



**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

## **Report**

### **Second Consultation in the Arab Region to Prepare for the 2023 Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade Beirut, 14 April 2021**

#### **Summary**

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the Second Consultation in the Arab Region to prepare for the 2023 Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade virtually on 14 April 2021. The meeting discussed a collaborative workplan for Arab regional preparations leading to the United Nations Conference for the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade in March 2023.

Discussions identified upcoming events to showcase and gather inputs in support of the Water Action Decade in the region and build momentum. Participants were invited to share their views on a preliminary list of main themes to convey on behalf of the Arab region to the global level. All participant institutions reiterated their commitment to the regional Water Action Decade preparatory process.

It was agreed to continue engaging in landmark global and regional events and consider existing regional instruments and mechanisms to identify and showcase progress made on water-related actions in the region and raise awareness for the Water Action Decade. The next consultation would aim to discuss more specifically the scope of the regional contribution to the midterm comprehensive review report as well as the size and scale of the regional preparatory meeting in early 2022.

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## Introduction

1. The “Second Consultation in the Arab Region to prepare for the 2023 Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade” was organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The meeting was convened virtually on 14 April 2021 from 10:00 am to 11:00 am Beirut time (GMT+2) using the Microsoft Teams platform.
2. This meeting followed up on the initial consultation convened on 24 February 2021, with the purpose of these consultations to coordinate on regional preparations leading to the United Nations Conference for the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade in March 2023 by discussing a collaborative roadmap for the Arab Region.
3. The meeting consisted of three sessions: Session I was the opening and update, Session II tackled formulating a roadmap for Arab regional preparations, and Session III highlighted next steps. Section I of this meeting report highlights the main topics of discussion, while section II reviews the organization of work. The meeting documentation and background information is available at the following website: <https://www.unescwa.org/water-action-decade>.

## I. TOPICS OF DISCUSSIONS

### A. OVERVIEW AND UPDATE

4. ESCWA opened the session with an overview and update presentation on the Water Action Decade (WAD) preparatory process. A background on the various global and regional mandates underlying the Water Action Decade was highlighted, as well as a summary of outcomes from the first consultation<sup>1</sup>. The Arab Regional roadmap to the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade was also presented. It is based on the global roadmap prepared by UN-Water that compiles global water-related events with relevance to the WAD up until March 2023, complemented by a regional set of activities and events stemming from collective inputs during Arab consultations. The Arab roadmap will be regularly updated to reflect regional engagements throughout this process.
5. An update was then provided on various water-related meetings of significance for the WAD held since the last consultation. The first event mentioned was the 34th UN-Water meeting held on 15-17 March 2021, which tackled the launch of the 2021 Summary Report Update on SDG 6 as well as advancing the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework in support of the WAD, and included discussions on other meetings leading to 2023 Midterm Review Conference. Highlights from the PGA High-level meeting on the Implementation of the Water-related Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda (18 March 2021) were then provided, including main messages from the proceedings for the lead-up to the Midterm Review Conference. Special focus was put on Arab States engagement during that meeting which comprised live statements or recorded interventions from 12 different Arab States<sup>2</sup>, who collectively indicated that the Midterm Review Conference should be more than just “a show”; with a need to strive to operationalize a comprehensive approach to water resources management that includes all related aspects. Another initiative highlighted by ESCWA was the 2021 international water dialogue series initiated by the German government, a process which will culminate on 1 July 2021 in a high-level conference in Bonn, that will also serve as a preparatory conference for the midterm review conference in 2023.
6. ESCWA subsequently described two upcoming regional events, namely the 5th Arab Water Forum (Abu Dhabi, 21-23 September 2021) and the Cairo Water Week 2021 (Cairo, 24-28 October), during which sessions related to the WAD regional process will take place. A session on “Accelerating Action on IWRM for

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<sup>1</sup> Details and conclusions from the First Consultation can be found in the dedicated [meeting report](#).

<sup>2</sup> More information on Arab States individual interventions can be accessed from [this document](#).

Sustainable Development through the Water Action Decade” is planned for the Arab Water Forum, and one on shared water resources during Cairo Water Week. Key findings and messages on each of the sessions’ themes will be solicited through stakeholder consultation in the form of summary briefs that will be used to inform regional contributions to the Midterm review conference.

7. Lastly, ESCWA expressed a call for collaborations for a set of initiatives and priority actions that would represent the Arab voice leading up to the global review in March 2023. ESCWA invited participants to particularly collectively focus on three key regional messages to convey in order to move the WAD agenda forward beyond solely convening meetings. Participants were strongly encouraged to share their suggestions during the discussions.

## B. ROADMAP FOR ARAB REGIONAL PREPARATIONS

8. This session consisted of a tour de table during which each participating institution provided updates on recent and planned water-related activities that could contribute to the Water Action Decade pipeline of regional events and inputs. Participants also shared their views on the three key messages to convey in this context on behalf of the Arab region, and provided general suggestions in planning forward for the regional preparatory meeting and Midterm comprehensive review report.

9. The Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE) gave updates on the planned 5<sup>th</sup> Arab Water Forum organized by the Arab Water Council that will be held in Abu Dhabi on 21-23 September 2021 under the theme Arab Water Security for Peace and Sustainable Development. The first day will focus on Arab water security, while the theme of the second day will be shared water resources, and the third day will tackle water for sustainable development. A 1.5-hour session organized by ESCWA is planned on the third day and will include aspects related to the Arab engagement for the Water Action Decade. The forum will comprise plenary sessions, scientific sessions as well as cross-cutting sessions, with an ongoing “Arab Water Expo” where different institutions and organizations can showcase specific initiatives, publications and others. Trainings are also planned, including one on hydrodiplomacy organized by the Palestinian Water Authority in coordination with the Arab Water Council.

10. International Water Resources Association (IWRA) highlighted two global events of interest that it is organizing and that could be of potential interest to showcase the Arab region engagement in the WAD. The first is IWRA’s XVII World Water Congress to be held in from 29 November to 3 December 2021 under the theme “Foundations for Global Water Security and Resilience: Knowledge, Technology and Policy”, with a recent renewed call for abstracts and special sessions (deadline is on April 30, 2021).<sup>3</sup> Another IWRA conference will be held online on 7-9 June 2021 on “One Water, One Health, Food & Public Health in a Changing World” with a call for abstracts also available.<sup>4</sup> As the themes fit well in the Arab region’s concerns and preparatory process for the WAD, these events were underlined as valuable opportunities for interventions and special sessions from the region in this regard.

11. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) mentioned its participation at the Arab Water Forum to showcase the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme Snapshot on Water and Sanitation in the Arab Region (SDG 6.1 and SDG 6.2). Another planned activity will potentially take place during the Cairo Water Week in the form of a session on water scarcity jointly with FAO, ESCWA and other partners. UNICEF are also working on a to link Arab youth to a global initiative with Generation Unlimited (GenU), planned for the fourth quarter of this year pending confirmation.

12. The Arab Water Council (AWC) highlighted the upcoming 5<sup>th</sup> Arab Water Forum as an important platform for contribution to the WAD Arab preparatory process, namely given the high-level considerable

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<sup>3</sup> More information on IWRA’s upcoming World Water Congress can be found on this link: <https://www.worldwatercongress.com/>

<sup>4</sup> For more information on this meeting, kindly check the following link: [https://www.iwra.org/2021onlineconference\\_callforabstracts/](https://www.iwra.org/2021onlineconference_callforabstracts/)

stakeholder representation including the League of Arab States Secretary General, Arab ministers, decision makers, scientific community, private sector and the youth. Moreover, the meeting report stemming from the Forum and that is usually conveyed to the World Water Forum will emphasize key messages resulting from the various discussions and can be used as an input to the WAD Arab preparatory process.

13. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) described its role as a humanitarian organisation that does not directly aim to achieve the SDGS, but indirectly contribute to it by preventing de-development, with a work focus on conflict-affected countries in situation of fragility. In the context of water and climate change, their efforts concern addressing the double vulnerability of conflict-affected communities due to climate change, and particularly the water scarcity angle in fragile countries. ICRC highlighted two recent publications of interest: a recent policy paper to advocate for a better adaptation to climate change in conflict areas<sup>5</sup>; and a report co-signed with UNICEF and the World Bank on the humanitarian development nexus in the Middle East and the means to prevent the decline of water and sanitation supply services<sup>6</sup>. Discussions are underway with the Arab Water Council on the possibility to showcase the latter publication at the upcoming Arab Water Forum.

14. International Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH) provided updates about upcoming meetings, namely a regional meeting in May during which mention of the WAD could be made and a session on the Arab region could be proposed if time allows. Another event is the 48th IAH Congress on 6-10 September 2021 in Belgium under the theme “Inspiring Groundwater”. IAH also indicated its participation in the 5<sup>th</sup> Arab Water Forum and reiterated its commitment to contribute to advancing the WAD agenda for the Arab region as academics or water practitioners, emphasizing the crucial importance of groundwater for the region.

15. International Water Management Institute (IWMI) pointed out at the upcoming United Nations Food System Summit (UNFSS) Independent Dialogue on The Role of Water Security for Food Systems Transformations in Egypt event to be held online on 19 April 2021.<sup>7</sup> This dialogue will discuss the importance of water security for all aspects of Egypt’s food systems, with a focus on equity, inclusion, capacity, innovation, and sustainability, including insights on how food systems need to change to improve water security (SDG 6), help eliminate hunger (SGD2), support energy security (SDG 7) and improve climate adaptation and mitigation action (SDG 13). Insights emerging from this multi-stakeholder dialogue will be summarized in a report and presented at the UNFSS in September 2021.

16. ESCWA then invited participants to share their views on three key messages or themes reflective of Arab interests that could be conveyed to the global level within the context of the WAD. The key themes identified included the following:

- Transboundary water resources and water cooperation at all levels
- Water and sanitation
- Climate change and migration
- Water-energy-food nexus
- Valuing water, including the economic, social, environmental, and health value of water
- Groundwater, especially non-renewable groundwater given its importance in the Arab region compared to other regions
- Water under crisis
- Water scarcity

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<sup>5</sup> The report can be accessed on this link :

[https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/topic/file\\_plus\\_list/rain\\_turns\\_to\\_dust\\_climate\\_change\\_conflict.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/topic/file_plus_list/rain_turns_to_dust_climate_change_conflict.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The report is available on this link: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/joining-forces-secure-water-and-sanitation-protracted-crises>

<sup>7</sup> More information on the event can be found on this link: <https://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/events/unfss-independent-dialogue-in-egypt/>

- Water under conflict, including the protection of water installations and the weaponization of water during conflicts, despite a body of law that protects water installations during war.

### C. NEXT STEPS

17. All participant institutions expressed their commitment to the WAD preparatory process. In summary, the following was agreed, namely to:

- Continue engaging in regional landmark events and organizing sessions to raise awareness or present progress made on water during the WAD in the Arab region, which would lead and contribute to the regional preparatory meeting.
- Update regularly the Arab Roadmap to the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade based on inputs from partners and encourage its use as a resource to inform on the Arab WAD preparatory process.
- Exchange suggestions about other themes, milestones, stakeholders to engage, events, regional instruments and mechanisms that can showcase progress made on water-related actions in the region and raise awareness for the Water Action Decade, which would in turn inform the preparation of the regional report.
- Schedule the next consultation meeting tentatively at the end of May 2021 (after the Ramadan period). The meeting will discuss more specifically the scope of the regional report as well as the size and scale of the planned preparatory meeting.

## II. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

### A. DATE AND VENUE

18. The meeting was held virtually on 14 April 2021 from 10:00 am to 11:00 am Beirut time (GMT+2).

### B. DOCUMENTATION

19. The meeting documentation is available at: <https://www.unescwa.org/water-action-decade>.

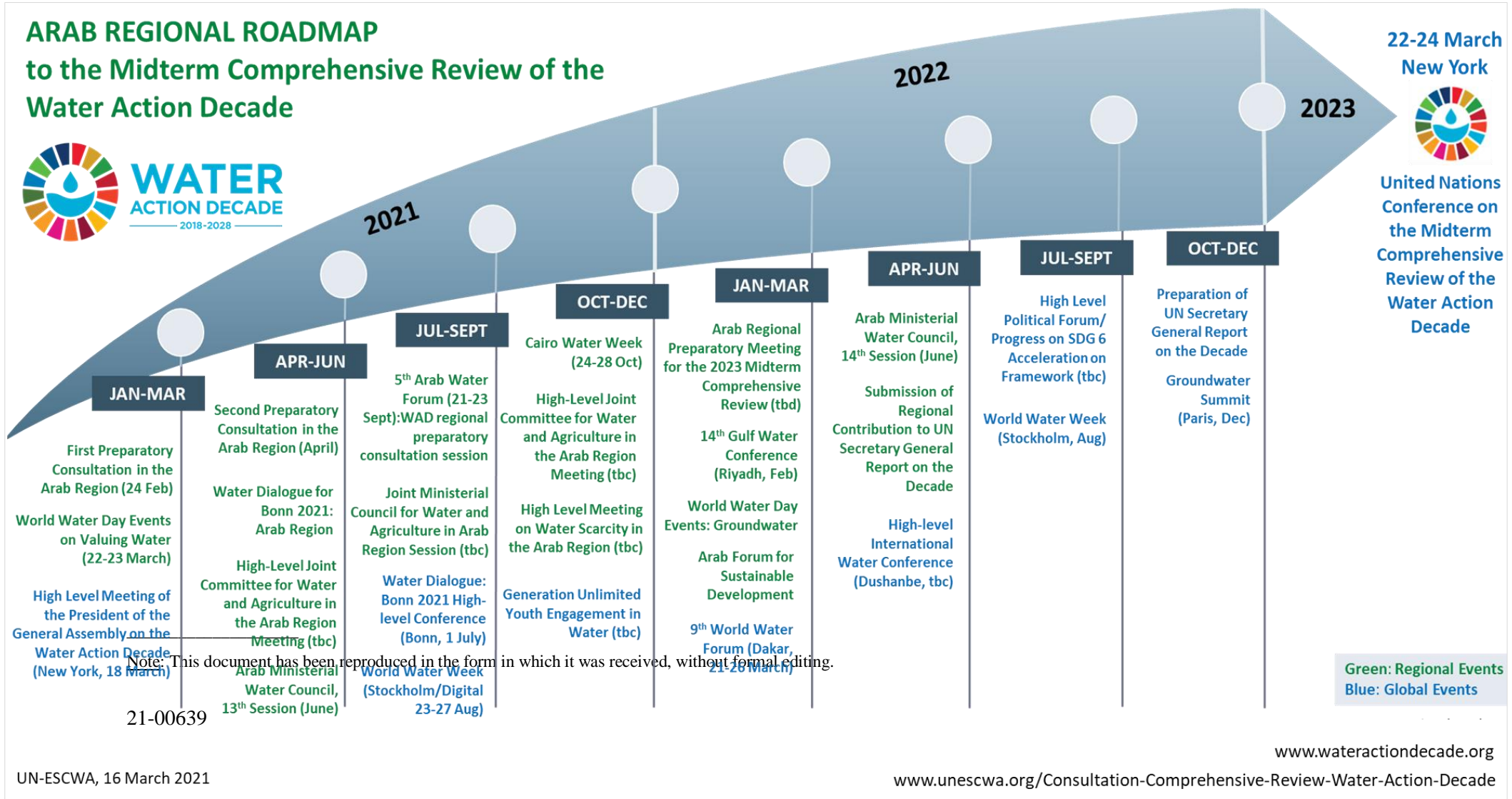
### C. PARTICIPANTS

20. This second consultative meeting gathered 10 participants and comprised the designated representatives of regional and international organizations, and United Nations organizations that serve in the Technical Scientific and Advisory Committee of the Arab Ministerial Water Council, the Regional Collaborative Platform/Issues-based Coalition (RCP-IBC) work pillar on Water, Food Security and Nutrition, and/or the UN-Water Regional Discussion Group for Arab States. The list of participants is provided in Annex II.



ANNEX I

Arab regional Roadmap to the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade (16 March 2021)



## ANNEX II

### List of Participants

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