mr Adib Nehme, Regional Adviser in the ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda, gave a presentation on the four integrated and interlinked components of the 2030 Agenda: the preamble and declaration; the 17 SDGs and their targets and indicators; the means of implementation; and follow-up and review. He discussed the development process, from the MDGs to the 2030 Agenda, indicating Arab countries' participation in the negotiations that had led to the adoption of the Agenda. He explained the five pillars of the 2030 Agenda's preamble, namely people, the planet, prosperity, peace and partnership, and its economic, social, environmental, political and cultural dimensions. He stressed the role of parliamentarians as enshrined in the 2030 Agenda in paragraphs 45, 52 and 79, and in other paragraphs on the responsibility of the State, legislative action, oversight, transparency and implementation. He emphasized parliaments' responsibility in ensuring commitment to the 2030 Agenda, especially the commitment of the executive authorities, indicating the importance of building parliaments' capacity to implement those functions.

### B. SESSION TWO ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION, FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW OF THE 2030 AGENDA

9. The second session was chaired by Ms. Karima El Korri, Head of the ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda. The session included several presentations on national experiences to highlight the role of parliaments and parliamentary institutions in driving development efforts.

10. Mr Jabbar Abdulkhaleq, a member of the Iraqi Parliament and of its Finance Committee, presented the experience of Iraq regarding national reconciliation efforts adopted as a strategic option for Iraq. He said that conflicting national issues had highlighted the need for a dialogue between Iraqi social groups, and for interventions from parliament to enact legislation and laws to tackle those issues. The Iraqi Parliament had established an accountability and justice committee that had adopted several laws to cement national reconciliation. Those efforts had resulted in a national reconciliation project that, since 2006, had included a series of activities, programmes and partnerships contributing to promoting citizenship, tolerance and civil peace.

11. Mr Mohamed Said Abdilahi, a member of the Somali Federal Parliament, presented the experience of Somalia in engaging young people in the development process. He highlighted the negative impact of the civil war, which had resulted in mass migration and the collapse of State institutions. He emphasized the gradual transformation under way in Somalia from conflict towards peace and security, despite many challenges including high youth unemployment and the practices of some political parties that negatively affected the peace and stability of the country. Those challenges were exacerbated by the absence of policies and visions to integrate fragmented and warring groups and political parties. He commended the assistance provided by the United Nations and regional and international organizations collaborating with the Somali Government to support young people through parliamentary efforts. He mentioned that model parliaments had been established in 2014 to support young people aged 16-25, and to provide them with a platform for discussions and dialogue.

12. Mr Joseph Maalouf, a member of the Lebanese Parliament, presented the experience of Lebanon in protecting the Litani river from pollution. He gave an overview of the policymaking cycle in Lebanon, which began with identifying the problem, analysing it and envisioning the desired outcomes, developing alternatives and selecting a solution, then formulating and implementing public policies. He explained how Lebanese specialized bodies had tackled water pollution in the Litani river, which had been an important development facility in Lebanon before suffering neglect and mismanagement for many years. He said that consultative work had begun with a small seminar, and had grown to include experts, academics, civil society and all parliamentary blocs in the Beqaa Valley, thus allowing parliament to enact a law on managing the Litani river from source to mouth. He added that the Council of Ministers had approved the law, and agreed to allocate part of the budget to the project and finance the remainder from various donors. He presented a series of lessons learned from the experience, notably the need to adopt a participatory approach in decision-making, develop sound mechanisms to increase transparency and combat corruption, raise citizen awareness, transfer knowledge and ensure integration between laws.

13. Mr Rachid El Menyari, a member of the House of Councillors in the Moroccan Parliament, gave a presentation on the experience of Morocco in combating corruption. He reviewed the measures taken by Morocco related to the 2030 Agenda under the Moroccan parliament's strategy for the period 2016-2018 and other parliamentary activities, such as seminars and work programmes to enable parliament to advance the SDGs. Regarding parliaments' role in combating corruption, he mentioned the legislative and regulatory mechanisms adopted by the Moroccan parliament to tackle corruption, notably establishing a committee on monitoring the State budget. He also reviewed the initiatives and bills launched by the Moroccan parliament on administrative reform, enhancing good governance, and strengthening the rule of law and justice.

#### C. LAUNCH OF THE HANDBOOK ENTITLED "PARLIAMENT'S ROLE IN IMPLEMENTING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS"

14. The parliamentary handbook entitled "Parliament's role in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals", published by UNDP, the Islamic Development Bank Group and the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption, was launched at the seminar. Mr Rami Ahmed, Special Envoy on SDGs and Adviser to the President of the Islamic Development Bank Group, underscored the flexibility of the 2030 Agenda and the importance of adapting it to national and local contexts, and the role of disparate authorities and partners in its implementation. He said that the handbook focused on parliaments' central role in representing the people, enacting laws towards implementing the SDGs, and developing and monitoring budgets. He added that the handbook contained questions and answers, and was an easy and invaluable reference given the essential role of parliaments in approving development plans and projects submitted to international and regional donor institutions.

15. Mr Olivier Pierre-Louveaux, Programme Specialist on Inclusive Political Processes at UNDP, gave a detailed overview of the handbook, in which he listed the key functions of parliaments including representation, legislation, budgeting and regulation. Regarding legislative functions, he covered the drafting of new laws under the 2030 Agenda, and the amendment or review of existing laws to ensure conformity with the 2030 Agenda. He

said that the handbook contained proposed tools to strengthen oversight of law implementation. Concerning parliaments' representative functions, he focused on the need for parliamentarians to respond to people's needs during the implementation period of the 2030 Agenda and beyond. He emphasized parliaments' role in developing and monitoring budgets to achieve the desired goals under the SDGs, and to ensure that everyone benefited, including the most vulnerable and marginalized citizens.

#### D. KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON THE POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF DEVELOPMENT

16. On the second day of the seminar, Mr Stephen Twigg, a member of the British House of Commons and Chair of the International Development Committee, made a statement in which he focused on the intersection of parliamentarians' functions and the importance of collaboration between them at the national, regional and global levels to move forward in implementing the 2030 Agenda. He said that the committee he chaired was mixed, comprising all parties represented in parliament. Its main functions included monitoring government work in supporting development processes in all countries, especially the commitment of the United Kingdom to the SDG on ending poverty. He reviewed the achievements of some countries in implementing the MDGs, highlighting the remaining significant disparities that increased inequality within and between countries. He said that the 2030 Agenda was more inclusive, and strove to ensure real equality and economic growth that took into account the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Development should serve all persons, especially marginalized individuals such as persons with special needs. He addressed the challenges faced by the United Kingdom, including the income gaps between people from different social groups, air pollution and the limited use of renewable energy. He added that the United Kingdom had allocated 0.7 per cent of GDP to development assistance, in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the responsibility of rich countries to support developing countries. He stressed the importance of involving the private sector, civil society, citizens and Governments in the development process. He expressed his appreciation to the Jordanian and Lebanese Governments for hosting Syrian refugees, and for bearing the resulting responsibility of providing them with their basic needs. Regarding indicators, he highlighted the importance of providing the necessary expertise to collect and offer data, requiring capacity-building in the field of statistics. He emphasized parliaments' role in achieving the SDGs at the national, regional and global levels in following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and in monitoring the work of Governments and all stakeholders.

#### E. SESSION THREE

##### ENHANCING THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN THE 2030 AGENDA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

17. Mr Azmi Shuaibi, a member of the Board of Directors of the Arab Parliamentarians Against Corruption and a former member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, chaired the third session. He gave a statement on parliaments' participation in preparing national development plans in line with the 2030 Agenda, stressing the importance of empowering parliaments to fulfil their roles. He considered the working methods in Arab parliaments, which were usually divided into sectoral committees that lacked a comprehensive view of parliaments' work. He said that Arab countries were facing a significant challenge in formulating a new development contract, which required broader social consensus. He stressed that parliaments played a vital role in institutionalizing openness to society and managing a serious dialogue on the role of development in State-building. He emphasized that parliamentarians' representative role was not impartial – they should defend the most marginalized groups. He added that parliaments in the Arab region required a complete restructuring of all their components, including parliamentarians, committees, departments and research units, stressing the need to amend parliaments' agendas to allow for discussions on the realities of development.

18. Ms. Maisaa Youssef, Sustainable Development Officer in the ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda, gave a presentation on the response to the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region. She reviewed encouraging and weak trends in Arab countries' engagement in the 2030 Agenda, and the disparities between countries. Regarding encouraging trends, she mentioned all Arab countries' commitment to the 2030 Agenda as a transformative development framework, and that some countries had submitted their voluntary national reviews, including Egypt and Morocco

in 2016 and Jordan and Qatar in 2017. Eight Arab countries had expressed their wish to submit their reviews in 2018, namely Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and the United Arab Emirates. She also considered the regional follow-up and review processes, especially the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development whose outcomes were presented to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. She said that the adoption of an integrated approach was the greatest challenge facing Arab countries, especially analysing the overlaps between priorities, stakeholders and expected outcomes, in addition to weak partnerships with civil society and the private sector. She focused on the importance of involving parliamentarians in supporting and implementing the 2030 Agenda, and on their role in implementing SDG 16 to propagate democracy and cement a participatory work culture in the Arab region.

19. Ms. Hala Abouali, a member of the Egyptian House of Representatives, discussed the opportunities and challenges facing the Egyptian parliament in achieving sustainable development. She began by mentioning the challenges that Egypt faced in achieving the MDGs, which resulted in the adoption of a mechanism to involve all stakeholders and strengthen national ownership in implementing the ambitious 2030 Agenda. She said that there were many young people in Egypt, questioning how to achieve their aspirations and provide them with decent living standards. She also questioned the factors that limited government involvement in the sustainable development process, although around 35 per cent of members of parliament were under the age of 35. She indicated that the Egyptian parliament's rules of procedure allowed for the cooperation with experts in specialized fields, thus facilitating parliamentarians' access to information and providing a knowledge foundation to support their legislative and regulatory work. She reviewed proposed mechanisms within parliament to promote its participation in the development process, such as forming a committee on sustainable development where all other committees are represented, or reassigning an existing committee to act as a link that ensured coordination between all areas of development.

20. Mr Mohamed Kabbani, a member of the Lebanese Parliament, considered the opportunities and challenges facing the Lebanese Parliament in implementing the 2030 Agenda. He explained the functions of the Parliament, which had begun by focusing on legislation then moved on to oversight and accountability in the 1990s. It had only started participating in planning in the past few years. He said that the Parliament was the only body that obliged the Government and officials to coordinate and collaborate with other partners, and that ensured the nation's continuity in emergency situations and in the absence of Government. He indicated the Parliament's current interest in sustainable development, as evidenced by a workshop on the 2030 Agenda organized by the Lebanese parliament for its members, in collaboration with UNDP. He listed the outcomes of the workshop, including recommendations on building the capacity of the Parliament and ensuring that its functions conform to the 2030 Agenda. He mentioned that the Office of the Parliament had endorsed the formation of a committee on sustainable development in October 2017, tasked with ensuring the participation of the Parliament in national efforts towards achieving the SDGs in Lebanon.

21. Mr Ziad Obeidat, Director of Development Plans and Programmes at the Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, gave a presentation on the experience of Jordan in preparing its voluntary national review. He reviewed the initiatives launched by the Jordanian Government since 2002 to achieve sustainable development. Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, the Government developed a vision for 2025 on national priorities. In early 2017, it began preparing its voluntary national review in a participatory manner. The membership of the Higher National Committee on Sustainable Development expanded to include the public and private sectors, the two parliamentary councils, civil society, women and youth organizations and academia. He said that Jordan was currently developing a comprehensive national plan that incorporated the 2030 Agenda, its targets and a set of performance indicators. The Jordanian Government had ensured the participation of the House of Representatives to increase public confidence, given that it was best placed to understand the challenges facing citizens and to convey them to decision makers for translation into development policies and programmes.

## F. SESSION FOUR

### TOWARDS AN ACTION PLAN FOR ENHANCING THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION, FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW OF THE 2030 AGENDA IN THE ARAB REGION

22. Mr Adib Nehmeh chaired the fourth session, which included a review of the proposed action plan to enhance the role of parliamentarians in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region. Participants discussed the proposed activities to be implemented at the national and regional levels. The fourth session was followed by a closing session that reviewed the key messages.

## III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

### A. DATE AND VENUE

23. The ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda, in collaboration with UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank Group, organized the regional seminar for parliamentarians in the Arab region on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, held at the United Nations House in Beirut on 8 and 9 November 2017.

### B. OPENING

24. Ms. Khawla Mattar, ESCWA Deputy Executive Secretary for Programme Support, opened the seminar with a statement in which she highlighted the incongruity between the difficult reality in the Arab region today and the importance of clinging to hope and working towards an integrated, inclusive and sustainable development. She said that the 2030 Agenda covered development in all its cross-cutting dimensions and its interlinked pillars that required collaboration, coordination and concerted efforts between all partners. She added that Arab parliaments and advisory councils played a key role in formulating development plans, engaging in dialogue with all social groups, and implementing, following up on and reviewing the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region. She emphasized parliamentarians' responsibility to drive inclusive and sustainable development by responding to the electorate's needs, ensuring that their voice was heard by decision makers, monitoring and holding Governments accountable, adopting international conventions, regional collaborative agreements, and national policies and laws, and building trust between representative councils and citizens. She stressed the importance of the current seminar, the first of its kind in the region, in paving the way towards the full and effective participation of parliaments and parliamentarians in national and regional sustainable development processes.

25. Mr Khaled Abdel Shafi, Director of the UNDP Regional Hub in Amman, gave a statement in which he underscored the inclusiveness of the 2030 Agenda as a new global process revolving around human beings, which aimed to achieve well-being, equality and development for all without exception. He said that the 2030 Agenda was not limited to achieving economic growth; its priorities also included protecting the environment and cementing good governance. He emphasized that weaknesses in good governance restricted countries' ability to respond to citizens' needs; increased unemployment, especially among women and young people; undermined social cohesion and security; and resulted in conflict. He stressed the importance of parliamentarians' participation in implementing the 2030 Agenda and in preparing voluntary national reviews that were submitted annually to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, especially given that SDG 16 placed parliaments at the forefront of institutions responsible for implementing and following up on the 2030 Agenda and for approving budgets. He said that the handbook entitled "Parliament's role in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals" was the result of collaboration between UNDP, the Islamic Development Bank Group and the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption, and had become a global reference for achieving the 2030 Agenda. He thanked the Islamic Development Bank Group, and expressed his hope for future collaboration between ESCWA and UNDP to support parliaments in the Arab region.

26. Mr Rami Ahmed made a statement in which he stressed parliamentarians' role in the development process and in supporting government work to implement the 2030 Agenda. He emphasized the Islamic

Development Bank Group's commitment to the 2030 Agenda, as illustrated by ensuring consistency between its work and the SDGs, and adapting programmes and projects to support member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda while taking into account country specificities and priorities rather than ready-made development solutions from outside the region, thus making the situation more attractive to donors.

#### C. PARTICIPANTS

27. The seminar was attended by 55 participants from 11 Arab countries, namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Somalia, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The seminar was also attended by members of the British House of Commons, and representatives of the organizing bodies, namely ESCWA, UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank Group. Women's representation at the seminar was 33 per cent.

#### D. AGENDA

28. The following is a summary of the seminar's agenda:

- (a) Opening statements by ESCWA, UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank Group;
- (b) Session one: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including a keynote address on the global process and a detailed presentation of the main components and general context of the 2030 Agenda;
- (c) Session two: Role of parliaments in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda;
- (d) Launch of "Parliament's Role in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: A Parliamentary Handbook";
- (e) Keynote address on the political dimensions of sustainable development;
- (f) Session three: Enhancing the role of parliamentarians in the 2030 Agenda: challenges and opportunities;
- (g) Session four: Towards an action plan for enhancing the role of parliamentarians in the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region;
- (h) Closing session: Key messages and the way forward.

#### E. DOCUMENTS

29. The seminar documents are available from [www.unescwa.org/events/seminar-parliaments-arab-2030-agenda](http://www.unescwa.org/events/seminar-parliaments-arab-2030-agenda).

Annex\*

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