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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report

Consultative Meeting of ESCWA and Civil Society Organizations on Supporting Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon Beirut, 2 June 2014

A. BACKGROUND

1. In November 2013, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 68/12 on the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in which it proclaimed 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. At its twenty-seventh session, held in 2012, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) issued resolution 307 (XXVII) on support for the Palestinian People, in which it requested the secretariat to continue to support the Palestinian people and their institutions in accordance with their priorities and needs. ESCWA has thus decided to intensify and broaden its efforts to support the Palestinian people and develop regional partnerships to this end.

2. ESCWA has launched several activities in Palestine and in refugee camps in neighbouring countries to support both Palestinians and civil society organizations operating in refugee camps, in line with the sectoral priorities and needs determined by Palestinians. It has also launched, in collaboration with the Welfare Association, a consultative process involving numerous civil society organizations in Palestine and refugee camps in order to determine the activities that it should undertake.

3. As a result, the Consultative Meeting of ESCWA and Civil Society Organizations on Supporting Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon was held in Beirut, on 2 June 2014, and participants were requested to present their perspectives on, and analyses of, the needs of civil society organizations supporting Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

B. OBJECTIVES

4. The meeting focused on highlighting the activities, mandate and capacities of ESCWA and mapping them with the needs of civil society organizations supporting Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and on identifying future steps to strengthen ESCWA support for these organizations.

C. DISCUSSIONS

5. The meeting discussions covered the scope of ESCWA work and its tasks, the needs of civil society organizations and the areas of cooperation between ESCWA and these organizations.

1. *Scope of ESCWA work and its tasks*

6. ESCWA was established in 1973 and is one of the five United Nations regional commissions. It comprises 17 Arab States* and its objectives can be summarized as follows:

(a) Promoting economic and social development in member States;

(b) Strengthening cooperation between member States and achieving regional integration;

(c) Realizing interaction and information exchange on experiences, best practices and lessons learned at the regional level;

(d) Enhancing interaction between the Arab region and the rest of the world and raising awareness at the global level of the region's situation and needs.

7. At the functional level, ESCWA acts as a framework for development policy formulation and harmonization, a platform for convergence and cooperation, a source of knowledge and expertise and an information observatory. ESCWA tasks can be summarized as follows:

* Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

- (a) Conducting analytical studies and research for development policies;
- (b) Collecting and disseminating data and information;
- (c) Organizing conferences and meetings;
- (d) Organizing training courses and seminars;
- (e) Providing technical services, including technical consultations, capacity-building and technical studies;
- (f) Preparing development activities and programmes;
- (g) Coordinating and cooperating with local, regional and international stakeholders.

8. For several years, ESCWA has been offering continual support to the Palestinian people and its public and civil society institutions. ESCWA is developing appropriate support activities to assist Palestinians in mitigating the repercussions of occupation and raising awareness of their rights. Support areas include the following:

- (a) Development under occupation;
- (b) Institutional capacity-building;
- (c) Awareness-raising and advocacy to secure the full realization of the rights of the Palestinian people;
- (d) Mobilizing Arab and international support and encouraging partnerships for development;
- (e) Establishing coordination networks and frameworks.

2. Needs of civil society organizations

9. The needs of civil society organizations supporting Palestinian refugees in Lebanon vary according to their areas of work, but they also have many common issues and priorities, especially in view of the deteriorating situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. This requires a radical intervention that complements the humanitarian services provided by various bodies and affirmation that a final solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees rests in the implementation of their right to return, in accordance with relevant international treaties.

10. Several organizations are striving to address the gaps in official efforts by supporting refugees and providing necessary services and assistance. However, they face severe challenges in meeting their increasing needs because of a lack of funding and required expertise, especially in the light of the Syrian crisis and the redirection of the bulk of financial and human resources to assist Syrian refugees. The needs of civil society organizations can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Diversifying funding sources to avoid complete dependence on foreign aid, which is invariably linked to donor priorities and generally granted for urgent assistance rather than for achieving development and progress, creating employment opportunities and establishing sustainable structures;
- (b) Mobilizing public and private Arab support for civil society organizations supporting Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, including Palestinian refugees displaced from the Syrian Arab Republic;

(c) Supporting advocacy efforts at the regional and international levels, especially with regard to international forums and donors, to implement refugees' right to return and raise awareness of their humanitarian and development needs and priorities based on the expertise of civil society organizations in the field;

(d) Establishing a positive and enabling local environment to facilitate official procedures aimed at improving several aspects of the lives of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and empowering civil society organizations to work more effectively in this area;

(e) Addressing the challenge posed by the brain drain from civil society organizations in Lebanon to other countries or sectors by offering incentives that encourage skilled individuals to continue contributing to the work of these organizations, even in a partial manner;

(f) Networking and coordinating at the regional level with organizations that work with Palestinian refugees in other countries, especially at the sectoral level, to develop activities and programmes and exchange expertise and experiences;

(g) Building the institutional and structural capacities of civil society organizations through technical assistance;

(h) Organizing training sessions and building the capacities of cadres and individuals working in civil society organizations in various administrative and development areas;

(i) Conducting sectoral studies on the situation and needs of Palestinian refugees and undertaking systematic and scientific evaluations of the work of civil society organizations and its results;

(j) Assisting in preparing and implementing sustainable development projects that might not be top donor priorities;

(k) Improving the conditions of several civil society organizations at the legal, administrative and financial levels.

3. *Proposals and recommendations*

11. Based on the identified needs of civil society organizations supporting Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and on ESCWA areas of work and tasks, participants made several proposals and recommendations, including the following:

(a) Benefiting from ESCWA technical expertise and knowledge to undertake the following:

(i) Analyse the implications of an increase in the number of international non-governmental organizations working in the field in Lebanon and of the redirection of humanitarian aid towards Syrian refugees;

(ii) Build institutional capacities, train cadres and provide technical assistance for establishing and developing institutional structures for civil society organizations on the basis of requested fields of expertise;

(iii) Conduct or contribute to sectoral studies to assess the needs of Palestinian refugees in each sector and evaluate the capacity and needs of civil society organizations working with them;

(iv) Develop an approach to and proposals on reconciling urgent relief efforts and development efforts;

- (v) Provide technical assistance to civil society organizations in designing sustainable development projects, even if they are not a priority for donors, to meet refugees' needs;
 - (vi) Organize normative activities on the following topics:
 - a. Advocacy to secure refugees' rights and the right to return;
 - b. The status of Palestinian refugees displaced from the Syrian Arab Republic in Lebanese law;
 - c. The role of international organizations with regard to working with refugees and relevant civil society organizations;
 - d. The role of Arab development institutions and funds;
 - e. Arab support for Palestinian refugees and civil society organizations;
 - f. Combining advocacy and development based on the principle of "no development without rights";
 - g. The information and communications technology sector as an option for employing and building the capacities of young people;
 - h. The implications of an increase in the number of international organizations working in Lebanon on civil society organizations;
 - (vii) Establish a database on studies and reports published by civil society organizations;
 - (viii) Organize field visits for ESCWA officials and researchers to Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon to provide a clear picture of living and development conditions;
- (b) Benefiting from the regional mandate and convening power of ESCWA through the following:
- (i) Connect civil society organizations in Lebanon with their counterparts at the sectoral level in Jordan, Palestine and other countries and strengthen activity coordination;
 - (ii) Mobilize public and private Arab support for civil society organizations working with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon;
 - (iii) Open up the labour market to Palestinian refugees in Arab countries, especially in Gulf Cooperation Council countries;
 - (iv) Improve the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, assist civil society organizations working with them and cooperate with the Lebanese Government to facilitate and develop the work of these organizations;
 - (v) Advocate the needs and rights of Palestinian refugees, including their right and need to return, at international meetings and highlight the plight of Palestinian refugees displaced from the Syrian Arab Republic;
 - (vi) Widely disseminate reports and intellectual and cultural material prepared by civil society organizations and Palestinian refugees to official bodies, State institutions and other stakeholders;
 - (vii) Organize regional and international meetings on the Palestinian Cause and tackle all its aspects, including development and support for Palestinian refugees;
 - (viii) Assist civil society organizations in participating in international activities and meetings with senior officials;

(c) Developing a permanent consultative mechanism between ESCWA and civil society organizations supporting Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, pending the participation of other stakeholders at a later date.

4. *Future steps*

12. To monitor the outcomes of the current meeting and implement the resulting proposals and recommendations, the following steps will be taken:

(a) ESCWA and the Welfare Association will prepare a draft report of the current meeting for dissemination to participating bodies for their comments and proposals, on the basis of which the draft report will be amended;

(b) ESCWA and the Welfare Association will prepare a draft work plan on the basis of the recommendations and proposals contained in the above-mentioned report for dissemination to participating bodies for their comments and proposals;

(c) A second consultative meeting will be organized in the last quarter of 2014 to approve the work plan and identify roles and tasks.

D. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

1. *Date and venue*

13. The consultative meeting was held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Monday, 2 June 2014 at the United Nations House in Beirut.

2. *Agenda*

14. The following agenda items were considered:

- (a) Review of the scope of ESCWA work and its tasks;
- (b) Needs of civil society organizations working with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon;
- (c) Proposals and recommendations on cooperation and partnerships;
- (d) Future steps.

3. *Participants*

15. The list of participants is set out in the annex to the present report.

Annex*

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