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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

First Consultation in the Arab Region to prepare for the 2023 Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade
Beirut, 24 February 2021

INFORMATION NOTE

I. BACKGROUND

Global mandates

In December 2016, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution [A/RES/71/222](#) proclaiming the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028, commonly referred to as the Water Action Decade. The Decade aims to advance sustainable development and integrated water resources management to achieve internationally agreed water-related goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The resolution decides that this should be pursued through cooperation and partnerships at all levels with focus on the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives.

In December 2018, the UNGA adopted Resolution [A/RES/73/226](#) deciding that the midterm comprehensive review of the Water Action Decade will be convened as the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018-2028 from 22 to 24 March 2023, coinciding with World Water Day. The resolution also:

- *Invites* the organization of activities in support of the Decade at the global, regional and country levels;
- *Requests* the Secretary-General, with the support of UN-Water, the specialized agencies, the regional commissions and other entities of the United Nations system, to prepare a report to assess progress in the implementation of the first half of the Decade;
- *Decides* that the conference will be preceded by regional and global preparatory meetings and informed by existing water-related meetings at the regional and global levels; and
- *Encourages* Member States, relevant United Nations bodies, the specialized agencies, the regional commissions and other organizations of the United Nations system, as well as other relevant partners, including the private sector, to continue to contribute to the review and implementation of the Decade.

The resolution also requests the United Nations President of the General Assembly (PGA) to convene a high-level meeting in 2021 to promote the implementation of the water-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda to support the Decade and inform the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on the outcomes. The meeting will be held on 18 March 2021 in New York.

Most recently, in December 2020, the UNGA adopted Resolution [A/RES/75/212](#) which details the modalities of the midterm comprehensive review conference. It decides that the conference should report on progress made in implementing the Decade's objectives, identify possible obstacles in achieving them and pinpoint

innovative ways to support their implementation and accelerate progress. It also reaffirms that the conference will be preceded by regional and global meetings and that preparations should include a review process.

Regional mandates

The Water Action Decade has been well-received by Arab States given the centrality that freshwater scarcity and water security play in advancing sustainable development in the region. This is demonstrated by resolutions and recommendations adopted by Arab States in intergovernmental and regional forums, including by the Arab Ministerial Water Council, the ESCWA Committee on Water Resources and regional consultations on water.

Specifically, the Arab Ministerial Water Council at its 10th Session (Kuwait, May 2018) adopted a [resolution](#) that “Encourages Arab States and stakeholders to share their best practices and efforts to advance the water-related dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by drawing upon resources related to the International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development (2018-2028), and disseminating their activities on the Water Action Decade knowledge platform.” Another resolution adopted at its 12th session in November 2020 “Invites Arab States and the Technical Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council to engage with ESCWA for the preparatory regional consultations for the 2021 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and follow up on the midterm review of the Water Action Decade (2018-2028)”.

In parallel, the ESCWA Committee on Water Resources at its 12th session (Amman, March 2017) adopted a recommendation asking ESCWA to support the Water Action Decade. The 13th Session of the ESCWA Committee on Water Resources (Beirut, 27-28 June 2019) asks ESCWA to “Support member States in their work under the International Decade for Action ‘Water for Sustainable Development’ 2018-2028, participate in Cairo Water Week and in other regional events related to climate change and water, and encourage youth participation therein”.

Moreover, the regional preparatory meeting on water issues, which was convened a week after the launching of the Water Action Decade (Beirut, 28-29 March 2018) and informed the 2018 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, resulted in an [outcome document](#) that consolidated regional views and priorities on water-related issues facing the Arab region. Four priority areas were identified: (1) Strengthening integrated water resources management to cope with water scarcity; (2) Access to water services for all through improving water-related infrastructure; (3) Water is a core component of climate change adaptation and natural disaster risk reduction; and (4) Access to water services for all through improving water-related infrastructure. Regional forums, initiatives, networks and other mechanisms are contributing to the objectives of the Water Action Decade.

United Nations System processes

In 2020, the United Nations System established five Regional Collaboration Platforms (RCPs) to support regional-level inter-agency collaboration in Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs) were subsequently set-up to address policy priorities in each region. The RCP for Arab States is the only collaborative platform with an IBC that explicitly references water. Specifically, the IBC on Food Security, Climate Action and Environment includes two pillars of work, one on Climate Action and Natural Resource Sustainability and a second on Water, Food Security and Nutrition. The RCP-IBC pillar on Water, Food Security and Nutrition includes in its work plan a consultation proposed by ESCWA to discuss the regional preparatory meeting that would support the United Nations Conference for the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade.

In tandem, UN-Water approved the 2020-2021 work plan of the Expert Group on Regional Level Coordination in September 2020. The Expert Group provides a platform for pursuing regional-level coordination and collaboration under UN-Water. The work plan and its approved budget provide initial resources to support the organization of regional preparatory meetings in support of the Midterm Comprehensive Review in the five

regions covered by Regional Collaborative Platforms. This work will be supported by Regional Discussion Groups being established in each region.

Regional preparations in the Arab region for the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade thus fall under different global, regional, national and institutional frameworks. Engagement in this first consultation thus provides an opportunity to coordinate across these various arrangements in support of the Water Action Decade midterm review in the Arab region.

II. OBJECTIVES

The aim of this first consultation is to draft a collaborative road map for Arab regional preparations leading to the United Nations Conference for the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade in March 2023. Specifically, the meeting will discuss how to proceed with: (a) preparing the regional contribution to the midterm comprehensive review report; (b) organizing the regional preparatory meeting for the global conference; (c) activating the engagement of regional stakeholders; and (d) encouraging the implementation of activities that can explicitly support the Water Action Decade in the region. Participants will also be invited to confirm their interest in substantively and financially contributing to this preparatory process.

III. PARTICIPANTS

This first consultative meeting will gather the designated representatives of the organizations that serve in the Technical Scientific and Advisory Committee of the Arab Ministerial Water Council, the RCP-IBC work pillar on Water, Food Security and Nutrition, and the UN-Water Regional Discussion Group for Arab States, based on the existing mandates to follow-up on regional preparatory work related to the Water Action Decade. It is expected that the scope of engagement would expand following this first consultation based on the suggestions received during the consultation.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

The meeting will be organized by ESCWA on 24 February 2021 from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm Beirut time (GMT+2). The meeting will be conducted online in the English language.

Invited participants are kindly requested to complete the online [meeting registration form](#) by 15 February 2021 in order to receive the meeting agenda and link to join the meeting.

The documentation supporting the consultation will be made available on the dedicated [meeting webpage](#).

V. CONTACT

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