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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report

Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Beirut, 24-25 January 2019

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, the Islamic Development Bank Group and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, organized the Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, held at the United Nations House in Beirut on 24 and 25 January 2019.

The primary objective of the Forum was to complement efforts to raise awareness among parliamentarians of their role in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and to follow-up and review it at the national and regional levels. The Forum comprised seven sessions, where participants were briefed on progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda globally since its launch in 2015, and on regional and global development paths that will focus on empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in 2019. The Forum provided participants with an opportunity to exchange knowledge and expertise on the experiences of Arab parliaments in advancing sustainable development issues. The Forum concluded with a set of key messages and practical steps to operationalize parliaments' role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region.

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Introduction

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ calls for an integrated approach to address development challenges, and to rely on the concerted efforts of various parties to achieve transformative change towards an inclusive and just world where no one is left behind. The 2030 Agenda also calls for enhancing the participation of a wide group of actors, including parliaments and their members, to advance sustainable development and monitor progress at the national level. Parliamentarians have participated to some extent in the global paths that paved the way for the post-2015 period, which led to the approval of the 2030 Agenda. The resolution entitled “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, especially paragraphs 45, 52 and 79, emphasizes the key role of parliaments in ensuring effective implementation of national sustainable development commitments, and the representation of peoples as actors in national development work. The 2030 Agenda includes a number of Goals and targets related to good governance and its importance in promoting sustainable development efforts, specifically Goal 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.²

2. In this context, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Islamic Development Bank Group and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, organized the Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, held at the United Nations House in Beirut on 24 and 25 January 2019. The Forum was organized in response to a proposed regional action plan emanating from the Regional Seminar for Parliamentarians on the 2030 Agenda, organized by ESCWA in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and the Islamic Development Bank Group, and held at the Nations House in Beirut on 8 and 9 November 2017. The action plan had called for an annual meeting of Arab parliamentarians on the 2030 Agenda.

3. The Forum aimed to empower parliamentarians by building their capacity to participate in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, in addition to enhancing the performance of Arab parliaments to increase their capacity to promote inclusiveness and support sustainable development. The sessions and discussions reviewed mechanisms for parliaments to join the path of sustainable development as partners, and learn about the experiences of parliamentarians from Arab and non-Arab countries in developing people-centred policies to ensure empowerment, inclusion and equality. The sessions provided an opportunity for parliamentarians to enhance their knowledge of the benefits of building good working relationships and fruitful partnerships with other actors in the field of development, and of institutional arrangements and good practices in the Arab region. The discussion also addressed the challenges faced by parliaments and the resources necessary to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of parliamentary work.

4. The present report includes a review of the topics discussed by participants in the seven sessions and of the Forum’s outcomes, namely the key messages, a list of practical steps to operationalize parliaments’ role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the post-Forum commitments of the organizers.

I. Outcomes of the Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

A. Key messages

5. Participants at the Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development agreed on the following key messages:

¹ [A/RES/70/1](#).

² Target 16.6 stipulates developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, and target 16.7 stipulates ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

(a) The need to increase the knowledge and awareness of parliaments, their members and secretariats of the SDG and their targets and indicators, as set out in the 2030 Agenda;

(b) The need to involve parliaments in the development and approval of sustainable development plans and strategies to enable them to link legislation with national development priorities, thus ensuring that no one is left behind;

(c) The necessity of operationalizing parliaments' role in setting and implementing budgets for sustainable development programmes;

(d) The need to stress parliaments' right to access knowledge and information and the need for a transparent, accurate and realistic statistical system for parliaments to assess the development process and thus enact legislation that addresses national development priorities and contributes to achieving sustainable development;

(e) The need to emphasize that achieving sustainable development starts at the local level, and that inclusive, equitable and sustainable development can be achieved by building confidence and forging partnership with civil society;

(f) The importance of civil society's role in enacting legislation and in monitoring the work and accountability of the executive, and of enhancing collaboration and coordination between the Government and civil society in raising public awareness of the SDGs;

(g) The importance of forging partnerships between parliaments and all actors in the field of sustainable development, including Government, statistical offices, regulatory institutions, civil society organizations and the media;

(h) The importance of investing in and managing parliamentary institution, and providing technical support to ensure the continuity of parliament's and the preservation of its institutional memory regardless of its sessions and ongoing changes in its membership;

(i) The need to involve parliament in the voluntary national review process, and to strengthen partnerships between it and all partners to ensure its oversight role over government action to ensure transparency and accountability;

(j) The importance of creating an effective coordination mechanism for regional parliamentary work that guarantees continuity of work, complements and interacts with efforts to implement sustainable development plans, and facilitates benefiting from the experiences of all development actors, including civil society organizations, financial monitoring institutions and houses of expertise.

B. Practical steps to operationalize parliaments' role in achieving the SDGs

1. Raising awareness

Objective	Proposed activities (implemented by parliamentarians upon their return from the Forum)
Increase parliament's awareness of the SDGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare and submit a report on the Forum to the parliamentary bureau;• Hold a parliamentary consultative meeting on the 2030 Agenda (with the chair, the committee, experts, the secretariat);• Propose organizing an annual national parliamentary conference on the 2030 Agenda;

Objective	Proposed activities (implemented by parliamentarians upon their return from the Forum)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review parliamentary efforts to follow up on parliament's work from the perspective of the SDGs; Host ministers to discuss the country's plan to implement the SDGs in 2030.
Raisin awareness of parliament members and parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold a consultative meeting on the 2030 Agenda with parliaments members and parties.
Raise awareness of parliamentary committees comprising members of parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold a consultative meeting with parliamentary committees on the 2030 Agenda, focusing on SDGs related to committee work and relevant indicators.
Identify actors concerned with the 2030 Agenda at the national level, and forge partnerships to increase awareness on national development trends from the perspective of the SDGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce the SDGs by holding a national workshop comprising all stakeholders, including Government and civil society representatives.
Raise awareness on related international agreements, including CEDAW, the Agreement, the Sendai Agreement for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Addis Ababa Action Plan for Financing for Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with parliamentarians, specialized agencies and experts.
Raise awareness of the various approaches to follow-up and review the 2030 Agenda at the national, regional and global levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with Government, coordination committees and civil society to strengthen parliament's role in these processes.
Develop mechanisms to evaluate legislation from the perspective of the 2030 Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with parliamentarians, specialized agencies and experts.
Ensure that legislation is consistent with the SDGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review national legislation in progress.

2. Building capacity

(a) *Parliamentarians*

- Organize training courses and panel discussions on:
 - Integrating the SDGs into legislation, oversight and budgeting;
 - Organizing sustainable development issues according to national priorities;
 - Formulating legislation for sustainable development;
 - Budgeting for sustainable development.
- Hold plenary sessions to discuss national voluntary reviews, and participate in setting national priorities and challenges;
- Publish public budgets fully and accurately.

(b) *Employees*

- Support parliamentary administration and build the capacity of researchers and staff members in the secretariat, committees and groups, among others, through training programmes on the following:
 - Integrating the SDGs in legislation, oversight and the budgeting;
 - Development issues, according to the terms of reference of the committee;
 - Report writing, especially from the perspective of the SDGs;
 - Policy analysis, especially from the perspective of the SDGs.

3. *Networking with stakeholders*

Objective	Proposed activities
Collaborate with representatives of stakeholders and civil society networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold periodic meetings and launch dialogues with such institutions, including youth and women's institutions.
Strengthen collaboration with the national statistical office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop mechanisms to periodically receive reports and data; Invite experts to attend hearings.
Strengthen collaboration with the monitoring bureau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop mechanisms to periodically receive reports and data.
Strengthen collaboration with local bodies and councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate development at the local level.

4. *Institutional steps*

Objective	Proposed activities
Form a parliamentary committee supported by a specialized research team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine the most appropriate type of committee (special/temporary/joint/permanent/committee of presidents) as permitted by the internal system; Develop a clear roadmap on parliamentary involvement in achieving the SDGs.
Establish a network within parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The network should include member of various committees and groups, and should work in coordinating with all committees. It should also include members of both houses of parliament.
Collaborate with the parliamentary media unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Press conference, media statement, or online campaign on social media about parliament's role in achieving the SDGs; A specialized space on the council's website/publications to track the SDGs.
Relationship with Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with the Government, ministries, and the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs to urge them to submit reports accompanied by law proposals, including for the budget, linking draft laws to achieving the SDGs.
Build institutional capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a specialized research office/unit on the SDGs; Provide the council library and committee offices with appropriate resources.
Operationalize the role of parliament in the development process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operationalize the role of parliament in formulating sustainable development plans. Operationalize the role of parliament in drafting voluntary national reviews

5. *Recommendations*

- Establish a regional network to exchange expertise and successful experiences between Arab parliaments;

- Ensure that Arab parliaments support the State of Palestine to achieve its independence and sovereignty.

C. Commitments of the organizers

1. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

- Provide an annual regional platform for dialogue, exchange of experiences and peer learning from the Arab region and beyond;
- Provide and enhance opportunities for parliamentarians to participate in the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development;
- Support efforts by other partners at the national level (awareness workshops, specialized workshops) by providing expertise and teaching materials that develop the concept of sustainable development and transformational change;
- Issue and provide studies and tools in the Arabic language on the situation of Arab countries, including those that contribute to enhancing the involvement of parliamentarians and all stakeholders in implementing, following up and reviewing the 2030 Agenda.

2. United Nations Development Programme

- The opening interventions indicated the importance that the Forum organizers attach to supporting the developmental role of parliaments;
- Consolidate partnerships with ESCWA, the Islamic Development Bank and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to organize the third session of the Forum;
- Institute the Forum and enhance its outputs through a commitment to partnerships with representative institutions through its regional center and offices in various countries, to ensure the effective implementation of the Forum's outcomes and recommendations;
- Continue the joint programme between UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank on supporting parliament in achieving the 2030 Agenda in Jordan, Somalia and Tunisia. The programme seeks to establish mechanisms and implement activities to strengthen the capacity of parliamentarians and their role in implementing the SDGs;
- Implement joint activities with the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the issues addressed by the Forum to enhance the commitment of parliaments to achieving the 2030 Agenda, and to develop long-term parliamentary strategies on the SDGs.

3. Islamic Development Bank

6. Through its technical cooperation programme, including the Reverse Linkage Mechanism, the Islamic Development Bank will continue to call for full participation of parliamentarians in implementing the SDGs at the following three levels:

- At the national level, the Islamic Development Bank will consider supporting the development of parliaments' institutional and human capacities, It is already implementing a pilot project in Somalia and Tunisia in partnership with UNDP;
- At the regional level, the Islamic Development Bank will contribute to supporting platforms that allow the exchange of experiences and knowledge between Arab countries, and raise awareness of the SDGs, discuss challenges, and identify opportunities and solutions;

- At the international level, the Islamic Development Bank will build ties between member States, and between them and countries of the South, to find solutions to challenges and capacity gaps in implementing the SDGs and monitoring their progress.

4. *Inter-Parliamentary Union*

- At the national/country level: the Union is ready to continue raising Arab parliaments' awareness of the SDGs through workshops and other channels, with a focus on supporting the institutionalization of parliamentary work towards achieving the 2030 Agenda using the self-assessment manual completed by the International Parliament and UNDP;
- At the regional level: discuss ways to enhance partnership with ESCWA, UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank, and to establish the Forum as an annual regional platform to advance the role of parliaments in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

II. Topics of discussion

7. The meeting comprised seven sessions, including presentations and discussion on the most pertinent issues raised.

A. SESSION I: Setting the scene: the 2030 Agenda, three years into implementation

8. The first session was moderated by Ms. Dima Al-Khatib, Policy and Programme Coordinator of the UNDP Regional Hub in Amman. The session focused on progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda since work began in early 2016, and on reviewing global and regional processes centred on empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in 2019.

9. Ms. Maisaa Youssef, Officer in the ESCWA 2030 Agenda Unit, gave an overview of the 2030 Agenda and its intellectual, philosophical and moral frameworks. She focused on the preamble of the 2030 Agenda, which calls for inclusiveness and highlights the right of everyone to sustainable development, while ensuring that no one is left behind in development, justice and equality. She introduced the 17 SDGs and their targets and indicators, and emphasized their interconnectedness and complementarity. She gave the example of Goal 10 on reducing inequality, and the links between it and the other sixteen Goals. She discussed the frameworks for following up and reviewing progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda at the following three levels: the national level through voluntary national reviews, the regional level within the framework of the annual Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, and the global level within the framework of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. She also provided an overview of the responses of Arab countries to the 2030 Agenda, identified similarities and variations in response levels, and indicated encouraging trends for most Arab countries by aligning the 2030 Agenda with their national sustainable development plans and preparing their voluntary national reviews. She highlighted the important role of parliaments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its follow-up and review, especially since the 2030 Agenda is rights-based and is underpinned by international laws. It calls for transformative development based on laws, policies and practices that promote justice, equality and participation for all. She also stressed the need for strong institutions, headed by parliament, as stipulated in SDG 16. She concluded with a review of the proposed work programme for the Forum.

10. The presentation was followed by a discussion on the role of parliaments in following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, especially since most parliaments were not involved in preparing voluntary national reviews. Participants proposed forming neutral specialized work teams to assist parliament in monitoring the Government's performance in terms of implementing sustainable development plans. They also stressed the importance of reviewing the Goals and their targets, and enacting legislation and laws that facilitate and accelerate their achievement by 2030.

B. SESSION II: Role and functions of parliament from a 2030 Agenda lens

11. The session was moderated by Mr. Rami Ahmad, Advisor to the President and Special Envoy on SDGs for the Islamic Development Bank Group. The session included presentations on the experiences and role of national parliaments in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and the tools and mechanisms available to activate the role of parliamentarians and parliamentary institutions in advancing development efforts.

12. Ms. Nourhayati Ali Assegaf, Chairperson of the Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation and member of the House of Representatives of Indonesia, presented the experience of the Indonesian parliament in implementing the 2030 Agenda by assessing, directing and approving state budget, and monitoring the Government's performance in disbursing funds. Collaboration between the Government and parliament on sustainable development issues is reflected in allocating 20 per cent of the budget to promoting and developing the education sector, and 5 per cent of the public health sector. She focused on key activities carried out by parliament in the field of sustainable development since 2015, when it approved the Village Law, which seeks to eradicate poverty in rural areas. She referred to the outcomes of the second World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development, held in September 2018 on the theme "Partnerships towards sustainable energies for all", and invited the meeting to participate in the third World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development to be held by the Indonesian parliament in September 2019.

13. Ms. Leila Ouled Ali, Member of the Assembly of People's Representatives of Tunisia, reviewed the Tunisian parliament's experience in drafting a new constitution that included sustainable development issues. She discussed the establishment of the Commission for Sustainable Development and the Rights of Future Generations, which is a constitutional body, and the involvement of Tunisia in global preparations for the 2030 Agenda. She mentioned the environmental degradation that afflicted many regions in Tunisia, which had led to economic decline and an increase in unemployment rates that contributed to igniting the revolution in 2008, which underscores the importance of promoting sustainable development in all its dimensions to ensure stability and prosperity. She noted the Parliamentary Network for Sustainable Development established by the People's Assembly to raise awareness among parliamentarians on development issues, guide the Government, and mobilize support and coordination among all actors. The Parliamentary Network has many tasks, including drafting laws to advance sustainable development, reviewing and checking reports issued by the Government, and cooperating with other parliamentary committees and reviewing their work from a development perspective, with civil society and other sustainable development actors.

14. Ms. Aleksandra Blagojevic, Programme Manager for International Development at the Inter-Parliamentary Union, presented the preliminary results and data resulting from the global SDG questionnaire conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in June 2018 on the activities of parliaments in relation to the SDGs and the mechanisms adopted to achieve them. A total of 89 parliamentarians from different countries worldwide participated, equivalent to 50 per cent of the members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The results showed that the participation of the group of Arab countries exceeded 42 per cent of the total parliaments participating in the questionnaire. As for the responses of this group to the questions posed, they were relatively parallel to the responses of other parliaments with regard to the submission of reports by Governments on sustainable development, and on training courses on the SDGs organized for parliamentarians and training sessions organized by parliaments. The rates of the Arab region were higher than international averages with regard to two issues: parliamentary committees specialized in sustainable development, and parliament taking measures to finance the SDGs in the budget. The rate of the Arab group was lower by around 50 per cent with regard to parliamentary committees preparing reports on the SDGs.

15. Mr. Ali Elsawi, parliamentary expert and professor of political science at Cairo University, made a presentation on what was required of parliaments to promote opportunities for sustainable development. The presentation came as an introduction to discussions in following sessions where Mr. Elsawi addressed what can be expected from Arab parliaments taking into consideration their existing tasks, mechanisms, resources and potentials. He reviewed discussions and dialogues with a large group of parliamentarians from the Arab region, highlighting varied views of sustainable development, with some considering it a continuity of growth

and prosperity and a guarantee for future generations, and others considering it a necessary issue at the core of the work of the executive and legislature. He concluded with four proposals on what parliaments can provide to implement the 2030 Agenda: translating the agenda into a legislative agenda, employing oversight tools to monitor the performance of Government and institutions (private sector, international community) with regard to development goals, employing parliamentary communication tools in the community to raise awareness, and using parliamentary diplomacy to support the State in achieving national sustainable development plans. He also set out challenges that parliaments could face in implementing those four proposals.

16. Participants discussed the presentations, especially the information provided by Mr. Elsayi. Some parliamentarians briefly reviewed the experiences of their parliaments in dealing with the 2030 Agenda. Several questions were raised, notably ensuring continued commitment to the 2030 Agenda in view of the periodic changes to parliaments because of electoral cycles, strengthening legislative mechanisms for sustainable development, coordinating with the Government and ensuring oversight through a system of specific indicators, and maintaining communication and interaction with the people.

C. SESSION III: Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality: what role for parliaments?

17. The session was moderated by Mr. Oussama Safa, Chief of the Participation and Social Justice Section of Social Development Division at ESCWA. He reviewed the concept of justice based on participation, equity, rights and equality, which are four pillars linked to the concepts of empowerment and inclusion. He emphasized that the development cycle that envisages inclusion in the development process is not complete without involving all social groups, including young people, women and marginalized groups, to achieve inclusion and leave no one behind. He recalled SDG 10 that stipulates the elimination of inequality in outcomes and opportunities, and target 10.2 on empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status, by 2030. He referred to the second ESCWA Social Development Report, which concluded that autonomy in decision-making raises an individual's ability to participate effectively and that this ability is necessary and must be made available to reduce inequality of opportunity and outcome. According to the report, the more individuals and societies have the ability to control their daily decisions and their lives, the higher the chances of social equality among them. The report indicated that inequality in access to education has reached alarming levels in the region, and that inequality in education affects future income inequality.

18. Mr. Christoph Hoffmann, parliamentarian and Member of the Parliamentary Committee for Economic Cooperation at the German Bundestag, made a presentation on the role, tools and mechanisms of parliament aimed at comprehensive sustainable development and the experience of the German parliament in this field. He focused on key mechanisms to assist in the implementation of the SDGs, including enacting appropriate laws as a framework for action and promoting decentralization, oversight and follow-up at all levels. Regarding the German experience, he explained that local elected councils and central Governments were responsible for aligning the 2030 Agenda with their sustainable development plans, and that sustainable development planning should stem from the local and central levels, with legislation and law-making carried out by elected local councils that submit their recommendations and outputs to the Federal Parliament, which promotes the participation of all sustainable development stakeholders.

19. Mr. Naief Al Taleb Alhareery, parliamentarian and Member of the Culture, Education, and Scientific Research Committee of the People's Assembly of the Syrian Arab Republic, presented the experience of the People's Assembly in issuing recommendations and passing laws on sustainable development, especially with regard to compulsory free education for children from the age of six to fifteen, and free health care, distributing land to farmers, meeting agricultural production needs, and delivering drinking water to every home through irrigation projects. He also mentioned the consequences of the Syrian crisis and its negative effects on all those services, especially health care.

20. With regard to the experience of parliament in Morocco, Ms. Amina Maelainine, Deputy Speaker and Member of the Committee on Justice, Legislation and Rights of Morocco, addressed the main issues that must be taken into consideration to activate the role of parliaments in implementing sustainable development plans. Despite the efforts made by the Moroccan parliament to assess the extent to which the Government fulfils its commitments to the SDGs, it has not been yet accurately identified indicators that enable parliament to evaluate government programmes and align them with the 17 SDGs. It also noted the right to access to knowledge and information that supports the oversight role of parliament. She suggested establishing regulatory laws and presenting them in the form of programmes, with their own evaluation indicators. She gave examples of some laws that would contribute to the implementation of certain SDGs. She also reviewed parliament's coordination relationship with civil society and constitutional institutions, especially the Supreme Council of Accounts.

D. SESSION IV: National budgets: parliament and achieving SDGs in Arab countries

21. The third session was moderated by Mr. Yassine Jaber, Chair of the Foreign Affairs and Immigrants Committee and Member of the Committee for Finance and Budget of the Lebanese Parliament. The presentation and interventions addressed ways to scrutinize the budget from the perspective of the SDGs during all stages of the budget cycle, and the resources and mechanisms available to parliamentarians to this end.

22. Ms. Mona Fattah, Sustainable Development Officer in the ESCWA 2030 Agenda Unit, made a presentation on the general framework and the principles used in the development of public budgets. The presentation included an overview of the main tasks of parliaments, and the importance of the State budget as a primary source of financing development. She gave a detailed explanation of the budget cycle and its four stages, starting with preparing the first draft until the end of the financial cycle and closing accounts. She gave examples from some countries worldwide and the experiences of their parliaments in directing the budget towards sustainable development, and examples from Arab countries and the budgetary approach of their parliaments.

23. Ms. Sara Salman, Population Affairs Officer in the ESCWA Social Development Division, reviewed the primary role of parliaments as partners in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and ways to activate parliamentary mechanisms and tools in that area, especially those related to directing the budget towards achieving the SDGs. She gave examples of some countries that have incorporated the SDGs into the budget process. She noted that these practices are still limited. Of the 56 countries that have so far submitted their voluntary national reviews, 23 stated that they were working to link the budget to the SDGs. She presented the conditions required for parliament to succeed in setting the public budget for sustainable development, and highlighted previous budget control mechanism, especially in the stage of developing and adopting the budget and the subsequent oversight reflected in implementation and audit, in addition to the challenges hindering parliaments' work in this area. In conclusion, she reviewed the tools and mechanisms available to parliaments that could be used to implement an SDG budget.

24. Mr. Mongi Rahoui, parliamentarian and Chairman of the Finance, Planning and Development Committee of the Assembly of People's Representatives of Tunisia, summarized the financial policy underpinning budgets, reviewed the financial cycle and its launch through plans and projects developed by local administrations and councils and raised in the form of proposed budgets to competent ministries, which compile and submit them to the Ministry of Finance, which refers the sum of these sub-budgets in the form of a State budget to the presidency of the government and then to parliament. The Finance, Planning and Development Committee then reviews and audits the proposed budget items and provides comments and recommendations to parliament for review with the Government and requests amendment (if needed). The Minister of Finance and senior officials in the ministry, and sometimes other competent ministers, participate in the audit meetings held by the Finance, Planning and Development Committee to discuss some of the items mentioned in the budget and respond to the inquiries of committee members. He reviewed the oversight role and the accountability and review mechanisms that the parliament has adopted to monitor the Government's

implementation of budget items. He also informed the participants that a draft law was being considered to review the financial constitution based on transparency and accountability.

25. Mr. Azmi Shuaibi, Board Member of Arab Parliamentarians Against Corruption and former member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, noted the social contract concluded between parliamentarians and the people by virtue of their election and their mandate to pursue the people's interests and hold the Government accountable. He stressed the importance of parliamentarians' knowledge of the 2030 Agenda and what is meant by localizing the SDGs within national development goals and plans. He highlighted important aspects, including the necessity of institutionalizing the work of parliament as an institution and not as individuals, because parliamentarians have a specific role that requires the existence of an institutional memory and institutional work that guarantees the continuity of projects and activities carried out by parliament. He noted the importance of technical committee heads participating in meetings of the Finance Committee, and the importance of work to ensure that election systems are transparent and inclusive, making parliamentary oversight of government periodical (every three months), and building the internal capacity of parliament. With regard to the budget weaknesses, he stressed the need to provide adequate resources for development projects, and to develop development plans to rationalize expenditures and not neglect marginalized groups, especially by reducing burdens on them, and to benefit from competencies in Arab societies, especially in civil society. He gave an example of the experience of civil society in the State of Palestine, whereby the State was obligated to establish a citizen budget, which enabled knowledge building towards sustainable development.

E. SESSION V: Strengthening Arab Parliaments for more effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda: engaging with stakeholders

26. The fifth session was on enhancing cooperation between parliaments and various governmental or non-governmental stakeholders, including national statistical agencies, supreme audit institutions, civil society organizations, academia and the media, to implement the 2030 Agenda. The session was moderated by Mr. Mustapha Barghouti, Member of Parliament and of the Palestinian Legislative Council and President of the Palestinian Medical Relief Society. The session aimed to enhance parliamentarians' knowledge of the benefits of building good working relationships and fruitful partnerships with other development actors and of institutional arrangements and good practices in the Arab region.

27. On the relationship between statistical offices and parliament, Mr. Qassem Al Zoubi, General Manager of the Department of Statistics of Jordan, made a presentation on cooperation between the Statistics Department and the National Assembly in implementing and following up sustainable development indicators. He introduced the Department, its tasks, its work mechanism for issuing data, and mechanisms for using data and statistics in national decision-making. He detailed how the process of institutionalizing the work of sustainable development indicators at the national level was achieved through the contribution of the Statistics Department to the process of preparing the 2017 voluntary national review. He referred to the National Statistics Strategy (2018-2022): through its implementation, the Department of Statistics seeks to develop a national statistical system, with the participation of various public and private institutions producing data, and by developing statistical devices that produce data according to international standards, building a unified national database, and providing sustainable development indicators periodically through all available means, and serving the Jordanian State by fulfilling the information needs of policymakers and decision makers, including members of Parliament. He also reviewed the means of communication between statistical agencies and parliament in the field of data, and considered SDG indicators and challenges facing their implementation in terms of statistics.

28. Then Ms. Asma Khader, President of the Sisterhood is Global Institute of Jordan, reviewed parliament's relationship with civil society organizations. She highlighted the ongoing dialogue, following initiatives by parliament, some parliamentary committees and some civil society organizations, on a draft reviewing the relationship between the House of Representatives and civil society organizations, which aims to develop a mechanism for engaging male and female citizens in legislation and oversight, and to develop a methodology for effective cooperation between the two sides that supports the sustainable development process and facilitates

plans to implement the SDGs. She said civil society was highly interested in a sustainable and institutionalized relationship with parliament. She added that there was a vast network of non-governmental organizations that devoted a large part of their activities to pursuing the SDGs. She gave examples of model laws being developed in cooperation between the two parties, such as the *Kafa* law, and about successes achieved between parliament and civil society to amend personal status laws and combat violence against women. She noted that civil society was not ideal in dealing with the issue of sustainable development, and that civil society institutions were not aligned, which required greater coordination and cooperation among them.

29. Ms. Wissal Hossein, Deputy Secretary-General for Technical Affairs of the National Population Council of the Sudan, summarized the relationship between the Council, as the national focal point for the 2030 National Development Plan, and parliament. She said that since the Sudan had adopted the 2030 Agenda, a presidential decree has been issued to form a national mechanism for sustainable development and to designate the National Council as a focal point. The relationship between the focal point and the House of Representatives had begun before the approval of the plan, in view of national consultations that took place in preparation for the plan. Parliament's role in approving plans and related budgets had also been defined. The voluntary national review presented by the Sudan in 2018 was not limited to the SDGs, but also considered the success factors leading to development and focused on three foundations: peace, agricultural transformation and social development (accelerators). A special parliamentary session was devoted to the report, at which parliamentarians reviewed and endorsed the report. Parliament also summoned the Government to hold it accountable, especially since parliament had formed a review committee.

30. Regarding the parliament's relationship with parliamentary observatories, Mr. Ismail IIsouk, Executive Director of SimSim-Participation Citoyenne in Morocco, presented Sim-Sim's experience as a national observatory of the Moroccan Parliament. He introduced Sim-Sim as an independent and non-profit national association that uses information and communication technology to strengthen the participation of citizens in managing public affairs and facilitate the tasks of public institutions in responding to the demands of the people through several programmes, including "Your Representatives", "We Participate" and "Innovation for Change". These programmes create platforms for direct interaction and communication between people and their deputies, and allow them to pose questions to deputies and receive direct responses.

31. Mr. Qasim Mutar, Board of Supreme Audit of Iraq, summarized the role of the Board in the financial oversight of all State agencies, in coordinating with the House of Representatives on everything related to the public budget from the start of its implementation until the conclusion of its session, and in auditing the accounts of the past fiscal year. He also stressed the independence of the Board and the challenges and risks it faced to maintain its independence and integrity, especially in a country like Iraq that suffered the consequences of wars and terrorism.

32. Mr. Ahmed Farouk Diken, Senior Technical Cooperation Coordinator at the Islamic Development Bank, made a presentation on the Bank's role in promoting South-South and triangular cooperation to achieve the SDGs. He reviewed the Bank's background, its development goals and its long experience in promoting South-South cooperation, and gave examples of the projects implemented by the Bank in this field. He also explained the concept of technical cooperation and its framework through the interdependence of three dimensions, namely human development, the creation of an enabling environment and organizational development, and the impact of each dimension on the other two dimensions. The concept, which is in line with SDG 17 on partnerships and international cooperation, depends on member States exchanging knowledge, experience and resources to develop their capacity and devise solutions for their independent development. He outlined the basic principles of technical cooperation, which are respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference in internal affairs, and mutual benefit. He discussed the stakeholders involved in the mutual technical cooperation framework, namely the recipient countries, the donor countries, the facilitator (which is the Bank itself) and development partners (bilateral technical cooperation agencies, multilateral development institutions, public and private institutions, non-governmental organizations, and private sector companies) that participate in development projects. He also

gave examples of technical cooperation projects facilitated by the Bank, and presented the Bank's vision of ways to benefit from this framework to build capacity to implement the SDGs.

F. SESSION VI: Voluntary National Reviews: towards a stronger role of parliaments

33. The session was moderated by Ms. Dima Jamali, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Sustainable Development Committee of the Lebanese Parliament. The session aimed to shed light on voluntary national reporting mechanisms in Arab countries, on whether parliaments were involved in the process, and to highlight the importance of the role that parliaments can play in this area.

34. Ms. Hania Sabbidin Dimassi, ESCWA 2030 Agenda Unit, made a presentation on the role of parliament in voluntary national reviews on the 2030 Agenda. She gave an overview of the global and regional follow-up and review process, including voluntary national reviews, and the basic principles of national reviews, as directed by the United Nations. She emphasized that the review was a process for countries, not just a follow-up report and a case presentation. She summarized Arab countries' participation in this process since 2016 (Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Lebanon, the State of Palestine and the United Arab Emirates). She said that an analytical reading of voluntary national reviews had found that less than half of the reports had clearly mentioned parliament's role as a contributor or participant in preparing the report, and that many of them recognized the importance of the parliament's role in implementing and following up on the 2030 Agenda, although parliament's role in preparing the report was not clear. The institutional arrangements adopted by some countries, such as the establishment of national committees or bodies for sustainable development, were mentioned in the reports, and a few included the representation of Parliament in them. They had also noted the mechanisms for joint work in the national review process, and the participatory role of parliament in the process.

35. Ms. Aleksandra Blagojevic, Programme Manager for International Development at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), made a presentation on parliaments' involvement in the voluntary national review process. She recalled that the 2030 Agenda emphasized the important oversight and legislative role of parliament, which was required to achieve the SDGs. She then highlighted what IPU was doing to support parliaments' participation in voluntary national reviews by raising awareness and knowledge of the SDGs, through seminars and conferences to introduce the mechanism for preparing voluntary national reviews. In December, IPU usually corresponds with parliaments of the countries that intend to submit their voluntary national review to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July of the following year to remind them of the role required of them in the national review process, and to request that they report on this and make sure that they are part of their country's official delegation to the Forum. IPU also organizes introductory sessions for parliaments on the affairs of the United Nations in general, and the High-level Political Forum in particular, especially since IPU usually organizes a side event for parliamentarians at the Forum. She presented the results of an IPU survey showing that parliaments' participation in the voluntary national review process was increasing significantly every year, although overall participation remained low, and a few parliaments have had the opportunity to review the national review before submission. However, the proportion of voluntary national reviews in which parliament had contributed did not to exceed a third of the reports submitted to date. Less than half of the number of official delegations that participated in the High-level Political Forum included parliamentarians, thus complicating parliamentary efforts to follow up on voluntary national reviews. Therefore, countries should involve parliament in preparing voluntary national reviews and request its contribution, and give parliament an opportunity to review it before submitting it to the Forum. Parliament must be represented with a deputy at the Forum, and the results of the Forum must be discussed at the parliament level. Countries should also organize national follow-up processes after the voluntary national review in which parliament takes part.

36. Mr. Abdalbasit Saeed, Member of the National Assembly of the Sudan, considered his country's experience in the voluntary national review process. He said that the SDGs complemented the Millennium Development Goals, and that the priorities of Sudan were to eradicate poverty and hunger, provide safe

drinking water and achieve the environment-related SDGs and Goals 16 and 17, as emphasized in the voluntary national review. He noted that the national review had touched on the challenges and difficulties facing development in the Sudan. External challenges included the blockade, economic boycott, restrictions on international trade for over 20 years, and internal challenges included the absence of security and stability for decades, which led to the deterioration of the State's financial capacity. The review also examined the procedures and institutional arrangements taken by the National Council to establish parliamentary departments in four areas of development: the Sustainable Development Goals Issues Division, the Immigration and Displacement Issues Division, the Parliamentary Women's Issues Department, and the Young Parliamentarians Department.

37. Mr. Ahmad Mesleh, Director-General of Committees at the Palestinian Legislative Council, gave an overview of the role of parliament as an essential part of the review and follow-up process. He highlighted the importance of shadow reports, as they are based on information and sources such as official reports. One of their advantages is that they reflect the national ownership of the 2030 Agenda, and that they are voluntary and impartial reports that contain data from various sources prepared by diverse teams of experts. He stressed the need to provide data and information to parliament to carry out its duties as a watchdog of government work. He also noted the importance of coordination between parliament and all development partners, especially civil society organizations.

G. SESSION VII: Roundtable discussion of practical steps to enhance parliament's engagement with the 2030 Agenda and follow-up and review

38. The session was moderated by Mr. Ali ElSawi. There was an open and interactive discussion on mechanisms to strengthen parliament's role in implementing, following up and reviewing the 2030 Agenda, and on the key outcomes of the Forum's sessions with a focus on the challenges facing parliaments in Arab countries and ways to activate parliamentary action to achieve sustainable development and advance national priorities. Participants recalled the action plan on strengthening the role of parliaments and parliamentarians in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region, which was adopted by the Forum at its first session.

39. Mr. ElSawi made a presentation in which he raised three main issues about what the 2030 Agenda means for parliamentarians, the challenges facing parliament, and how Parliament can use its tools to contribute to achieve the 2030 Agenda. He focused on the importance of legislating the SDGs through a comprehensive and detailed review of the national legal system to verify the consistency of existing legislation and its relevance to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. He reviewed mechanisms for enhancing parliamentary performance, including relying on the Government; establishing a technical unit in the parliament's secretariat, especially if parliament has two chambers; forming a special parliamentary committee, expanding parliament's work horizons; and developing new parliamentary tools for oversight and tracking. The presentation concluded with proposals on the next steps, the most important of which was holding a parliamentary consultative meeting on the 2030 Agenda, issuing a media statement on the role of parliament in achieving the SDGs, devoting a special space for the plan on the parliament's website and for launching publications on the SDGs, strengthening partnership with civil society, holding periodic conferences and seminars with ministers and government officials to discuss the State's plans to achieve sustainable development, organizing training programmes for the secretariat cadres on sustainable development research, providing data, participating in the voluntary national review process, discussing the review with the Government, and coordinating with all parties involved in sustainable development.

H. Closing remarks

40. At the end of the Forum, Mr. Mustapha Barghouti presented a summary of the discussions and proposals that were shared by participants during the two days of the Forum. He reviewed the key messages of the Forum, the main practical steps agreed by participating parliamentarians to activate the work of parliaments in the field of development, and the commitments of the Forum organizers.

III. Organization of work

A. Venue and date

41. The ESCWA 2030 Agenda Unit, in partnership with UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank Group, and in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, held the Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations House in Beirut on 25 and 25 January 2019.

B. Opening

42. Mr. Mounir Tabet, Acting Executive Secretary of ESCWA, opened the Forum with a statement in which he stressed that the Forum aimed to emphasize the key role of parliaments in development, and to deepen the debate on the close relationship between the work of parliaments and the 2030 Agenda, in order to contribute to the development of the discourse on the principle of partnership to activate partnerships at various levels, given that parliament is an institution that contributes to achieving the SDGs. He added that the Forum fed directly into the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, where participation, equality and inclusion underpinned discussions and which provided access to the experiences and initiatives of parliaments from the Arab region and other countries in enacting human rights-based legislation aimed at achieving decent living standards for all. He also stressed that the 2030 Agenda was not a new burden on countries, but rather an innovative approach to the concept of development based on human rights. Its objective and one of the conditions for its success is teamwork and partnerships. This ambitious global framework to achieve the SDGs was adopted by all countries worldwide.

43. Mr. Khaled Abdel Shafi, Director of the UNDP Regional Hub in Amman, made a statement in which he called on parliaments to be effective and open and fully perform their legislative, oversight and representative functions to achieve the 2030 Agenda. He also stressed the importance attached by UNDP to the role of representative institutions in advancing the 2030 Agenda and to partnerships launched to support parliaments in this area. He noted that the Forum was part of a wider initiative launched by the UNDP entitled “Parliaments for the 2030 Agenda: Supporting parliamentarians in achieving the SDGs”, in partnership with ESCWA and the Islamic Development Bank. Moreover, UNDO and the Islamic Development Bank had launched an initiative for cooperation programmes with a number of parliaments in the region.

44. Mr. Rami Ahmad, Special Envoy on the Sustainable Development Goals and Advisor to the President of the Islamic Development Bank Group, made a statement in which he mentioned the role of parliaments contributing to the 2030 Agenda through their contribution to the extensive consultations that led to the finalization of its preamble and Goals for approval by world leaders in September 2015. He also indicated the importance of the participation of all parties involved in sustainable development in implementing this the 2030 Agenda, including parliaments. Arab parliaments, based on their constitutional and representative functions, should be effective and reflect the hopes and pains of Arab citizens regarding development issues, and urge them to think strategically and work to monitor achievement and monitor implementation. He highlighted the need to build and strengthen the capacity of parliamentarians and assist them to fully understand the SDGs. He said that the Islamic Development Bank, and its Forum partners (UNDP and ESCWA) would continue to support the capacities of Arab parliaments. He gave an example of the technical assistance provided by the Bank, in cooperation with UNDP, to support parliaments in Tunisia, Jordan and Somalia. He posed several questions for discussion during the Forum’s sessions, most of which revolved around the capabilities of Arab parliaments in the field of strategic planning and scientific oversight of the work of the executive to ensure transparency and accountability.

C. Participants

45. The Forum was attended by 41 participants from 13 Arab countries, namely Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco. The Forum was also attended by participants from the German parliament and the Indonesian parliament, and representatives of Governments, civil society organizations, academia and Forum organizers, namely ESCWA, UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank Group. The female participation rate was 29 per cent.

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