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Arab NGOs Forum
In Preparation for the World Summit
On Sustainable Development WSSD
Manama, Bahrain, 8 September 2001

FINAL REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Paragraph	Page
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	1-3	1
I. Background.....	4-9	1-2
II. Attendance.....	10-12	2
III. Opening Session.....	13-14	2-3
IV. Election of Officers and Adoption of Agenda.....	15-17	3
V. Proceedings.....	18-22	3-4
Vi. Main Issues Discussed.....	23-56	4-7
Annex 1 Manama Declaration.....		8-10
Annex 2 List of Participants.....		11-20
Annex 3 Agenda.....		21

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. As part of the regional preparatory process leading to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), a Regional NGOs Forum was held in Manama, Bahrain, on 8 September 2001. The Forum was organized by UNEP/ROWA on behalf of the Joint Secretariat that was set up for the preparatory process and that comprises UNEP/ROWA, the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) and the Secretariat of the Council for Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE).
2. The objective of the Forum was to engage the NGOs in the regional preparatory process leading to WSSD and to assess their role as partners for sustainable development.
3. At the end of the Forum, the participants issued a Declaration that stated the Arab NGOs achievements in the field of sustainable development through the last decade, as well as the constraints and challenges they encountered in achieving sustainable development. The Declaration is attached as Annex 1

I. BACKGROUND

4. The General Assembly (GA), in its resolution 55/199 of 20 December 2000, decided to hold the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 2 to 11 September 2002, with participation at the level of Heads of State or Governments from 9 to 11 September 2002. The main objectives of the WSSD is to reinvigorate, at the highest political level, the global commitment to sustainable development by identifying accomplishments and areas where efforts are needed to implement Agenda 21 and other outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) 1992, addressing new challenges and opportunities. This should result in a renewed political commitment and support for sustainable development, consistent, *inter-alia*, with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.
5. The General Assembly stressed the importance of early and effective preparations for the Summit. It called for a comprehensive assessment of progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the other outcomes of UNCED to be carried out at the local, national, regional and international levels by Governments and the United Nations system so as to ensure high-quality inputs to the review process, and welcomed the preparatory activities carried out so far. The General Assembly called on the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), established in 1993 and charged with monitoring implementation of Agenda 21, to act as the Preparatory Committee and to launch a preparatory process.
6. The preparation process in the region comprises two main integrated series of meetings (a) a series of roundtables and forums at the regional level involving various stakeholders and major groups active in the field of sustainable development to give them the opportunity to play a positive role in the regional preparatory process, to voice their concerns and priorities, and to influence the outcomes of the Summit; and (b) Intergovernmental meetings (including the PrepCom) at the regional level providing the political statement of the Arab countries as an input to the WSSD.
7. The integrated outcomes of the meetings and regional forums will be incorporated into a regional assessment report, being prepared to reflect on the achievements, constraints, challenges

and needs to advance the implementation of Agenda 21 and sustainable development in the region. It will be the base for an Arab Declaration, which will provide a common position for the Arab region to the World Summit in 2002. The Report and the Declaration will be submitted for endorsement to the Arab Summit in March 2002 in Beirut.

8. Within this framework, the United Nations Environment Programme, Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA), in collaboration with the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) and the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE), and under the patronage of H.E. Mr Jawad Salem Al Arrayed, Bahrain Minister of State for Municipalities Affairs and Environmental Affairs and in cooperation with the Environmental Affairs Directorate, convened a regional NGOs Forum in Manama, Bahrain, on 8 September 2001.

9. The objective of the NGOs Forum is to engage the Non-Governmental Organizations in the regional process leading to WSSD, in order to assess their role as partners for sustainable development. The participants discussed progress made in implementing Agenda 21, especially Chapter 27. They also discussed the main constraints and challenges faced in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda; and identified the needs, initiatives and campaigns on priority issues for non-governmental organizations to advance sustainable development in the region.

II. ATTENDANCE

10. The Forum was attended by representatives from national NGOs as well as regional NGOs networks.

11. 54 Delegates from 15 Arab countries, representing 30 different organizations took part in the Forum discussions. There were also participants from various institutions in the host country, Bahrain.

12. The complete list of participants is attached as Annex 2

III. OPENING SESSION

13. The Forum was opened under the patronage of His Excellency Mr. Jawad Salem Al Arrayed, Bahrain Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Environmental Affairs.

14. The following statements were made:

- a. Dr. Jomaa Al Kaaby, Deputy Director Environmental Affairs welcomed the participants on behalf of His Excellency the Minister of State for Municipalities Affairs and Environmental Affairs. He stated that Bahrain is pleased to host this meeting and emphasized the importance of the role played by NGOs in achieving sustainable development. He emphasized that since Rio, the Arab world, including Bahrain, has achieved much progress in the field of sustainable development, but much is yet to be achieved. He commended the efforts of UNEP and the Joint secretariat in organizing the Forum.
- b. Dr Emad Adly, General Coordinator of the Arab Network for Environment & Development spoke of the increasing importance of achieving sustainable development in the Arab Region, emphasizing that governments of the region need to cooperate more closely with regional and national NGOs and networks not only in the implementation of programmes, but also in

laying down strategies and work plans. He thanked the State of Bahrain and the Joint Secretariat for organizing the Forum.

- c. Mrs Shams Mourad, Head of the Sustainable Development Committee at the Mothers & Children Welfare Society, spoke on behalf of the NGOs in Bahrain. She welcomed the participants and reviewed the role NGOs in Bahrain are playing independently, and in support of government programmes to achieve sustainable development. She spoke of specific programmes the Mothers & Children Welfare Society is undertaking in cooperation with UNEP and the Environmental Affairs Directorate. She expressed the willingness of the organization of using their experience in implementing sustainable development project to help other NGOs regionally.
- d. Mr. Mahmood Y. Abdurraheem, Director and Regional Representative of UNEP/ROWA, welcomed the participants and stated the context and objective of the meeting. He stated that NGOs in the Arab region today are assuming a greater role and responsibility towards sustainable Development issues, as recommended by the Arab Ministers of Environment in the Abu Dhabi Declaration. He said that civil society participation is crucial to the success of any sustainable development effort and that NGOs involvement in strategy making as well as in the implementation of projects must be encouraged. Mr. Abdurraheem wished the participants success in fulfilling their endeavors and extended his thanks to them, the co-organizers, and the State of Bahrain.

IV. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

15. Mr. Ghassan Sayah, CEO of the Young Men's Christian Association (Lebanon), Chaired the First Two sessions of the Forum.

16. Dr Emad Adly (General Coordinator for the Arab Network for Environment & Development) chaired the subsequent sessions. Ms Alya Al Hussein, acted as rapporteur for both sessions.

17. An open-ended drafting committee was formed, the core of which included the following:

- a. Dr Bahiya Al Jishi
- b. Mr Ghassan Sayyah
- c. Mrs Shams Mourad
- d. Mr Zakarya Khonji
- e. Mr Magdi Allam.
- f. Mr Ziyad Alawneh
- g. Alia El-Husseini

The agenda was adopted as presented in Annex 3.

V. PROCEEDINGS

18. Following the adoption of the agenda and the introduction of participants, an overview of the WSSD and the regional preparatory process for West Asia and Arab Region was presented by Mr. Adel Farid Abdul Kader, to bring the audience up-to-date on the WSSD process and the related activities.

19. The meeting then considered the discussion paper that was prepared by the secretariat and discussions regarding the achievements and constraints in the implementation of Agenda 21 took place.

20. The meeting then discussed. That was followed by a review and discussion of the challenges, and opportunities towards achieving sustainable development in the region.

21. Finally, the attendees discussed the way forward for achieving sustainable development, and identified the priorities for action and means of implementation through the next decade.

22. It was agreed that a declaration by Arab NGOs would constitute one of the main outcomes of the meeting. A small drafting group was formed in order to prepare the recommendations upon which the Declaration was based.

VI. MAIN ISSUES DISCUSSED

A. Opportunities of Sustainable Development in the Arab Region:

23. Incorporation of environmental information in the decision making process has been initiated.

24. Conventions of biodiversity, combating desertification, climate change and ozone depleting substances, have received a lot of attention within countries of the region. Certain progress has been made in some. In particular, significant progress has been made regarding controlling Ozone Depleting Substances

25. Improvements have been witnessed concerning the tools and applications of environmental management system. Environmental impact assessments have become a pre-requisite for major projects in most countries of the region.

26. The environmental dimension has been incorporated in the educational curricula, which is a major achievement in most countries of the region. However, debate is still going on concerning the effectiveness of educational methods and materials used including informal education technologies.

27. Regional institutions provide some of the most innovative responses to the challenge currently facing national and international governance; those regional institutions are requested to re-look for their billows to consider NGOs involvement.

28. While globalization includes new opportunities, it also raises new areas of challenge both within and among Arab states – still, the bilateral trade among the Arab States is only 8% of their total trade.

29. Information and communication technology provide a unique opportunity to improvement of information dissemination, environmental governance, networking and exchange of experiences and technologies, still this exchange among Arab NGOs and their governments is still very limited and even among NGOs themselves.

30. Diversification of economy and investing in industrialization and technology is an opportunity that regional cooperation can promote to achieve sustainable development in the region, there is a need to review all the developmental programs implemented in the Arab Region in different levels to assure the incorporation of S.D indicators on those programs.

31. The diversity and richness of the cultures in the region poses unique opportunities that should be invested and built upon. The endowment of the region with rich cultural heritage offers a great opportunity for economic, cultural, and educational development, which if well invested, would reflect positively on people's quality of life.

32. Globalization is an additional factor contributing to the important role of NGOs can and need to play. NGOs are less bureaucratic and more eager in going about work. Their involvement in the daily lives of people and communities makes them uniquely equipped to speak and act on behalf of the chosen causes. Furthermore, they have a unique role of initiating creative and innovative solutions at local levels.

B. Needs and Priorities of Sustainable Development in the Arab Region:

33. Achieving peace, security and alleviating poverty, and environmental protection are top priority issues that should be tackled in order for the region to achieve sustainable development. Specially the Israeli aggregations and other conflicts. The international community is urgently requested to fulfill its political commitments and moral obligations in order to stop the severe discrimination against Palestinian citizens. It is well accepted that violation of human rights, injustice and poverty are major obstacles to achieve the sustainable development.

34. Appropriate policies and measures that answer to the expanding problem of poverty in the Arab Region. NGOs and civil society being closest to people's needs and priorities should have a major input in these policies.

35. Concentrate on concrete action-oriented activities and programs. All parties involved in sustainable development are called upon to pursue a "result-oriented approach".

36. Increase public environmental awareness is a requirement for environmentally sound and socially responsible sustainable development. Awareness programs must be directed towards decision makers, the business sector and national public figures. The notion of the public awareness should be expanded to include creation of environmental pressure groups.

37. Develop an enabling environment and tools for NGOs and civil society to operate: legislative, and regulatory framework, incentive structures, mechanisms for the involvement in decision-making and implementation, and financial support from government and donors.

38. Continued amendments are needed in the environment institutional set up, and their assigned responsibilities, in order for them to cope with the environmental problems.

39. Incorporate economic and financial instruments to control pollution emissions and environmental deterioration. Such instruments may include incentives, taxes, charges, pricing strategies and other indirect measures, such I.E. As and P.P.P., in addition to strong enforcement of environment of law.

40. Improvement and updating in the formulation and enforcement of environmental laws through combining government environmental institutions with other authoritative powers in the country.

41. Change of consumption patterns in the Arab region. This needs extensive efforts regarding spreading awareness among citizens of the Arab countries. Developing programs for

environmental citizenship at the community level is a major component of the awareness programs.

42. Improve basic social services in rural areas including education, health, and infrastructure.

43. Improve access of products from the Arab Region to international markets, through the reduction of tariff barriers and the elimination of non-tariff barriers and other measures that hinder free trade.

44. Investing in the rich cultural heritage of the region is a domain that promises abundant opportunities future and needs to be invested further.

45. Assist local communities in the implementation of local activities of Agenda 21, and overcome the limitations present, which include centralization of decision-making, lack of local funding mechanisms, and government bureaucracy, to give a chance for local NGOs and local communities to share in decision making, planning, implement and evaluation.

46. Set regional and national strategies for management of natural resources, land, biodiversity and water resources. Such strategies should include sensitizing the Arab citizens on the diminishing supply of water in the region.

47. Improve information and telecommunication infrastructure capacity and further incorporate environmental information in the decision making process.

48. Building institutional and physical capacity is necessary in order for countries of the Arab Region to compete with the lack of technical know how. National environmental strategies should emphasize the importance of making use of local technologies and indigenous knowledge, assessment and feasibility studies, legislation, creation of national decentralized institutions to monitor and follow up environmental decisions.

49. Increase capacity for integrated economic and environmental decision making in the Arab region, with special emphasis on relationships between trade and environment, and international competitiveness.

50. The Arab Region needs to take action to prepare itself for globalization and the global economy. An Arab regional strategy is essential in order to counter the policies of other already-formed economic blocs.

51. Construction of an effective system of global governance in response to the global, social, environmental, and security issues and as a political counterweight to the globalization of the world economic system

52. Increase transparency of some UN institutions as a need to reform the UN system as a whole to be more justice, and transparent, giving NGOs more chance in participate working in the field of Sustainable development in the Arab Region. It is worth highlighting the importance of the institutions' specialization and segregation of responsibility to avoid monopoly, overlap and at many instances incompetence.

53. Enhance international cooperation among governments and other actors, including non-governmental organizations to ensure that global policies and agreements take people's well being into account.

54. Globalization poses a new challenge to the NGO community. Today's economy and markets are global, and the problems we face are also global. From the environment to poverty, unemployment, trade, peace and human rights.

55. Priority issues that should be tackled in order for the region to achieve sustainable development. Specially the Israeli aggregations and other conflicts. The international community is urgently requested to fulfill its political commitments and moral obligations in order to stop the severe discrimination against Palestinian citizens. It is well accepted that violation of human rights, injustice and poverty are major obstacles to achieve the sustainable development.

56. Concentrate on concrete action-oriented activities and programs. All parties involved in sustainable development are called upon to pursue a "result-oriented approach".

THE MANAMA DECLARATION
For Arab Non Governmental Organizations
Bahrain 8 September 2001

Fifty Four delegates from 15 nations, representing 30 Arab networks and NGOs, met in Manama, Bahrain, on 8 September, in response to the invitation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA), and other members of the Joint Secretariat for the preparation of the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) to participate in the Forum for Arab NGOs for the WSSD, and

Having: reviewed the Abu Dhabi Declaration - issued by The Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment on 3 February 2001 and Chapter 27 of Agenda 21, highlighting the vital role non-governmental organizations in the shaping and implementation of sustainable development.

Having: produced the Statement of the Arab NGOs outlining the achievements, constraints and challenges encountered in achieving Sustainable Development through the last decade (Annexed),

Realizing that: Factors affecting sustainable development in the Arab region include socio-economic policies, patterns of planning and development of resources, population policies, waste management schemes, and governance policies, and

Acknowledging that: Poverty has increased in several parts of the region with disproportionate distribution of income; the majority of people living in extreme poverty are in rural areas, slums and illegal settlements. Leading to further marginalization of disadvantage groups and resulting in severe pressure on natural resources and the environment.

Recognizing that: since the 1980s, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged as an important force in the Arab Region working to democratize decision-making processes, protect human rights and provide essential services to the most needy communities; and that the 1990s have marked significant set-up of environmental institutions in the region including NGOs and civil society contribution.

Realizing that: national strategies for the environment and sustainable development have been formulated in most countries of the Arab region; and that countries of the region have signed and/or ratified more than 75 international and regional conventions.

Considering that: the implementation of Agenda 21 has been hindered by the lack of adequate funding, well-trained personnel, failure to change unsustainable patterns of consumption, and insufficient response from international institutions.

Emphasizing that: the UN system has initiated consultations for capacity building and created dialogue with NGOs, in support of the principles of global governance.

The way forward for Arab NGOs Action for Sustainable Development through the next decade, as seen by the NGOs meeting in Manama in 8 September 2001, was outlined and endorsed. Based on all the above they

Declare

First: Arab NGOs support the concepts, policies, and strategies proposed in the Abu Dhabi Declaration. They strongly recommend the translation of the principles expressed in the declaration into action and pursue a “result-oriented” approach.

Second: There is an urgent need to work closely with local governments, regional and international organizations to develop an enabling environment and tools for NGOs and civil society to operate by providing legislative, and regulatory frameworks, incentive structures, mechanisms for the involvement in decision-making and implementation, and financial support from government and donors. Therefore,

A) Arab Governments are urged to:

1. Renew their commitment to Arab NGOs. Government support is required in the areas of information transfer, facilitation of procedures and support to NGOs.
2. Include NGO-selected representatives in all delegations of states to the Prepcoms, other regional forums and the Johannesburg Summit.
3. Bridge the gap between what citizens want and what governments can deliver. NGOs can effectively express the needs of the society and rally support for achieving sustainable development,
4. Empower NGOs through upgrading institutional laws that govern their work with a view of giving them greater flexibility to develop and implement their strategies and programs of action.
5. Build institutional and physical capacity to overcome the lack of technical know how. National environmental strategies should emphasize the importance of making use of local technologies and indigenous knowledge, assessment and feasibility studies, legislation, creation of national decentralized institutions to monitor and follow up environmental decisions.
6. Increase capacity for integrated economic and environmental decision making in the Arab region, with special emphasis on relationships between trade and environment, and international competitiveness.
7. Set regional and national strategies for management of natural resources, land, biodiversity and water resources. Such strategies should include sensitizing the Arab citizens on the diminishing supply of water in the region.
8. Improve information and telecommunication infrastructure capacity and further incorporate environmental information in the decision making process.

B) Encouraging the League of Arab States (LAS) and its agencies to consider the following course of action:

1. Provision of greater involvement of NGOs in the various mechanisms and agencies of the Arab Regional Cooperation.
2. Enhancement of the role of LAS, including the implementation of sustainable development indicators.
3. Establishment of an Arab Sustainable Development Committee.
4. Establishment of AEF (Arab Environment Facility).

C) Fostering cooperation with the UN and other international agencies working in the field of environment and development (UNEP, GEF, UNDP, etc.). The Role of UNEP,

UNDP and other UN Agencies needs to be strengthened and supported to give more assistance to the Arab Regions. These programs should help NGOs to have access to:

1. Information on the mechanisms of those programmes.
2. Opportunities for cooperation between Arab NGOs and these organizations.
3. More funds and support for NGO projects in the Arab region.
4. Greater transparency of UN institutions, giving NGOs better opportunities to participate in Sustainable development in the Arab Region. It is worth highlighting the importance of the institutions' specialization and segregation of responsibility to avoid monopoly, overlap and at many instances incompetence.
5. The expansion of West Asia Region to include the North African Arab countries, as the distribution is not based on political but on geographical ecological, cultural and social layout.

Third: Increase public environmental awareness is a requirement for environmentally sound and socially responsible sustainable development:

- Awareness programs must be directed towards decision makers, the business sector and national public figures.
- The notion of public awareness should be expanded to include creation of environmental pressure groups.
- Change of consumption patterns in the Arab region is an area that requires extensive work and specially tailored, well-targeted programmes.
- Developing programs for environmental citizenship at the community level is a major component of the awareness programs.

Fourth: It is important to work towards the construction of an effective system of global governance in response to the global, social, environmental, and security issues and as a political counterweight to the globalization of the world economic system. The partnership between NGOs, and the private sector is an effective alliance that should be encouraged.

Fifth: The international community is urgently requested to fulfill its political commitments and moral obligations in order to stop the severe discrimination practiced by the occupation forces against Palestinian citizens. It is well accepted that violation of human rights, injustice and poverty are major obstacles to achieve sustainable development in the region.

Sixth: Fresh water, marine environment, desertification, population, biodiversity, conservation, and Environmental management systems are top priorities to be considered at all levels of decision making in Arab States.

Seventh: Appropriate policies and measures need to be taken to solve the problem of poverty in the Arab Region. NGOs and civil society being closest to people's needs and priorities should have a major input to these policies.

Eighth: Arab NGOs must assist local communities in the implementation of local activities of Agenda 21, and overcome the limitations present, which include centralization of decision-making, lack of local funding mechanisms, and government bureaucracy, to give a chance for local NGOs and local communities to share in decision making, planning, implement and evaluation. Also, Women in the Arab region should be empowered and their role in sustainable development must be enhanced.

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Agenda

08:00 – 08:30	Registration
08:30 – 09:00	Opening Ceremony
09:30 – 09:30	Coffee Break
09:30 – 09:45	Adoption of the Agenda Personal Introduction
09:30 – 09:45	Overview of WSSD and the objectives of the NGOs Forum
09:45 – 11:00	Discussions of Achievements in the Implementation of Agenda 21 with Reference to the NGOs Role
11:00 – 12:30	Constraints, Challenges and Opportunities Toward Achieving Sustainable Development in the Region
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch Break
13:30 – 15:00	The Way Forward for Achieving Sustainable Development 1- Priorities for Action in the Next Decade 2- Plan of Action and means of implementation
15:00 – 15:15	Coffee Break
15:15 – 16:30	The Way Forward Continued.
16:30 – 16:45	Closing