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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**

**FOLLOW-UP TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED
BY THE COMMISSION AT ITS TWENTY-SECOND SESSION**

*The impact of the lack of stability in the Arab region on economic
and social development: resolution 241 (XXII)*

Summary

Pursuant to the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) resolution 241 (XXII) of 17 April 2003, the Commission made the following three specific requests to the secretariat: (a) to study the impact of war on economic and social development and the environment in Iraq, ensuring that its activities in that field are coordinated with those of other United Nations bodies and the relevant regional organizations, and to provide assistance in this respect in the framework of the purposes and principles of the United Nations; (b) to identify the activities that should be undertaken by ESCWA as part of the post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation process, and to incorporate such activities into its programme of work and specializations; and (c) to establish a mechanism for monitoring the effects of current and future crises, with a view to identifying and analysing the extent of the impact on economic and social development in the region of such events, and to assist countries in dealing with such crises.

This report reviews the progress made with regard to those three requests.

A. THE IMPACT OF WAR ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN IRAQ

1. After the attack on the United Nations premises in Iraq, no United Nations missions in the economic and social fields were allowed to carry out data collection and situation analyses. Consequently, the secretariat has been compelled to implement all relevant activities outside the country since May 2003. Those activities centred on the following: capacity building of senior Iraqi officials in strategic economic planning and institution building; developing a database of Iraqi professionals abroad for reconstruction assistance; and capacity building of Iraqi women on their role in the political and electoral processes and on drafting the constitution.

2. In partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the specialized company, Cisco Systems Networking Academy, ESCWA is currently implementing the project on Iraq Networking Academies, which is aimed at building ICT education infrastructure and human resources in that country, with due focus on networking solutions. Additionally, ESCWA has developed a technical cooperation project package covering 11 priority areas identified by Iraq, including the following: developing policies and strategies for employment creation, developing the construction sector, establishing a local urban observatory in Baghdad, developing smart communities, promoting business incubators for immediate creation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and developing human resources for local community development, increasing national gender statistics. Those projects have been submitted to a steering committee of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) for funding consideration from UNDG Iraq Trust Fund. The concerned project profiles will be disseminated to the Commission at the present session.

3. In a broader context, ESCWA organized a series of closed brainstorming meetings involving more than 70 Arab decision makers, influential persons, civil society activists and academics, including Iraqi scholars and experts, to support the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which was established by the Secretary-General. The findings of these meetings were published in a report, entitled "International peace and security: an Arab perspective". This report articulated a coherent and comprehensive Arab regional perspective of the nature of the threats facing the international system and provided effective responses to counter such threats. Moreover, this report served as background material for the deliberations of the High-Level Panel and was included in the report by the Secretary-General on "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all", which was submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. Furthermore, ESCWA held numerous brainstorming sessions and consultations to address political developments that have long-term repercussions on the development of the region and on the United Nations.

B. IDENTIFYING ACTIVITIES AS PART OF THE POST-WAR
RECONSTRUCTION AND REHABILITATION PROCESS

4. As part of its regular programme of work, ESCWA produces the Secretary-General's annual reports to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the General Assembly on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). The 2004 report was well received by both ECOSOC and the General Assembly for its quality and in-depth analysis. ESCWA succeeded in mobilizing the concerned United Nations entities to contribute to the report, which served to enhance its credibility.

5. The Commission, together with the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Palestinian Authority, invited Arab funds and other economic and funding organizations, civil society institutions and the private sector to join in efforts to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to provide coherent assistance towards socio-economic development in Palestine. To that end, ESCWA mobilized extrabudgetary resources and organized a number of meetings, which resulted in the following: (a) enhancing cooperation between Palestinian and Arab civil society entities; (b) increasing support of Palestinian expatriates and institutions to the process of socio-economic rehabilitation and development in Palestine; and (c) developing Arab private sector support to sustainable development efforts in Palestine, including through public-private partnerships.

6. The project culminated with the convening of the Arab-International Forum on Rehabilitation and Development in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Towards an Independent State (Beirut, 11-14 October 2004). The Forum adopted new networking arrangements between the Palestinian Authority, civil society and the private sector and their Arab and international counterparts. These arrangements are now operational and facilitate the stakeholders to forge partnership initiatives and to address future challenges for socio-economic development of Palestine. In its Medium Term Development Plan 2005-2007, the Ministry of Planning in the Palestinian National Authority acknowledged ESCWA's work and qualified it as providing "important inputs" into the Plan. ESCWA is currently developing technical cooperation projects to follow up on the outcomes of the Forum.

7. Additionally, ESCWA implemented a set of extrabudgetary projects on skills upgrading and economic development of the communities of the liberated areas of South Lebanon in an effort to address poverty eradication and increase productive employment in the affected region. ESCWA, in partnership with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the Ministry of Social Affairs in Lebanon and the Association d'Aide du Développement Rural (ADR) conducted 22 vocational training sessions and small business courses. The training sessions benefited 366 individuals and facilitated the provision of 47 micro-credit loans to graduates, thereby assisting many of the graduates to start their own businesses.

8. In the proposed programme of work for 2006-2007, ESCWA incorporated a wide range of activities to assist the countries emerging from conflict.¹ The availability of extrabudgetary funds will have a great impact on the level of ESCWA assistance to those countries.

C. ESTABLISHING A MECHANISM FOR MONITORING THE EFFECTS OF CURRENT AND FUTURE CRISES

9. In 2003, ESCWA established two task forces to monitor the effects of crises in Iraq and Palestine. These task forces coordinated the work of various divisions and consolidated the secretariat's assistance to those two members. In preparing ESCWA's programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007, the Executive Secretary incorporated the establishment of a new unit for emerging and conflict-related issues, which is set to serve as the mechanism to carry out analytical and coordination work to meet the stated objective.

¹ See "Proposed programme of work for the biennium 2006-2007", 9 March 2005 (E/ESCWA/23/7).

