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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report

First special meeting of the Executive Committee Online, 4 April 2024

Summary

The Executive Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its first special meeting online on 4 April 2024. On its agenda was a single item related to the follow-up to ESCWA resolution [347 \(XXXI\)](#) of 18 December 2023 on the Arab Vision 2045, which stipulated taking into account the comments received from member States on the Vision within three months from the date of the resolution and updating the Vision accordingly with a view to adopting it.

The present report summarizes the discussions and sets out the conclusions reached by the Committee at the end of the meeting.

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Introduction

1. At its twenty-eighth session, held in Tunis from 15 to 18 September 2014, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted resolution [320 \(XXVIII\)](#) on redesignating the Technical Committee as the “Executive Committee” and amending its terms of reference to empower it to facilitate direct communication between the ESCWA secretariat and member States on regional development and economic and social issues, and to submit resolutions directly to the Economic and Social Council, if necessary.
2. The ESCWA Executive Committee held its first special meeting online on 4 April 2024, with one item on its agenda related to the follow-up to ESCWA resolution [347 \(XXXI\)](#) of 18 December 2023 on the Arab Vision 2045, which stipulated taking note of the observations received from member States on the Vision within three months from the date of the resolution and updating the Vision accordingly with a view to adopting it.
3. The present report summarizes the discussions and sets out the conclusions reached by the Committee at the end of the meeting.

I. Agreed conclusions of the Executive Committee at its first special meeting

4. At the end of its first special meeting, the Executive Committee adopted¹ the Arab Vision 2045, which was amended according to the observations sent by member States to the ESCWA secretariat, in implementation of resolution [347 \(XXXI\)](#), provided that the new observations received from States on the amended version within ten days from the meeting would be taken into account. The Committee recommended that the amended Vision be submitted to the Arab Summit through the relevant mechanisms of the League of Arab States.

II. Topics of discussion: adoption of the Arab Vision 2045

5. The Executive Secretary of ESCWA, Ms. Rola Dashti, presented the activities implemented by the secretariat pursuant to resolution [347 \(XXXI\)](#) on the Arab Vision 2045, noting that ESCWA received more than 400 observations on the text of the Vision, which reflected the keenness of member States to participate and enrich the Vision with valuable comments. She mentioned that some observations praised and welcomed the Vision, while others suggested valuable amendments, of which over 90 per cent were accommodated by the team. The rest were not taken into account because they related to practical procedures and operational mechanisms, which would be handled at a later period, following the adoption of the Vision. Ms. Dashti stated that the Vision was also presented to the regular session of the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States, held in Cairo in February 2024. The Council welcomed the Vision and recommended presenting it to the upcoming Arab Summit after enriching the text with member States’ observations and adopting it by the ESCWA Executive Committee.
6. In the course of the discussion, the representative of the United Arab Emirates thanked ESCWA and the League of Arab States for their tireless efforts to develop the Vision then amend it based on the observations. He stressed the importance of having a vision for the Arab region, noting that his country welcomed this valuable effort made by the two organizations. However, he considered that the time allocated for the review of the amended text was insufficient and requested extending it. He noted that the methodology used to develop indicators was still slightly ambiguous, adding that it was important to agree on the general context of the Vision along with the goals, indicators and methodology first, and then address and agree on operational initiatives at a later stage.

¹ Egypt and Saudi Arabia have made reservations to the adoption of the Arab Vision 2045.

7. The representative of Kuwait thanked ESCWA and the League of Arab States for developing the Arab Vision 2045 and agreed with the representative of the United Arab Emirates that more time was needed to review it and, in particular, to study the suggested initiatives. She noted that the initiatives included the establishment of entities, some of which were already in place under the umbrella of the League of Arab States. She concluded by stating that the Vision could be presented to a subsequent Arab Summit. The representative of Oman recalled the recommendation of the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States to submit the Vision to the upcoming Arab Summit in May 2024. He asked whether the quantitative targets and indicators presented in the Vision were binding and inquired about the implementation mechanisms. He also called for more time to review the Vision and develop a matrix that would incorporate the observations received from States with their sources.

8. As for the delegation of Iraq, it hoped that the Vision would give more weight to key issues such as water security, cybersecurity and the joint Arab management of social networks, and that member States would be given more time for review. It also stressed the importance of aligning the Vision with national visions and the reality of Arab States, noting that it should focus on keeping pace with the Fifth Industrial Revolution, bridging the digital divide between countries, and preparing Arab civil servants that were capable of implementing the Vision. The delegation also asked about the base year of data, and about the possibility of raising the targets of the investment environment indicators.

9. The representative of Egypt mentioned that national dialogues on the Vision had been organized in her country with the participation of all relevant ministries, government bodies and representatives of civil society, and that participants agreed on several observations that were sent to ESCWA. She requested more time for the review of the updated version and asked to postpone its adoption, given that it overlooked important issues, including linking climate change adaptation and mitigation issues to environmental security, giving more importance to water security, agreeing on key performance indicators to monitor progress in implementing the Vision, and exploring accompanying implementation plans. She suggested that dialogue sessions be organized between countries to discuss amendments and develop the final text of the Vision.

10. The representative of Saudi Arabia stressed the importance of having an Arab vision that seriously reflected the joint Arab action. He thanked its authors for their efforts, noting that a long list of observations was developed in coordination with all concerned national authorities in Saudi Arabia and sent to the ESCWA secretariat. He then asked for more time to review the updated version so that the Vision would have actionable outputs, and asked to defer its adoption so that everyone could reconsider the new initiatives, taking into account national specificities in sensitive topics such as nuclear energy.

11. The representative of the State of Palestine said that it was difficult to adopt 400 observations in a manner suitable for all, and that the aim was to reach a minimum agreement to produce the Vision document. He expressed his country's satisfaction with the way ESCWA handled all their observations except for one, namely the absence of a political framework for the development Vision. He added that such a framework was necessary to place the Vision in a context aligned with the difficult period faced by the region and the shifting global order. He wondered how the Vision could avoid the recurrence of the famine witnessed by Gaza and ensure food and water security for all, without having first clear policy orientations and answers to difficult questions. At the technical level, he suggested that a note should be added to the document about implementation mechanisms that would be developed for the suggested initiatives at a later stage. He noted that there was some redundancy in the document at times, for example in mechanisms 3 and 14 under water security, and that a further revision might help to address that issue.

12. The representative of Jordan agreed with the representative of the State of Palestine on the need to develop a political framework for the Vision, adding that implementation mechanisms were highly important because all Arab integration programmes that were developed decades ago remained unachieved, such as the Arab Customs Union and others. He requested that an implementation plan be formulated for the Vision with key performance indicators to track progress, while prioritizing regional integration programmes in the plan. He also noted that the Vision could be clearly linked to the Sustainable Development Goals.

13. The representative of the United Arab Emirates said that, on the contrary, it would be preferable for the Vision to be limited to general directions, strategic goals and targets, and quantitative indicators. He added that initiatives along with the mechanisms and means of implementation should be addressed at a later stage, and that all initiatives in the Vision should be new. The representative of Saudi Arabia agreed with him, especially since the financial aspects of the initiatives were unclear, and reiterated the request to postpone the adoption of the Vision because he believed that it was not ready to be presented to the Arab Summit, that it required further joint work, review and discussions, and that there was no urgency to adopt it.

14. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic suggested to place the proposed initiatives, projects and implementation mechanisms in a separate annex to the “Strategic Vision”, which could make the wording satisfactory to all and remove obstacles to adoption. He also suggested to provide additional time for member States to review the updated text and make additional observations, and to adopt the Vision at the end of the meeting while noting that additional observations received within ten days from the meeting would be taken into account. The representative of Oman recalled that preparatory meetings of senior officials would be held prior to the Arab Summit, which might provide an additional opportunity for States to make further observations.

15. The representative of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States thanked the participants for their presence and the keenness of their countries to enrich the Vision. She recalled the strategic partnership with ESCWA in all regional development programmes, particularly in the preparation of the Vision, which received support from the highest levels, namely from the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and the Executive Secretary of ESCWA. She stressed that the bodies, initiatives and programmes presented in the Vision did not duplicate the work of the League of Arab States. Some were put forward to strengthen existing mechanisms, while others were entirely new. She considered that this was the best time to present the Vision to the Arab Summit as the region was facing serious turmoil and the world was waiting for a unified regional position in this regard. Therefore, postponing the adoption of the Vision would squander the historic opportunity that emerged after the Vision was welcomed by the ministerial session of ESCWA and by the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States. The Council also called for submitting the Vision to this year’s Arab Summit prior to the Summit of the Future scheduled in September 2024, which marked a crucial global event where the Vision would be the voice of the region. If the Vision’s adoption was postponed, new fluctuations and changes could occur in the region that might require changing the Vision and falling into an endless cycle of amendments.

16. The representative of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States emphasized that an implementation plan would be developed after adopting the Vision to address the remaining questions. The plan would then be submitted to all the competent ministerial councils in the League of Arab States to take the necessary actions. In order for the Vision to be submitted to the Arab Summit in May 2024, it should be shared with member States 40 days prior to the Summit, hence the need to expedite the process. She noted the possibility of an exceptional delay, i.e. extending the deadline by an additional ten days, until 14 April 2024, to allow representatives of member States to review the updated version with their incorporated observations and make further comments, if needed. However, she recalled that the Vision must be adopted by the ESCWA Executive Committee before it could be presented to the Summit.

17. In response, on the subject of methodology, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat noted that the indicators had been chosen to suit the region as a whole, rather than national specificities, and to reflect collective aspirations for the region in 2045. Some targets seemed too ambitious for some countries, and attainable or already achieved for others, which could not be avoided when developing a vision for a region with so many cross-country disparities. Concerning the method used to develop a baseline for indicators to measure progress, the team developed indicators that were automatically self-updating from the source, drawing on reliable regional and international sources. However, those indicators did not follow the same baseline, and a single methodology could not be adopted to develop it because of the varying nature of indicators. Some of them were hierarchical, such as those related to the Arabic language, which ranked fifth in the world in terms of strength. According to the Vision, however, it would be important for the Arabic

language indicators to rise to the third rank by 2045, and change would be tracked every five years. Some other indicators were numerical and would update themselves at a faster pace, for example macroeconomic indicators such as the gross product and inflation, social indicators such as unemployment and others, and security and safety indicators. All indicators would be placed on a smart and interactive digital dashboard.

18. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat stressed the complementarity of the proposed projects in the fields of water, food, environmental and cyber security and others with the projects implemented under the umbrella of the League of Arab States, and highlighted the absence of duplication in all cases. He noted that it was up to member States to choose to establish new projects or bodies or to strengthen existing ones and launch new initiatives within them, and to agree on funding at a later stage. However, he stressed the importance of putting forward initiatives within the framework of the Vision because they were an integral part of it. At the political level, the issue of Gaza and the State of Palestine were covered in the revised version because the first version had been prepared before 7 October 2024. The revised version emphasized the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and their right of return, and the centrality of the issue of Jerusalem. The issue of the Gaza war and the war in Ukraine and their repercussions on the region were included in a special text box, not in the body of the text, to facilitate consensus. Finally, on the subject of the Vision's incompatibility with the reality of countries in keeping pace with the Fourth and Fifth Industrial Revolutions, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat pointed out that the "variable architecture" approach was adopted as in other regional blocs to address disparities in progress between countries. Each country was moving at its own pace, and the result was the progress of the region as a whole, while respecting disparities.

19. The Executive Secretary of ESCWA echoed the statement of the representative of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States regarding the need to adopt the Vision on that day so as not to miss the opportunity to present it to this year's Arab Summit, while giving participants an additional period of ten days to read the revised text. She called on the participants to read the text as Arab citizens, not as representatives of their countries. ESCWA received the official positions of member States, which sent their valuable observations through official channels. Almost all observations were incorporated in the revised version, which was sent back to everyone earlier that week. All that remained now was to make sure that no significant observation was overlooked, but more importantly to read the text from the perspective of Arab citizens and ask whether it really expressed their hopes and aspirations.

20. With regard to quantitative indicators and targets, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA stressed that they were not binding but were rather targets to be pursued. She noted that the Vision was a dream and no one was bound by a dream. As for the implementation mechanisms, funding and necessary procedures, she pointed out that they would be elaborated and agreed upon following the adoption of the Vision, which was simply a vision for a bright future for all, embodying the regional, not just national, responsibility shouldered by all Arab officials. All the countries of the region had their visions, and all Governments were making strenuous efforts to implement them, and that was commendable. However, the Arab region lacked an inclusive regional vision and a text that would unite all its countries in the current time of challenge and fragmentation. She stressed that the efforts of the two regional organizations and the efforts of Arab Governments should converge on such a vision to instil hope among Arab people and provide the necessary impetus to work optimistically to achieve it. She affirmed that ESCWA would support the implementation of the projects decided by member States, and would leverage the Vision to adapt its programme plans until 2045 so as to support the League of Arab States and member States in achieving progress, aspirations and hopes.

III. Organization of the meeting

A. Date and venue

21. The Executive Committee held its first special meeting online, on 4 April 2024. Pursuant to its terms of reference, which stipulate that the Chair of the ESCWA session shall be designated to chair the Executive Committee, the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, in his capacity as Chair of the thirty-first session of ESCWA, was appointed Chair of the Executive Committee.

B. Opening

22. The Executive Committee opened its first special meeting online at 11 a.m. on Thursday, 4 April 2024 (Beirut time). The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, Refaat Hejazi, Deputy Head of the Planning and International Cooperation Commission, welcomed the participants and reminded them that the meeting agenda had a single item related to the Arab Vision 2045 and the implementation of resolution [347 \(XXXI\)](#), which stipulated taking into account the comments received from member States and amending the text of the Vision accordingly. He also reminded them that the ESCWA secretariat had corresponded with member States in that regard, received observations from most of them and took those observations into consideration in revising the text. He concluded by hoping that the discussions would lead to the adoption of the revised text of the Vision.

23. Ms. Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, delivered a speech in which she thanked the participants for attending the meeting, and welcomed the participation of the representative of the League of Arab States, who was a partner in the preparation of the Vision. She also thanked the representatives of member States for their valuable observations that reflected the aspirations of Arab Governments and people, so that the Arab Vision 2045 would be the first vision for the Arab region, similar to other regional visions in the world. She recalled that the year 2045 was chosen because it marked the 100th anniversary of the League of Arab States, and that the remaining years of the century must be dedicated for hard work to achieve the ambitious Vision and realize every Arab citizen's dream of a bright future. She stressed that the present moment marked a historic milestone as the upcoming Arab Summit would be held in May 2024 in Bahrain, thus offering an exceptional opportunity to present the Vision to the Heads of State for their approval. She concluded by noting that ESCWA had issued the report on "[Arab Integration: A 21st Century Development Imperative](#)", which was also presented to, welcomed and praised by the Arab Summit a decade ago. Building on that effort, ESCWA proposed an integrated vision for the Arab region today.

C. Participants

24. The first special meeting of the Executive Committee was attended by representatives of ESCWA member States. The list of participants is set out in the annex to the present report.

Annex

List of participants

A. Member States of ESCWA

Algeria

Ms. Manel El-Ayoubi
Director of Environment and Sustainable
Development
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Bahrain

H.E. Mr. Hamad Waheed Sayyar
Acting Chief of the Organizations Sector
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Egypt

Ms. Mona Essam
Assistant Minister of Planning and
Economic Development for Sustainable
Development Affairs

Ms. Rasha El-Diasty
Supervisor of the Sustainable Development Unit
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Iraq

Ms. Maha Al-Rawi
General Director
Department of Human Development
Ministry of Planning

Mr. Muhammed Al-Sayed
Director General of the Department of Regional
and Local Development
Ministry of Planning

Jordan

Mr. Malek Al-Breazat
Head of Department of Cooperation with Arab
and OIC Institutions
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Kuwait

Ms. Khayria Hilal Al-Duwaikhi
Head of the Department of Organizations
and Ministerial Councils
Ministry of Finance

Libya

Mr. Mahmoud Ahmed Milad Ramadan
Director of the International Organisations Section
Department of Foreign Trade and International
Cooperation
Ministry of Economy and Trade

Mauritania

Mr. Mohammed Abdulrahman Al-Dedi
Assistant Director-General for Development
Strategies and Policies
Ministry of Economy and Sustainable
Development

Mr. Al-Mustafa Sayed Muhammad
Economic Advisor to the Minister of Economy
and Sustainable Development

Morocco

H.E. Mr. Mohamed Karin
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco
to the Lebanese Republic

Oman

Mr. Ali bin Saeed Al Jabri
Director of the International Institutions
Directorate
Ministry of Economy

State of Palestine

Mr. Mahmoud Ataya
Director General of Planning
Office of the Prime Minister

Qatar

H.E. Mr. Shaheen Ali Al-Kaabi
Director of the Department of International
Cooperation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Khalid Yousuf Al-Khulaifi
Third Researcher in International Affairs
Department of Arab Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Wassaya bint Abdullah Al Dhaidah
Second Secretary
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Hattan Bin Samman
Senior Advisor and General Supervisor
for International Organizations and
Foreign Relations
Ministry of Economy and Planning

Ms. Reham Al-Rassi
Ministry of Economy and Planning

Ms. Monia Zaqzouq
Advisor
International Organizations Unit
Ministry of Economy and Planning

Sudan

Mr. Omer Mustafa Hassan
Director of International Organizations Department
Ministry of Trade and Supply

Syrian Arab Republic

Mr. Refaat Hejazi
Deputy Head of the Planning and International
Cooperation Commission
Planning and International Cooperation
Commission

United Arab Emirates

Mr. Ahmed Al-Astad Al-Hammadi
Director of the Information and Economic
Studies Department
Ministry of Economy

Ms. Sumaya Mohammed Ahmed Yousef Janahi
Lead Economic Researcher
Director of the Information and Economic
Studies Department
Ministry of Economy

B. Regional organizations

League of Arab States

Ms. Nada El Agizy
Director of Sustainable Development and International Cooperation