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Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

**Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development:
contribution of the United Nations Environment Programme to the
forthcoming session of the Commission on Sustainable Development**

**Regional civil society statement submitted to the eighth special session
of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum**

Note by the Executive Director

The annex to the present note contains the regional civil society statement from the West Asian region developed in the course of the regional preparatory process for the Fifth Global Civil Society Forum, to be held in Jeju on 27 and 28 March 2004, with a view to providing a contribution from civil society organizations to the eighth special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum. The statement is being circulated as received by the secretariat and has not been formally edited.

* UNEP/GCSS.VIII/1/Rev.1.

Annex

Regional Workshop on the Role of Arab Parliamentarians in Protecting the Environment

Final Statement Manama 3-4 March 2004

In accordance with the Arab Environment Work Programme of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible of the Environment (CAMRE) of 2004, a Regional Workshop on the Role of Arab parliamentarians in protecting the Environment was held in Manama, Bahrain, on 3-4 March 2004. The Seminar was organized by UNEP/ROWA, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) in coordination with the Shura Council and the Lower House of Parliament of the kingdom of Bahrain. It was attended by Parliamentarians from Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Palestine. Representatives of governments and non-governments organizations from seven Arab States also participated in the workshop.

The Programme of work addressed the following main topics: the role of UNEP and the league of Arab States, national experience of some of the Arab States and civil society organizations in protecting the environment and achieving sustainable development and how to strengthen cooperation between these stakeholders in enhancing environment protection efforts at the national level and achieving cooperation at the regional level to bring about a more effective participation of Arab Parliamentarians at the regional and international for a.

Following the presentations and discussions at the four sessions addressing the above themes, the participants agreed that:

1. Peace and security in the region are prerequisites of protecting the environment and achieving Sustainable Development, by abolishing weapons of mass distraction in the region, putting an end to occupation, threat, and refraining from interference in the national affairs of the countries, in accordance with the international law and decisions in this regard.
2. The Arab Parliamentarians having noted with appreciation the State of the Environment Reports of Palestine and Iraq prepared by UNEP, and request the international community to assist UNEP towards the implementation the recommendations of these reports towards the rehabilitation of the environment.
3. The Parliamentarians are concerned that the State of Environment in the Arab Region shows continuous degradation of water resources, increased rates of abstraction and pollution without significant progress in curtailing consumption trends or significant increase in the treatment of sewage and reuse of treated effluent. The area is also witnessing degradation of the coastal and marine environments as a result of extensive land filling and dredging operations, over fishing and continued release of untreated waste water, oil and other industrial pollutants without treatment. Other major areas of environmental degradation include shrinking green cover, creeping deserts, over grazing and open pit mining for building materials. Air pollution in major cities and the accumulation of solid and hazardous wastes also represent major challenges to human health and the environment.
4. The Arab Initiative of Sustainable Development (2002) is a comprehensive and an integrated framework to achieve the social and economic development, and protecting the environment sustainable bases. This requires a political will that assembles the various stakeholders under a cooperative and effective partnership to develop national and regional strategies that are consistent with the global aspirations in this regard. Moreover, it is recognized that Arab funding organizations and the development banks represent the core source funding for the Initiative that must be established as the first step towards seeking support from global funding mechanisms.

5. The Parliamentarians have also reviewed progress made towards implementing the Johannesburg Work Plan (2002), especially in the areas of water, sanitation and human settlements. The achievements, however, fall short of achieving the goals of the Work Plan; and the expectations stipulated in the Arab Initiative.
6. The Arab states implementation of the water, sanitation, and human settlements programmes require financial resources that are beyond the capabilities of the Arab States. Accordingly, there is a need to develop financial mechanisms, provide technical support and capacity building opportunities through regional and international programmes towards the implementation of the Arab Initiative.
7. The political framework represented by the league of Arab States and the specialized Arab Ministerial Councils, form a practical approach for regional collaboration towards achieving sustainable development. Accordingly, the recommendations adopted by CAMRE at the 15th Session (2003), to widen its mandate to include achieving sustainable development, as well as strengthening national committees for environment and sustainable development, and which will be submitted to the Arab Summit in Tunisia later in the year for approval, represent a necessary step towards achieving sustainable development in the region.
8. The Parliamentarians recognize that parliaments can play a major role in achieving Sustainable Development through a partnership with government institution and civil society groups, within the framework of the National Committee of Environment and Sustainable Development.
9. In pursue of this role, the Parliamentarians find themselves responsible for following up the efforts towards protecting the environment, achieving Sustainable Development and the Millennium Goals that was adopted by the of the UN (2001), especially Goal No. 7 which stipulates that guarantee the Environment Sustainability can be achieved through integrating the principles of Sustainable Development into the national programmes and policies, decrease loss us the environmental resources, and reduce the percentage of humans who without access to safe drinking water by 2015 and significantly improve the living conditions of poor areas by 2020.
10. The Parliamentarians consider the ministries and institutions responsible of the environment in the Arab States. As a partner in achieving protection of the environment and achieving Sustainable Development, Accordingly, political and financial support should be provided in order to enable these institutions to fulfill their mandate.
11. Emphasizing on the monitoring role of Parliamentarians, it is necessary to develop a mechanism for enhancing capacity building efforts, with a view to insure that environmental protection responsibility is entrusted with qualified human resources. This can be achieved by integrating the concepts of environmental protection into the curricula of all education stages. In the mean time, government institutions responsible for the environment are to be requested to submit annual reports on the state of the environment in their respective countries.
12. The role of civil society organizations as partners in achieving Sustainable Development through their voluntary initiatives and programmes. Towards this objective, political and financial support must be provided, as well as an access to become part of the planning and implementation of the development process.
13. The Parliamentarians also emphasize importance of the partnership with the civil society organizations towards consolidating the social efforts in establishing the principles of environmental citizenship and activate the role of the citizen in protecting the environment and curtailing the abuse of natural resources and curbing the unsustainable patterns of consumption. This effort should be augmented with ensuring the integration of the principles of environment protection into feasibilities studies of projects, from the planning until implementation phases.
14. The Parliamentarians emphasize the need to activate the role of women through strengthening her participation in the development and follow up of strategies and programmes of Environmental protection and Sustainable Development.

15. Emphasizing the importance of cooperation between parliaments and government institutions in strengthening of the media towards the enhancement of environmental awareness programmes and relevant projects to achieving Sustainable Development.
16. Arab Parliamentarian emphasize the need to have effective presence, in the Arab, regional and international Environmental for a and enhancement of cooperation between parliaments at the regional and international level through working closely with government institutions and national committee for Sustainable Development in the elaboration of national environmental plans of action.
17. Accordingly Arab Parliamentarian call for the establishment and strengthening national environment and Sustainable Development committees in their parliaments as will as forming a permanent committee for environment and development within the Arab Union of Parliamentarian with a view to strengthen cooperation, exchange of expertise, and follow up of the implantation of conventions and agreements, preparations of guidelines for environmental legislation and contribution towards development of environmental policies in the Arab region and follow up of implementation.
18. The Arab Parliamentarian express their deep appreciation of the generous offer of the Jordanian parliamentarian to host a regional office entrusted with follows up of the efforts of the proposed parliamentarian committees for environment and development
