



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

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Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda

**Report of the Executive Secretary  
on the activities of the Commission**

**Implementation of the Tunis Declaration and  
other resolutions adopted by the Commission  
at its twenty-eighth session**

**Summary**

This report presents the actions taken by the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to implement the Tunis Declaration on Social Justice in the Arab Region and other resolutions adopted by ESCWA at its twenty-eighth session (Tunis, 15-18 September 2014).

## ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE SECRETARIAT

### Tunis Declaration on Social Justice in the Arab Region

#### A. SUMMARY OF THE TUNIS DECLARATION

1. In the Tunis Declaration on Social Justice in the Arab Region, member States requested the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to undertake the following:

(a) To incorporate the elements of social justice in its work on the preparation, monitoring and implementation of a post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals, and establish clear implementation and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the achievement of national, regional and global development goals, in accordance with country capabilities;

(b) To strengthen the policy capacity of member States in all relevant fields through training, research and normative work, including through the production of reports on justice, poverty, inequality, social protection, social inclusion, women's empowerment, natural resource management, renewable energy subsidies, access to technology and good governance, as well as trade policies and their role in achieving development;

(c) To provide advisory services and technical support to member States to improve national policy responses so as to enhance social cohesion, tackle youth and women's development challenges, and promote youth and women's participation and empowerment in decision-making processes;

(d) To monitor the effects of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, its implications in the light of regional and international developments and its detrimental impact on the attainment of the multiple dimensions of justice in Palestine and the region as a whole, so as to uphold the human rights-based and legal efforts to condemn the Israeli occupation and support the Palestinians in demanding their rights;

(e) To create a measurement tool to monitor progress in the area of social justice in the Arab region and strengthen the capacity of member States and statistical agencies to collect, build, analyse and disseminate harmonized related indicators.

#### B. IMPLEMENTATION

2. The ESCWA secretariat undertook the following activities pursuant to the Tunis Declaration:

(a) *Normative work*

(i) The secretariat initiated a series of working papers addressing different aspects of the declaration, including: gender equality; the link between economic growth, employment, poverty and inequality; early childhood development; inequality of opportunities in education; perceptions of inequality and social justice; policymaking in support of social justice; and the impact of refugees on economic growth in host countries in the Arab region. The papers are as follows:

a. Inequality decomposition in the Arab region - application to Jordan, Egypt, Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia: this paper evaluates differences in household expenditure between rural and urban areas, female and male-headed households, households headed by non-educated and educated persons, and households headed by non-employed and employed persons, in eleven household income and expenditure surveys from those countries;

- b. Perceptions of inequality and social justice in the Arab region: this paper analyses the socioeconomic characteristics of population subgroups to identify perceptions of inequality and social justice and their determinants;
  - c. Development policy change models - the practitioners' view: this paper looks at the role of external development agencies in creating national consensus for needed policy change;
  - d. Economic growth, employment and poverty in Arab countries: this paper examines the link between economic growth, employment, poverty and inequality in Arab countries and developing economies in other regions during the Millennium Development Goals period and how economic growth and inequality affected the extreme poor and the poor;
  - e. Opportunities for early childhood development in Arab countries - profile and evolution of inequality and its sources: this paper evaluates opportunities for early childhood development in 13 Arab countries using indicators for maternal care during pregnancy and child delivery, children's access to minimum nutrition, health services, parental care and cognitive developmental activities;
  - f. Inequality of opportunities in education in the Arab world: using the latest student test scores in mathematics and science reported by the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and in reading reported by the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA), this paper examines inequality of opportunities for achievement in those areas in 11 Arab countries;
  - g. Refugees and economic growth - challenges and opportunities for the Arab region: this paper studies the impact on economic growth of refugee flows in host countries in the Arab region, with a focus on the displaced populations of Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic;
  - h. Forging new strategies in protracted crises - Syrian refugees and the host State economy: this paper presents an overview of the Jordanian economy and an analysis of the impact of Syrian refugee flows on Jordan, and offers proposals for conceptualizing new ways of approaching protracted refugee crises;
  - i. Does gender justice matter?: this paper discusses the contested relationship between Islam and gender justice, emphasizing the role of *ijtihad* (independent interpretation) in achieving gender justice in a manner that allows the region to maintain its cultural identity and religious values; it also examines the existing accountability mechanisms and the overall status of gender equality in the Arab region.
- (ii) The secretariat finalized three studies on issues related to women. "Access to justice for women" and "Child marriage in humanitarian settings" address inequality and injustice and provide key policy recommendations for improving social justice at the country and regional levels. "The impact of women NGOs on women's livelihoods" examines socioeconomic and demographic factors. The findings of the first two studies were presented in two policy briefs aimed at strengthening commitment and targeted action on gender equality in member States;
  - (iii) It also prepared the *Arab Governance Report II: Governance and Institutional Transformations in Conflict-affected Arab Countries*, which identifies priority issues for a conflict-sensitive approach to governance in conflict-stricken countries, where injustice is prevalent. The report discerns conflict triggers and peace enablers that could assist the transition out of conflict. It identifies four groups of priority institutions for reform, namely security, administrative, judicial and political institutions, and the characteristics that would turn them into peacebuilding mechanisms.

(b) *Social policies*

- (i) The secretariat prepared the Social Development Bulletin, vol. 5, No. 2: “Social protection as a tool for justice”, which examines the mutually reinforcing relationship between social protection and social justice. It promotes social protection as a transformative tool that can empower people, especially the poor, and enable them to become development actors rather than only service beneficiaries. It concludes with a set of recommendations on developing just and coherent social protection policies;
- (ii) It developed a toolkit for enhancing capacity in designing participatory social protection policies, designed to reinforce the Commission’s efforts to promote a broad regional rights-based approach to social protection policies and the participatory mechanisms needed to guarantee their success. In nine modules, the toolkit explains what is needed to formulate, implement, finance, monitor and assess such policies, and how to reach consensus on effective and sustainable social protection choices;
- (iii) It organized a regional workshop on the social protection toolkit (Beirut, 27-30 July 2015) which was attended by officials from Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Morocco and Tunisia, and a social policy expert from Yemen. Participants provided valuable feedback on the toolkit and its relevance to their needs. The workshop enabled participants to become better acquainted with social protection concepts and approaches, and exchange national experiences and lessons learned in the design and implementation of social protection programmes;
- (iv) It also organized a round table to discuss the link between participation and social justice as part of the activities of the tenth session of the Committee on Social Development (Rabat, September 2015). The round table brought together representatives of member States, high-level speakers and experts, and allowed government representatives to share information on national initiatives to promote social justice;
- (v) The secretariat is currently preparing a toolkit/guide on mainstreaming social justice in development plans, policies and programmes in member States. It is expected to be completed by the end of 2016.

(c) *Palestine*

- (i) ESCWA partnered with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics to carry out a household survey on living conditions in Gaza and the impact of the Israeli offensive launched against it in July-August 2014;
- (ii) It also partnered with Birzeit University and prepared a study on the effects of the 2014 Israeli offensive on the health and well-being of adults, titled *A People in Danger: Effects on Health of the 2014 Israeli Offensive on the Gaza Strip*.
- (iii) The secretariat prepared the following outputs:
  - a. The report on *Measuring the Costs of Israeli Restrictions on the Palestinian Economy: A Computable General Equilibrium Approach*;
  - b. The background paper titled “The multilayered, cumulative and comprehensive cost of the Israeli occupation: beyond economic calculations” which outlines the scope, benefits and usages of measuring, analysing and calculating the cumulative multilayered and comprehensive cost of the Israeli occupation and practices on the Palestinian people;
  - c. A strategy to better use the normative work of ESCWA to communicate on the plight of the Palestinian people and support efforts towards the attainment of their rights and the achievement of justice;

- d. The biennial report on “The social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls: July 2012 - June 2014”, which is prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2003/42. It outlines improvements in gender equality and highlights significant challenges that still prevent Palestinian women and girls from realizing their rights.
- (d) *Statistics*

ESCWA is working on different methodologies for collecting data on social justice in the Arab region, including:

- (i) Developing composite indices;
- (ii) Measuring different development outcomes in early stages of life to measure inequality of opportunities;
- (iii) Creating a measurement tool, using international standardized tests, to measure the quality of education.

### **314 (XXVIII) The Arab Forum on Sustainable Development**

#### A. SUMMARY OF THE RESOLUTION

3. In this resolution, the Commission requested the ESCWA secretariat to hold sessions of the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development periodically, in partnership with the League of Arab States and other organizations concerned with sustainable development, in order to prepare for the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, review the progress made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and contribute to launching regional partnerships to advance sustainable development in the Arab region. It also requested the secretariat to monitor progress in achieving sustainable development in the Arab region and to prepare reports on the topic on the basis of official data, for presentation at the sessions of the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development.

#### B. IMPLEMENTATION

4. The secretariat held the second session of the Arab High-level Forum on Sustainable Development in Manama, from 5 to 7 May 2015, in partnership with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), to discuss priority areas for the Arab region with respect to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

5. ESCWA and members of the Regional Coordination Mechanism cooperated to prepare the *Arab Sustainable Development Report: First Edition, 2015*. This report, launched in 2016, includes information on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with emphasis on issues of highest importance for the Arab region. It presents an overview of the status and progress in sustainable development across priority thematic issues; useful information for policymakers to establish targets, design policies and monitor/report progress; and recommendations for preparing the region for the implementation of SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. For the purpose of the report, sustainable development assessments were conducted in some countries to analyse their readiness to implement the SDGs; they highlighted existing data gaps and capacity development needs to enhance national reporting systems on sustainable development.

6. The secretariat also held a preparatory meeting for the Third Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and the Second United Nations Environment Assembly, on 14 April 2016 at the United Nations House in Beirut. Participants from the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR) attended the meeting, along with civil society representatives. They agreed on key

messages for the Forum and the Environment Assembly, which were included in an outcome document and presented during the Forum in 2016.

**315 (XXVIII) Establishing an intergovernmental committee on technology for development**

A. SUMMARY OF THE RESOLUTION

7. In this resolution, the Commission endorsed changing the name of subprogramme 4 from “Information and communications technology for regional integration” to “Technology for development and regional integration” and decided to establish an intergovernmental committee to be named the Committee on Technology for Development, comprising representatives from ESCWA member States with experience in the field, to replace the Consultative Committee on Scientific and Technological Development and Technological Innovation. The Commission also decided that the Committee shall hold its sessions once every two years, with effect from 2016.

B. IMPLEMENTATION

8. The secretariat changed the name of subprogramme 4 from “Information and communications technology for regional integration” to “Technology for development and regional integration”. It also started preparing for the first session of the Committee on Technology for Development, which will be held in December 2016.

**316 (XXVIII) Support for the Palestinian people**

A. SUMMARY OF THE RESOLUTION

9. In this resolution, the Commission requested the ESCWA secretariat to raise the level of its support for the Palestinian people and their institutions at all levels, including the enhancement of human resources for subprogramme 7 to support the implementation of the following:

(a) Providing normative and technical assistance to Palestinian institutions according to Palestinian needs;

(b) Developing more activities on Palestine and organizing special events in observance of the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, with the aim of raising awareness and mobilizing support for the Palestinian people in Palestine and abroad, and securing the widest media coverage for those events;

(c) Submitting periodic reports to the ministerial sessions of the Commission on Israeli violations of the economic and social rights of the Palestinian people and other rights guaranteed under international laws, charters and conventions;

(d) Monitoring the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation, mobilizing regional partners to support the Palestinian people and their institutions in Palestine and abroad, assisting them in achieving development, and exerting pressure and conducting advocacy to help them to obtain their full rights as guaranteed by United Nations resolutions and international conventions and charters.

B. IMPLEMENTATION

10. ESCWA prepared the 2015 and 2016 notes of the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied

Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan, and presented them at the 2015 and 2016 sessions of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

11. It observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 27 November 2015 and organized a series of activities aimed at raising awareness and mobilizing support.

12. It cooperated with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics to carry out a household survey on the living conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory and the impact of the Israeli offensive on Gaza in July-August 2014. It also cooperated with the Birzeit University to analyse the results of the survey.

13. In cooperation with the Palestine Water Authority, and within the framework of the MDG+ Initiative coordinated by ESCWA, a survey on access to water and sanitation was conducted involving 81 service providers and 794 households in 12 villages. The findings were presented in the 2015 MDG+ Initiative Report that was approved by the Arab Ministerial Water Council in May 2015.

14. ESCWA is preparing a report on the impact of Israeli practices on the Palestinian economy using a computable general equilibrium model.

15. It organized a workshop entitled "Palestine and the Occupation: Towards a Better Understanding and a Targeted Research Agenda", which was held on 24 and 25 November 2015 at the United Nations House in Beirut.

16. ESCWA is preparing a study aimed at examining whether Israeli policies and practices with regard to the Palestinians amount to apartheid as defined in international law.

17. In 2015, ESCWA issued a report on the cost assessment of water resources degradation in Palestine. The report was discussed during the workshop held in November 2015 in Beirut.

### **317 (XXVIII) Adoption of the draft strategic framework for the biennium 2016-2017**

#### **A. SUMMARY OF THE RESOLUTION**

18. In this resolution, the Commission adopted the draft strategic framework for the biennium 2016-2017. It also requested the secretariat to distribute the strategic framework in the form adopted by member States.

#### **B. IMPLEMENTATION**

19. The strategic framework for the biennium 2016-2017 was distributed as adopted by member States at the twenty-eighth session of the Commission.

### **318 (XXVIII) Adoption of session reports of the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**

#### **A. SUMMARY OF THE RESOLUTION**

20. In this resolution, the Commission requested the secretariat to prepare a paper on the reasons and justifications of the requests concerning annual meetings of the sessions of the Statistical Committee, the Committee on Water Resources and the Committee on Energy.

#### **B. IMPLEMENTATION**

21. The secretariat is currently reassessing the proposal concerning annual meetings of the Statistical Committee, the Committee on Water Resources and the Committee on Energy.

**319 (XXVIII) Adoption of the proposed amendments to the programme of work for the biennium 2014-2015**

A. SUMMARY OF THE RESOLUTION

22. In this resolution, the Commission requested the secretariat to follow up on the implementation of the programme of work for the biennium 2014-2015 and, if necessary, include activities to address any challenge that may emerge in the Arab region.

B. IMPLEMENTATION

23. ESCWA achieved an implementation rate of 99 per cent of the programme of work for the biennium 2014-2015. The secretariat followed up on the programme implementation through monthly meetings on deliverables with concerned divisions, and through periodic programme performance reporting.

**320 (XXVIII) Redesignating the Technical Committee as the “Executive Committee” and amending its terms of reference**

A. SUMMARY OF THE RESOLUTION

24. In this resolution, the Commission decided to redesignate the Technical Committee as the “Executive Committee”. It also decided to revise the role of the Committee and its terms of reference, with immediate effect, as set out in the annex to the resolution.

B. IMPLEMENTATION

25. The secretariat submitted resolution 320 (XXVIII) to the Economic and Social Council, which approved the redesignation of the Technical Committee as the “Executive Committee” and the revision of its role and terms of reference. The Executive Committee held its first and second meetings in Amman on 8 and 9 June 2015, and from 14 to 16 December 2015, respectively.

**321 (XXVIII) Redesignating the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia as the “Economic and Social Commission for Arab States”**

A. SUMMARY OF THE RESOLUTION

26. In this resolution, the Commission recommended that the Economic and Social Council redesignate the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia as the “Economic and Social Commission for Arab States” and amend the terms of reference of the Commission as set forth in its resolution 1985/69, of 26 July 1985, in line with the new designation. It also requested the Executive Secretary to follow up on the implementation of this resolution and submit a report on the progress achieved in that regard at the twenty-ninth session of the Commission.

B. IMPLEMENTATION

27. The secretariat will submit, in due course, resolution 321 (XXVIII) to the Economic and Social Council, containing a recommendation to redesignate the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia as the “Economic and Social Commission for Arab States” and to amend the terms of reference of the Commission as set forth in its resolution 1985/69, in line with the new designation.

28. The Executive Secretary is following up regularly on this recommendation with the member States of the Economic and Social Council to ensure its successful endorsement.

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