27th Ministerial Session of ESCWA Welcomes Request for Membership by Tunisia, Libya and Morocco

The 27th Ministerial Session of ESCWA was held on 9-10 May, 2012 under the auspices and in the presence of Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Miqati. In addition to official delegations, participants in the opening ceremony were politicians, diplomatic corps, economists and cultural personalities. Speakers at the ceremony were Prime Minister Miqati; Ms. Rima Khalaf, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA; Mr. Sultan Bin Said Al-Mansouri, Minister of Economy in the United Arab Emirates, chairman of the 27th Session; the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation in Jordan, represented by Mr. Saleh Al-Kharabsheh, the Deputy Minister and the chairperson of the former Session. The message of the UN Secretary-General addressed to the Session was delivered by Mr. Derek Plumbly, UN Sepecial Coordinator for Lebanon.

The Session was held as the region witnesses drastic changes with political, economic and social dimensions. This also comes after ESCWA held a high level meeting entitled “Reform and Transition to Democracy” in January, 2012 that was also opened by PM Miqati and the UN Secretary-General. The regional situation reaffirms, once and again, ESCWA’s role as the arm of the UN in the region and the voice of its member countries at the level of the international organization and the world. It also emphasizes the Commission’s role as a forum for member states, concerned governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as experts interested in discussing key issues of concern for Arabs, their present and their future.

Addressing the closing session, Executive Secretary Rima Khalaf said that this Session took more relevant decisions than any of ESCWA’s sessions, “since such decisions will serve as a guide for us in our work for the next two years.”

Participants in the Session had welcomed the requests of the Republic of Tunisia, Libya and Morocco to join the Commission to be submitted in front of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations for approval. Member States also called on ESCWA Executive Secretariat to invite the other Arab nations to join the Commission.

Participation and Social Justice
On participation and social justice in achieving sustainable development, the Session asked member countries to promote the representation of youth and women and all factions of society and their participation in national parliament committees and other elected bodies responsible for formulating public policies at the local and national levels. Participants requested that ESCWA Secretariat provides assistance to member countries in developing work strategies integrated with economic policies and social protection policies, giving particular attention to employee issues in the informal sector as well as youth unemployment.

Rio+20
Concerning the preparations for the Rio+20 Conference, the awaited world event in June, participants asked ESCWA Secretariat to report on the outcomes of the conference in terms of proposals of the region’s topics of interest; to support member countries in building the capacity to deal with these outcomes; and to continue coordinating and cooperating with...
The 27th Ministerial Session of ESCWA Welcomes Request for Membership by Tunisia, Libya and Morocco (Cont.)

Arab governments and UN agencies and the League of Arab States and its specialized committees, to take the measures necessary to achieve sustainable development, especially by supporting the energy, water and environment sectors including climate change, and activating institutional frameworks for regional sustainable development.

Internet Governance and Arab Domains

In terms of harnessing information and communication technology for development, participants urged member countries governments to participate in establishing the Arab Forum for Internet Governance in coordination with the League of Arab States. They asked ESCWA Secretariat to facilitate the process of establishing this Forum, in cooperation with the international and regional organizations, and the UN Regional Commissions. They also requested the Secretariat to support the policies and general guidelines for implementing sub-programs contained in the Arab roadmap for internet governance, under the umbrella of the Arab Forum for Internet Governance, and support the efforts in the development of Arabic domain names.

Inclusive Finance in ESCWA Region

Participants stressed the importance of creating a culture that encourages innovation and entrepreneurship in Arab countries, because the lack of such culture is one of the main obstacles Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and financial institutions are facing. They also emphasized the importance of the private sector role, however, without negating the importance of the public sector in financing SMEs, since this type of financing has social aims related to poverty alleviation and improving the standard of living. They proposed looking into financing SMEs in terms of its ability to create jobs and revitalize other economic sectors. They stressed on promoting cooperation at the level of Arab countries and on the contribution of Arab funds to develop SMEs including knowledge-based projects.

Palestine

While participants welcomed Palestine’s full membership in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), they asked member states to increase the level of support for the Palestinian people in gaining full rights and establishing an independent Palestinian state according to related UN Resolutions. They also requested ESCWA Secretariat to monitor and document the practices of the Israeli occupation and its negative economic, social and environmental implications, as well as to submit periodic reports to be presented at ministerial sessions. They requested their Secretariat to support the efforts of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority to achieve full membership in all international forums, organizations and international bodies.

Prominent Events of the Session

The 27th Ministerial Session had a high agenda including a ministerial round table discussion on “Participation and Social Justice in Achieving Sustainable Development,” the main topic of the Session; a ministerial round table on “Preparations for the Rio+20 in the Arab Region”; and a ministerial round table on “Inclusive Finance in the ESCWA Region: Current Status and Future Prospects.”

ESCWA Cyber Legislations Launched

One of the most prominent topics in the Session was “Launching Cyber Legislation Directives” on 10 May, 2012. Cyber legislations are considered to be the foundation of providing the legal and organizational environment appropriate for developing an information and knowledge society. They also play a great role in providing the confidence and protection necessary for citizens and public and private entities in using digital environment and e-services. These laws contribute to increasing local, regional and foreign investments in the fields of Information and Communication Technology.

Culture, Art Enrich Development

Before the opening of the Session, The Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music, led by Maestro Harout Fazelian, played enduring musical masterpieces by Mohamad Abdul Wahhab (Al-Nahr Al-Khalid), Zaki Nassif (Habayibna Hawaleina), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (A Little Night Music), Antonio Vivaldi (Spring- The Four Seasons). It has become a tradition for ESCWA to start its ministerial sessions with a cultural segment in order to ensure the artistic and cultural presence in its development work, for the growth of people and nations is not completed and achieved without enriching the artistic and cultural aspects of human life.