



# Economic and Social Council

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## High-level political forum on sustainable development

Convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council  
6–15 July 2021

**Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development**

## Input from the fifth session of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

### Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits the input from the fifth session of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, held from 29 to 31 March 2021, to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.



## **2021 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development: accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda post-COVID**

**29 to 31 March 2021**

### **Introduction**

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the League of Arab States and United Nations system bodies operating in the Arab region, organized the 2021 session of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, the theme of which was “Accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda post-COVID”. The session, which ran from 29 to 31 March, was chaired by Saudi Arabia.

2. The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development is the high-level regional forum for reviewing and following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region. The previous six sessions were held in Amman (2014 and 2016), Manama (2015), Rabat (2017) and Beirut (2018 and 2019). The Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which ESCWA adopted at its twenty-ninth session (Doha, 13 to 15 December 2016), established the Forum as an annual event at which the Governments of Arab States and sustainable development stakeholders can meet to review national and regional experiences and discuss mechanisms for implementing the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels.<sup>1</sup> Its conclusions are submitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which is held annually in New York in July.

3. The forum was preceded by a series of regional meetings: (1) the Arab regional parliamentary forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (26 November 2020); (2) the consultative meeting on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (10 March 2021); and (3) The regional meeting of civil society organizations on sustainable development in the Arab region (25 and 26 March 2021).

4. The programme of work included 12 plenary sessions on the main theme of “Accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda post-COVID” and regional implementation methods. Those sessions covered the nine Sustainable Development Goals that are to be reviewed at the high-level political forum (Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17), as well as Goal 5, on gender equality. In addition, 11 specialized sessions on priority issues for the Arab region and four special events were held.

5. The discussions that took place led to the formulation of several messages that will be submitted to high-level political forum on sustainable development to be held in New York from 6 to 15 July 2021 on the theme “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”. The messages were

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<sup>1</sup> The Forum’s terms of reference derive from a series of ESCWA resolutions, including resolution [327 \(XXIX\)](#) on the working mechanisms of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, adopted at the twenty-ninth session of the Commission; resolution [314 \(XXVIII\)](#) on the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, adopted at its twenty-eighth session (Tunis, 15–18 September 2014); and Executive Committee resolution 322 on a strategy and plan of action on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the Committee at its second meeting (Amman, 14–16 December 2015).

formulated from an Arab perspective, with a view to reflecting regional priorities in relation to the theme of the 2021 high-level political forum and the Goals that will be reviewed.

## **I. Key messages from the 2021 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development**

6. Following deliberations, Forum participants developed several messages aimed at accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in the Arab region. Following are the most significant messages:

(a) We must make structural changes to social protection systems and expand them so that they cover all, including workers in the informal sector, in particular given that the pandemic has demonstrated that the most affected groups are those that were mostly likely to have been neglected before the crisis.

(b) We must transform the education system so that it covers all, enhance quality, develop digital learning platforms, advance a forward-looking vision of open learning that consolidates the development aspect of learning and increase investment in science and innovation.

(c) We must strengthen the political commitment to building health-care systems that ensure health security for all and are founded on primary health care, and we must reaffirm that mental health is not only a component of overall health but also a component of development, because of the impact that it has on the economy, gender equality, children, youth, education, employment, social cohesion and peace.

(d) We reaffirm the importance of addressing social inequalities by implementing redistribution policies and reforms that support decent employment and job creation.

(e) We must share good practices relating governance and management of migration, and build on regional successes in that regard, while taking note of the increasing hardships facing vulnerable migrant worker groups in the region as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including with regard to access to services and jobs, the ability to return their countries of origin and the significant decline in remittances.

(f) We must make a greater political commitment to achieving gender equality, enacting and enforcing laws aimed at ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, strengthening coordination between the judiciary and security services in that regard, and increasing women's representation and participation in all aspects of public life.

(g) We must expand the civil space, involve all stakeholders in making policy and implementing programmes, and promote human rights as the bedrock of development, in particular given how the pandemic has highlighted the importance of local governance and the effectiveness of civil society in times of crisis.

(h) We must promote the role of parliaments and oversight institutions, because they play an important role in supporting the development process by monitoring planning, implementation and execution, and in developing a culture of accountability in the field of development work.

(i) We must strengthen efforts to increase the training opportunities available to young people in the Arab region, accelerate their post-COVID-19 involvement in productive economic endeavours and enhance their participation in decision-making processes.

(j) We must support the private sector, in particular small and medium enterprises, which have played an important role in the response and adapting to the pandemic, because that sector plays a central role in driving the economy at the national and regional levels, and we must strengthen public-private partnerships on a transparent basis, in order to achieve sustainability and link business strategies to the Sustainable Development Goals.

(k) We must promote regional cooperation and joint investments in agriculture, in order to achieve food security and Sustainable Development Goal 2 in the Arab region; address food loss and waste in the region and malnutrition; put in place appropriate incentives to support a circular economy in the region, with a particular focus on the private sector; and support small farmers, ensure that they have access to green technologies and other production resources, and enhance their capacity to withstand future shocks, such as those caused by climate change, epidemics, economic difficulties and conflicts.

(l) Arab countries must make their policies more consistent with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the 2030 Agenda through integrated development planning and by adopting innovative funding tools, such as green funding, in order to recover from the consequences of the pandemic, adapt to climate change and reduce disaster risk.

(m) We must ensure that everyone has access to technology, accelerate the digital transformation of the public and private sectors, adopt strategies to improve research and development, enhance the technological capacity of researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs, in particular women and young people, and provide equitable access to technology, with a view to ensuring the continuity of State services and work in various sectors, and in order to avoid widening the differences between different community groups.

(n) We must establish national data monitoring platforms, identify clear sources of information for each indicator on the basis of standard metadata, give due attention to alternative data sources, use modern technologies in censuses and surveys, adopt alternative methodologies and build on methodologies developed in the management of the crisis that will help to address statistical gaps, in accordance with international recommendations and standards.

(o) We must reaffirm the pivotal role of development financing; strengthen political commitment to a regional road map and coordinated response mechanisms to reduce illicit financial flows, tax evasion and financial corruption, with a view to closing the Sustainable Development Goal funding gap; increase fiscal revenue and redirect expenditure in the recovery phase; and promote financial integrity through coordinated efforts at the national, regional and international levels.

(p) We must promote mobilization of financial resources at the national level and monitor resources by further aligning national budgets with the Sustainable Development Goals and national development plans and programmes, and we must benefit from success stories in the Arab region in order to implement current and future initiatives aimed at enhancing consistency between planning, budgeting, implementation and follow-up.

(q) We must reaffirm that Sustainable Development Goal 16 is of vital importance to the region; strengthen political commitment at all levels to end wars and conflicts, because the COVID-19 pandemic, wars and ongoing conflicts present a double burden to many groups in the region; and link humanitarian aid and emergency response to long-term recovery.

(r) We reaffirm that providing security and political stability, as well as just and comprehensive solutions that respect the rights of peoples to self-determination,

are vitally important to addressing existing imbalances in the region, such as inequality, poverty, unemployment and the collapse of health and social systems.

(s) We reaffirm that it is vitally important to ensure fair, equitable and simultaneous distribution of COVID-19 vaccines by strengthening solidarity among nations, as that will affect how the pandemic is controlled and how we recover from it.

## II. Sessions and presentations

7. In addition to the opening and closing sessions, 12 plenary sessions were held on the main theme of the Forum, accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda post-COVID. Following are the topics that were covered in the plenary sessions:

Session 1: Sustainable Development Goal 1 review: Eradicating poverty and recovering from the COVID-19 crisis in the Arab region

Session 2: Sustainable Development Goal 10 review: Inclusive recovery and reducing inequalities in the Arab region

Session 3: Sustainable Development Goal 2 review: Achieving food security in the Arab region by 2030

Session 4: Sustainable Development Goal 3 review: Towards more resilient health systems in the Arab region

Session 5: Sustainable Development Goal 17 review: Innovative data solutions from the Arab region

Session 6: Sustainable Development Goal 8 review: policy options for economic growth and employment to recover better in the Arab region

Session 7: Sustainable Development Goal 12 review: Rethinking consumption and production patterns in the Arab region during the COVID-19 recovery and on the way to 2030

Session 8: Sustainable Development Goal 13 review: Advancing climate action for a green recovery and accelerated progress on the Sustainable Development Goals

Session 9: Sustainable Development Goal 5 review: Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and girls in the Arab region

Session 10: Financing for development: what is possible and necessary in the Arab region to achieve the 2030 Agenda?

Session 11: Sustainable Development Goal 16 review: Institutional fragility, the COVID-19 crisis and lessons learned from the region

Session 12: Sustainable Development Goal 17 review: Bridging divides and strengthening the role of technology in response to the pandemic

8. Eleven special sessions on priority topics in the Arab region were held: (1) Rethinking sustainable development under fragility and conflict; (2) Auditing the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region; (3) Mental health and psychosocial support in the context of COVID-19: implications for the Arab region; (4) Localization and multi-stakeholder partnerships: means of achieving the 2030 Agenda in conflict-affected countries; (5) Migration governance in the Arab region: priorities, opportunities and lessons learned from the first regional review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Arab region; (6) Catalysing private sector engagement in the Decade of Action; (7) The nexus between the Sustainable Development Goals and climate security in Arab countries;

(8) Open science: the gateway to accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda post-COVID; (9) COVID-19 and its impact on the environment; (10) Accelerating gender justice in the Arab region, removing gender inequalities from laws and changing them for the benefit of women, and empowering current and future generations of women and girls in the region; (11) The nexus between humanitarian work, development and peace as a transformative pathway for making progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in protracted crises, including COVID-19: challenges and opportunities.

9. The Forum included four special events: (1) a special event on the 2021 Food Systems Summit: Arab regional food systems dialogue; (2) a youth round table; (3) a session on strengthening regional collaboration in the Arab States; and (4) a high-level multi-stakeholder dialogue.

## **A. Opening session**

10. Mr. Faisal F. Al-Ibrahim, Deputy Minister of Economy and Planning of Saudi Arabia, spoke at the opening session in his capacity as Chair of the 2021 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, as did Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and Ms. Rola Dashti, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA. The speakers addressed the situation in the Arab region and the challenges that it faced in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as how the region could recover from the pandemic by returning to sustainable development.

11. In the pre-session, a documentary film on the status of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region before the COVID-19 pandemic was shown. The film, which was based on the results of the 2020 Arab Sustainable Development Report, addressed the negative effects of the pandemic by focusing on certain indicators and expectations related to the region's development priorities.

12. Mr. Faisal F. Al-Ibrahim, Chair of the Forum, facilitated the intergovernmental segment and gave the floor to Ambassador Mohammed Hussein Bahr Aluloom, Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations and co-facilitator of the ministerial declaration of the 2021 session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The Ambassador addressed the importance of the Arab Forum and the messages that it will submit to the high-level political forum. He urged Arab countries to participate effectively in the preparations for that important global event in the light of COVID-19 pandemic recovery efforts.

13. Nine Arab countries delivered brief statements on the most important steps taken to address the economic, social and environmental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as part of the efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. The following, in alphabetical order by State, took the floor: Mr. Nasim Qawawi, Acting Director-General of Multilateral Relations, Algeria; Ms. Aminah al-Rumayhi, Undersecretary for National Economy, Ministry of Finance and National Economy, Bahrain; Ms. Hala al-Sa'id, Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Egypt; Mr. Marwan Rifa'i, Acting Secretary-General, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Jordan; Mr. Khalid al-Mahdi, Secretary-General, Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Kuwait; Mr. Muhammad Karin, Ambassador of Morocco to Lebanon; Mr. Ahmad bin Hasan al-Hammadi, Secretary-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar; Mr. Fadlallah Gharz al-Din, Assistant Director, Planning and International Cooperation Authority, Syrian Arab Republic; and Mr. Burawi al-Imam, Ambassador of Tunisia to Lebanon. The Minister of Planning of Iraq, Mr. Khalid Battal al-Najm,

sent a recorded statement via email that was presented on his behalf by Ms. Maha Abdulkarim al-Rawi, Director-General of the Human Development Department at the Ministry.

## **B. Plenary sessions**

### Session 1 – Sustainable Development Goal 1 review: Eradicating poverty and recovering from the COVID-19 crisis in the Arab region

14. The session was facilitated by Mr. Ibrahim Elbadawi, Managing Director of the Economic Research Forum. The participants were Ms. Rana Jawad, Associate Professor in Social Policy, University of Bath, United Kingdom; Ms. Nivine El-Kabbag, Minister of Social Solidarity, Egypt; Mr. Ziad Abdelsamad, Executive Director, Arab NGO Network for Development; and Mr. Touhami Abdelkhalek, Professor of Higher Education, National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics, Morocco.

15. The session highlighted the key measures that must be taken to reduce poverty and mitigate the effects of the increase in poverty in the region that had been brought on by the pandemic, in order to meet the needs of those most at risk of neglect and reduce vulnerability and susceptibility to future shocks. The speakers focused on the importance of reviewing social protection systems in order to increase their long-term effectiveness and make them more inclusive. Participants reviewed the policies and experiences of Egypt and Morocco in relation to strengthening and increasing the scope of social protection measures and diversifying the funding structures and ensuring the sustainability of social protection systems.

### Session 2 – Sustainable Development Goal 10 review: Inclusive recovery and reducing inequalities in the Arab region

16. The session was facilitated by Mr. Ishac Diwan, Professor of Economics, Université Paris Sciences et Lettres, and a research fellow at the Economic Research Forum in Paris. The session was attended by Ali Hameed Mukhlif al-Douleimy, Minister of Education, Iraq; Ms. Lama al-Natour, Head of the Development Coordination Unit, Ministry of Education, Jordan; Ms. Lala Arabian, Executive Director, Insan Association, Lebanon; Mr. Mohammed Elagati, researcher and Director, Arab Forum for Alternatives, Egypt; and Ms. Jahda Abou Khalil, General Director, Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities, Lebanon.

17. The participants drew attention to the key manifestations of inequality during the COVID-19 pandemic and their implications for policymaking in the region, and they offered appropriate policy options to reduce inequality and accelerate progress in achieving Goal 10 of the 2030 Agenda. The experiences of Jordan and Iraq in that regard were reviewed, as well as the strategies they have adopted and the challenges they have faced in ensuring continuity of education during the COVID-19 pandemic with respect to equitable access to and active participation in digital learning opportunities, particularly for the most vulnerable. The speakers focused on the need to adopt a comprehensive and human rights-based response to COVID-19.

### Session 3 – Sustainable Development Goal 2 review: Achieving food security in the Arab region by 2030

18. The session was facilitated by Ms. Ismahane Elouafi, Chief Scientist, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The speakers were Mr. Said al-Masri, former Minister of Agriculture, Jordan; Mr. Wafaa Dikah Hamzeh, First Counsellor, Agriculture and International Cooperation, and a former minister, Lebanon; Ms. Linda Shaker

Berbari, expert in public health and policy, and specialist in infant and child nutrition, Lebanon; and Ms. Maryam Aleisa, founder, Re:food Company, Kuwait.

19. The session addressed policy options aimed at enhancing access to safe and nutritious foods and promoting production of such foods in the region. The participants reviewed the experience of Jordan in developing stimulus plans designed to bring the most affected agricultural communities into the social safety net and cushion the impact of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The session also addressed the experience of Lebanon, the efforts made to maintain food security and the priorities established for responding to the crises caused by the pandemic. It was suggested that a food security council be established in Lebanon. The main role of such a council would be to address the crisis faced by the neediest groups and to expand the social safety net and social protection system. The participants highlighted initiatives and mechanisms that help reduce food waste and drew attention to the important role that young people play in enhancing food security. In addition, they identified measures that can help strengthen sustainable food production systems and accelerate progress in nutrition, including, inter alia, supporting small food producers, because that is essential to ensuring that no one is neglected and to promoting sustainable food production systems and sustainable agriculture.

#### Session 4 – Sustainable Development Goal 3 review: Towards more resilient health systems in the Arab region

20. The session was facilitated by Ms. Maha El Rabbat, former Minister of Health and Population of Egypt and Special Envoy of the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) for COVID-19 Preparedness and Response. Mr. Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, delivered the keynote address. The participants were Mr. Ahmed Al-Saidi, Minister of Health, Oman; Ms. Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Social Affairs Directorate, League of Arab States; Mr. Kamel Mohanna, President and founder, Amel Association International, Lebanon; and Mr. Fadi Jardali, Director of the Knowledge and Policy Centre, American University of Beirut.

21. The participants stressed the importance of adopting the principle of primary health care, developing the capacity of centres to provide such care and ensuring universal coverage for all members of the community. The session highlighted the efforts of the League of Arab States to support countries in cushioning the blow of the pandemic. Participants reviewed the experience of Oman with regard to pandemic response and the innovative practices that it has adopted to overcome consequences. In that connection, they identified four measures required for developing resilient health systems: (1) investing in basic public health functions, including monitoring, organization, infection prevention and health information systems; (2) strengthening the infrastructure of health systems, developing workforce capacity, improving the supply chain and financing, and enhancing good governance and governance capabilities; (3) establishing institutions concerned with universal health coverage and health security, and strengthening cooperation between all government and private sectors; and (4) transforming health systems into human-centric systems that are focused on quality assurance and decentralization.

#### Session 5 – Sustainable Development Goal 17 review: Innovative data solutions from the Arab region

22. The session was moderated by Ms. Ola Awad, Director of the Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Palestine. The speakers were by Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations; Ms. Siham Zarrari, Head of the Household Survey Division, High Commission for Planning, Morocco; Mr. Ayman Zohri, migration studies expert and Adjunct Professor,

American University in Cairo; Mr. Youssif Al Riemi, General Director of Economic Statistics, National Centre for Statistics and Information, Oman; and Mr. Ziad Abdallah, Head of the Information Technology Centre, Central Administration of Statistics, Lebanon.

23. Participant reviewed the experience of Morocco, which developed a database using information collected through telephone interviews to assess the pandemic's impact on several aspects of life, including mental health. They also reviewed the experience of Oman, which automated the collection of price statistics and the entire census process by using an innovative method in which data are collected from the source, thus making it possible to disseminate results immediately. The participants heard a presentation on a pilot project in Lebanon to develop non-traditional sources of data on Syrian refugees, while maintaining privacy and security. The aim of the project was to demonstrate the challenges faced by the host authorities in producing sound and reliable statistics. The participants drew attention to innovative methods developed in several countries that were helpful in collecting data during the pandemic, such as the platforms that were created for vaccination registration or access to health and social services. Participants stressed the need to focus on alternative data sources and encouraging States to produce high-quality and detailed data.

Session 6 – Sustainable Development Goal 8 Review: policy options for economic growth and employment to recover better in the Arab region

24. The session was facilitated by Ms. Raghda El-Ebrashi, Chair, Department of Management and Organization, German University in Cairo, and Head of the “Alashanek Ya Balady” foundation, Egypt. The participants were Mr. Fayez Al-Mutairi, Director-General, Arab Labour Organization; Mr. Abdullah Abuthanin, Deputy Minister of Human Resources and Social Development for the Labour Sector, Saudi Arabia; Ms. Christeen Haddadin, Executive Director, 17 Ventures, Jordan; and Ms. Naima Hammami, Executive Office, Tunisian General Labour Union, Tunisia.

25. The speakers focused on opportunities to accelerate implementation of Goal 8 following the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of Arab cooperation in that regard, in order to address the social repercussions of the pandemic. The discussion was centred on the change brought about by the COVID-19 crisis in the needs of small and medium enterprises and the way that they operate, as well as the ability of such companies to access financing outside the formal banking system. Participants discussed the measures that could be taken to encourage women's entrepreneurship as a means of recovering from the COVID-19 crisis. The experience of Saudi Arabia in promoting decent work, in particular for women and youth, and implementing reforms in order to facilitate the movement of migrant workers and protect their rights was reviewed.

Session 7 – Sustainable Development Goal 12 Review: Rethinking consumption and production patterns in the Arab region during the COVID-19 recovery and on the way to 2030

26. The session was facilitated by Ms. Samira Al-Kandari, Deputy Director-General for Environmental Control, Public Environment Authority, Kuwait. The following speakers took the floor: Ms. Maha Al-Ma'ayta, Director of Policy and International Cooperation, Ministry of the Environment, Jordan; Ms. Sumaya Yusuf, Assistant Professor, Environmental Management Programme, Arab Gulf University, Bahrain; Mr. Zaid Al-Shabanat, Director, National Programme for Reducing Food Loss and Waste, Saudi Arabian Grains Organization; and Mr. Moez El Shohdi, co-founder and Chief Executive Officer, Regional Food Bank Network, Egypt.

27. The speakers addressed the ways in which governments, academia, scientific research centres, the private sector and civil society could help drive progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 12, particularly in the COVID-19 recovery phase. The discussion turned to the opportunities presented by green growth, the circular economy and sustainable consumption and production plans and strategies, with the participants highlighting the importance of addressing food loss and waste in the region, and strengthening and supporting food banks.

Session 8 – Sustainable Development Goal 13 review: Advancing climate action for a green recovery and accelerated progress on the Sustainable Development Goals

28. This session was facilitated by Mr. Jamal Saghir, member of the board, Global Centre for Adaptation. The speakers were Ms. Yasmine Fouad, Minister of the Environment, Egypt; Mr. Ahmed Abu Thaher, Director-General for projects and international relations, Environment Quality Authority, State of Palestine; Mr. Ahmed Al Qabany, Director, Climate Change Unit, Islamic Development Bank Group; and Ms. Noura Mansouri, Research Fellow, King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Centre, Saudi Arabia.

29. The speakers reviewed green development pathways that reduce the risk posed by the effects of climate change and natural disasters while ensuring water, energy and food security. The participants reviewed the experience of Egypt, which has committed itself to strengthening resilience to climate change as part of its nationally determined contribution under the Paris Agreement. The session turned to climate financing and addressed the options available to Arab States for building their national capacities, securing financial resources and institutionally integrating climate change and disaster risk reduction in development planning and in their national budgets. The session also addressed innovative climate financing tools, such as green bonds and green “*sukuks*”, private sector participation through banks and investors, and debt-for-climate swaps.

Session 9 – Sustainable Development Goal 5 review: Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and girls in the Arab region

30. This session was facilitated by Mr. Khaled Mahdi, Secretary-General, Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Kuwait. The following participated in the discussion: Mr. Magued Osman, member, National Council for Women, and Head of the Egyptian Women’s Observatory; Ms. Amani Arouri, advocate for the rights of women and youth in the State of Palestine and member of the Youth Gender Innovation Agora for the Arab region; Ms. Jennifer Suleiman, Chief Sustainability Officer, Zain Group; and Ms. Martine Najem, Instructor, Public Health Practice, Centre for Outreach and Community Action, American University of Beirut.

31. The discussion addressed the importance of integrating women’s rights and involving women and girls in the planning and crisis management process, with a view to ensuring steady progress towards achieving Goal 5 and safeguarding women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights. Participants discussed how national equality strategies could benefit from financial inclusion initiatives and the efforts of civil society organizations to integrate the issue of violence against women into COVID-19 recovery plans. They drew attention to the example of Kuwait with regard to implementing Goal 5 and involving women in political and economic work, and to the experience of Egypt in that regard and how it addressed the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic through a gender-sensitive response. The contributions of the private sector to the implementation of Goal 5 were highlighted in a presentation on the experience of the Zain Group.

Session 10 – Financing for development: what is possible and necessary in the Arab region to achieve the 2030 Agenda?

32. This session was facilitated by Ms. Sabine Oueiss, business and politics editor, *Al-Nahar* newspaper, Lebanon. The speakers were Ms. Dalia Grybauskaitė, former President of Lithuania, and Co-Chair of the High-level Panel on International Financial Accountability, Transparency and Integrity; Mr. Saleh Kharabsheh, former Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, Jordan; Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya, Vice-President of ECOSOC, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations; and Mr. Mahmoud Mohieldin, Executive Director at the International Monetary Fund and United Nations Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda.

33. The focus of the session was planning financing for development in view of the priorities for the current phase of the COVID-19 pandemic recovery effort, which is aimed at addressing three key crises: the health crisis, economic contraction and recession, and the global debt crisis. In addition, the session addressed the need to strengthen political commitment to a regional road map and for coordinated response mechanisms, in order to reduce illicit financial flows, close the Sustainable Development Goal financing gap, increase financial revenues, redirect expenditures and strengthen partnership with the private sector. The solutions proposed include increased political commitment on the part of Arab Governments to a regional strategy for financing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in line with the options set out in the Initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond that Canada and Jamaica launched in conjunction with the Secretary-General, and the ESCWA debt-for-climate swaps initiative, with a view to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region.

Session 11 – Sustainable Development Goal 16 review: Institutional fragility, the COVID-19 crisis and lessons learned from the region

34. This session was facilitated by Ms. Lamia Moubayed Bissat, Director, Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan, Lebanon. The following speakers took the floor: Mr. Mohamed Mefteh, General Manager, Central Governance Unit, Ministry of Health, Tunisia; Mr. Omar Mashaqbeh, Director, National Aid Fund, Jordan; Mr. Daoud al-Deek, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Social Development, State of Palestine; Ms. Yousra Sidani, elected member for the municipality of Beirut; and Ms. Kinda Mohamadieh, Third World Network, Geneva office.

35. The participants highlighted the measures taken by Arab governments to address the pandemic and strengthen the role of the State, including with regard to the relationship between citizens and the authorities. They reviewed the experiences of Jordan, Tunisia and the State of Palestine in meeting the needs of citizens and vulnerable groups during the epidemic by following an approach that is based on rights and equality. Participants discussed the importance of the role of local government, non-governmental groups, multilateral entities and public-private partnerships, and were of the view that the pandemic offered an opportunity for governments to intensify their efforts to build effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.

Session 12 – Sustainable Development Goal 17 review: Bridging divides and strengthening the role of technology in response to the pandemic

36. The session was facilitated by Ms. Sana Ghenima, Executive Director, SANABIL MED, Tunisia. The speakers were Mr. Imad Sabouni, Head, International Planning and Cooperation Commission, Syrian Arab Republic, and Mr. Saeed Ali, Director, Information Technology Department, Federal Centre for Competitiveness and Statistics, United Arab Emirates. During the session, the ESCWA Arabic Digital

Content Award for Sustainable Development was launched, and Ms. Rola Dashti delivered a speech on the partnership between ESCWA and the World Summit Awards foundation. Ms. Dashti noted that the aim of the award is to promote the creation of Arabic digital content related to Sustainable Development Goals and to involve everyone, including individuals and institutions, in finding appropriate solutions. Mr. Peter A. Bruck, head of the World Summit Awards foundation, then delivered a statement in which he set out the foundation's background and stressed the importance of benefitting from the digital technology skills of today's youth in the sustainable development process.

37. The discussions addressed the importance of promoting the use of digital technology and services in sustainable development and addressing national crises and challenges. The participants discussed the role of the technological and digital innovations that were applied during the COVID-19 crisis, such as big data, open data, geospatial data and artificial intelligence, that served the needs of the health sector and provided statistical information and data. The speakers addressed the role of regional organizations in strengthening partnerships to ensure access to technology services during crises, as well as the role of technologies in developing sustainable and flexible food systems that are capable of providing healthy food. They drew attention to young entrepreneurs and their role in developing digital solutions that led to increased use of digital technology in the response to the pandemic.

### **C. Special sessions**

38. At the Forum, eleven special sessions in which certain development goals and dimensions were addressed in depth, in the light of the theme and goals of the Forum. A summary of the discussions that took place at those sessions is set out below.

#### Special session 1: Rethinking sustainable development under fragility and conflict

39. The session was facilitated by Mr. Ahmed Mahmoud, author, journalist and advisor to the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Al-Ahram Foundation, Egypt. The following took the floor: Ms. Najat Rochdi, United Nations Deputy Special Coordinator for Lebanon and United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon; Mr. Muhammad al-Hawari, Deputy Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen; Mr. Mohamed Hassan Katna, Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, Syrian Arab Republic; and Mr. Fuad Albassam, Assistant Director-General for Public Sector Operations, Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries Fund for International Development (OFID).

40. The discussion turned to the emerging challenges raised by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and its effect on the realization of the sustainable development goals. It was stated that the coronavirus crisis and ongoing conflict in fragile countries had left a deep economic, social and developmental mark, and recovery would require additional support. The discussion underscored the need for peace, justice and resilient institutions in order to attain sustainable development in countries affected by fragility and conflict. Participants emphasized that the main priorities should therefore include good governance, political reform and the fight against corruption. The focus should be on recovery, long-term goals, humanitarian assistance and emergency response, all of which were important in fragile contexts, without losing sight of the fundamental nexus between humanitarian assistance, sustainable development and peace.

### Special session 2: Auditing the sustainable development goals in the Arab region

41. The special session was facilitated by Mr. Karam Karam, Regional Advisor on Governance, ESCWA. Opening statements were made by Ms. Karima El Korri, Leader, 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals Coordination Cluster, ESCWA; Mr. Nejib Gtari, Secretary-General of the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI); and Ms. Archana Shirsat, Deputy Director-General, Department of Professional and Relevant Supreme Audit Institutions, International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) Development Initiative. The following took the floor: Mr. Mohammed ben Hamdan ben Saeed ben Hamad Al Jabiri, audit expert, Financial and Administrative Affairs Audit Agency, Oman; Mr. Abdelhakim Ben Lazreg, Senior Manager, Supreme Audit Institutions Governance Department, INTOSAI Development Initiative; Ms. Majdoleen Sammour, Head, Performance Audit Division, State Audit and Administrative Control Bureau, State of Palestine; Mr. Mohammed Abed El Mohsen Hanine, Head of Division, Fourth Chamber, Court of Audit, Morocco; and Mr. Saad Bourkadi, focal point for monitoring implementation of the sustainable development goals, Office of the Prime Minister, Morocco.

42. The session shed light on the role of supreme financial oversight and audit institutions in the Arab region in following up implementation of the 2030 Agenda; lessons learned and outcomes of the preparedness assessment operations conducted in several Arab States. The implementation of the sustainable development goals was assessed with a particular focus on target 3.4, with a view to improving the adaptation and recovery capacities of public health care systems. Speakers stressed the importance of removing barriers to the auditing process by defining the legal prerogatives of audit bodies and facilitating access to data; those steps would both improve the quality of the audit and make it possible to benefit from its outcomes.

### Special session 3: Mental health and psychosocial support in the context of COVID-19: implications for the Arab region

43. The session was facilitated by Ahmed al-Mandhari, Regional Director, World Health Organization (WHO) Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and by Mr. Ted Cheiban, Regional Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa. The speakers were Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children; Dr. Shekhar Saxena, Professor of the Practice of Global Mental Health, TH Chan School of Public Health, Harvard University, United States of America; Mr. Rabih El Chammy, Chair of the National Mental Health Programme, Ministry of Health, Lebanon.

44. Participants underscored the importance of mainstreaming mental health and psychosocial support into national emergency plans for preparedness, response and recovery. Doing so would help to ensure the well-being of such vulnerable groups as children, teenagers, women, refugees, migrants and people subjected to violence, and to shore up the resilience and well-being of society as a whole. The discussion addressed the effects of the pandemic on mental health and the need to reform mental health through a comprehensive approach focused on integrated mental health systems that would promote mental well-being, prevent mental trauma and facilitate access to care. Participants highlighted the importance of mental health as a basic component of development. Mental health had implications for the economy, gender equality, children and younger persons, education, employment, social cohesion and peace.

Special session 4: Localization and multi-stakeholder partnerships: means of achieving the 2030 Agenda in conflict-affected countries

45. The special session was facilitated by Mr. Karam Karam, Regional Advisor, ESCWA. Opening statements were made by Mr. Hossam Zaki, Assistant Secretary-General, League of Arab States, and by Ms. Carmela Godeau, Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, International Organization for Migration (IOM). The following participated: Ms. Buthainah Mahmood Abbas, Chief, Hawa'a Organization for Relief and Development and member of the National Sustainable Development Network 2030, Iraq; Mr. Ahmed Awad, Director, Phenix Centre for Economic and Informatics Studies, Jordan; Ms. Ola Sidani, Senior Economic Officer, Economic Unit, Office of the Prime Minister, Lebanon; Mr. Tahir Abu El Hassan, Chair, Commission on Sustainable Development, Ministry of Planning, Libya.

46. Participants discussed the effects of the pandemic on vulnerable parts of the institutional, economic and social infrastructures of conflict-affected countries. The discussion focused on practical solutions that would enable people, whether in cities or in the country, to secure their economic and social rights and to strengthen the framework of political, economic and social rights and freedoms and the social justice framework as a basis for realizing sustainable development.

Special session 5: Migration governance in the Arab region: priorities, opportunities and lessons learned from the first regional review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Arab region

47. The session was facilitated by Dr. Amira Ahmed, Lecturer at the American University in Cairo. Speakers included Ms. Enas Fergany, Director, Department of Refugees, Expatriates and Migration, League of Arab States; Mr. Othman Belbeisi, Senior Regional Adviser, Middle East and North Africa Region, IOM; Ms. Sara Salman, Population Affairs Officer, ESCWA; Mr. Karim AlNouri, Deputy Minister of Displacement and Migration, Iraq; Mr. Jonathan Prentice, Head of Secretariat, United Nations Network on Migration; Mr. Ayman Zohry, lecturer and researcher at the American University in Cairo and founder and chair of the Egyptian Society for Migration Studies; Ms. Sara al-Khatib, member of the Solidarity Centre and of the Regional Centre for Refugees and Migrants; Ms. Nourhan AbdelAziz, Save the Children North Africa; and Mr. Ibrahim Aqel, Director, Family Health Institute, Noor Al-Hussain Foundation, Jordan.

48. The discussion focused on the importance of achieving good governance of migration in the Arab region and the role of Arab governments in ensuring safe, orderly and regular migration, protecting migrants and empowering them to become effective agents of change. The session drew attention to the outcomes of the Arab regional review of the Global Compact and the progress made by the States of the region in mainstreaming migration into development efforts. Speakers said that it was important to include migrant issues in pandemic crisis recovery plans. They stressed the need to combat discrimination against and hatred of migrants; facilitate access to comprehensive health care, including reproductive health care and care for women survivors of violence; and facilitate access to education, justice and other needs. Emphasis was placed on the importance of collecting, analysing and disseminating data, particularly data involving the most at-risk groups. Participants recommended including migrant issues in development policies, and providing gender- and age-disaggregated data to ensure that migration policies were evidence-based and rights-based.

Special session 6: Catalysing private sector engagement in the Decade of Action

49. The session was divided into two discussion groups. The first was facilitated by Ms. Nadia Al Saeed, Chief Executive Officer, Al-Etihad Bank, Jordan. The following people took the floor: Ms. Amanda Kelleher, Director of International Education, Luminus Technical University College, Egypt, and Ms. Nagla Kinawi, Director, Human Resources Section, Vodafone Egypt. In the first group, participants addressed the effect of the pandemic on women in the labour force and the mounting challenges they faced owing to the lockdowns announced by governments, and the effect on young persons' skills caused by the interruption of education in certain regions owing to the pandemic. Attention was drawn to certain good practices adopted by companies in the region to improve gender equality in employment; applying flexible work policies; building the capacities of businesspeople in order to overcome obstacles resulting from the pandemic; and cooperating with civil society to provide child-care services for women in the labour force.

50. The second group was facilitated by Mr. Sami Mahroum, Professor at the Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management and Senior Fellow at the Issam Fares Institute, American University in Beirut. The following persons participated: Ahmed Riad, founder-member of UAE ARISE and founder of Estmraraya Consulting, United Arab Emirates, and Ms. Maissa Abou Adal, Member of the Board of Directors of the Holdal Group, Lebanon. Participants highlighted the role of small and medium enterprises in fostering the realization of the sustainable development goals. They underscored the negative impact of the pandemic on such enterprises and the need to bolster their resilience and make plans to ensure business continuity in times of crisis. Several examples were provided of corporate solidarity in times of crisis, and of corporate assistance for small and medium enterprises. Reference was also made to regional and international alliances, such as the Private Sector Alliance for Disaster Resilient Societies, which played a role in promoting more resilient business sector practices during crises.

Special session 7: The nexus between the Sustainable Development Goals and climate security in Arab countries

51. The session was facilitated by Ms. Sujala Pant, Chief Technical Advisor and Project Manager, Sustainable Development Goals Climate Facility Project, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Bureau for Arab States. The following persons participated: Mr. Khaled Abdelshafi, Director, UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States; Ms. Nada El Agizy, Director of Sustainable Development and International Cooperation, League of Arab States; Mr. Ahmad Yusuf Ahmad, Director-General, Department of the Environment, Somalia; Mr. Mohammad Khashashneh, Secretary-General, Ministry of the Environment, Jordan; Mr. Tarek El Samman, advisor and member of the Board of Governors, Arab Water Council, Egypt; Ms. Heba Al Hariry, Deputy Technical Director, Arab Water Council, Egypt; Ms. Yasmine Mustafa, Knowledge Management and Reporting Officer, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Cairo; Mr. Zahi Shahine, Director, Disaster Risk Management Unit, Office of the Prime Minister, Lebanon; Ms. Nuran Atef, Coordinator, Sustainable Development Goals Climate Facility Project, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Finance Initiative, Geneva; and Mr. Dustin Schinn, Regional Climate Change Specialist, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States.

52. Participants drew attention to climate security, a new concept deployed to describe the set of effects of climate change that exacerbated threats to natural resources, ecosystems, socio-economic development and political stability. Proposed solutions included bringing together the range of stakeholders to leverage their strengths, and connecting knowledge, expertise and information provided by actors

and partnerships as a basis for response measures. Participants concluded that there was a need for those partnerships to include integrated solutions to finance and incentivize investments in research and to develop data with a view to finding creative, targeted, business-oriented solutions.

Special session 8: Open Science: The gateway to accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda post-COVID

53. The session was facilitated by Mr. Ghaith Fariz, Director, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Regional Bureau for Science in the Arab States. The speakers were Mr. Muhyieddeen Touq, former Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Jordan; Ms. Layla Al Mousawi, Programme Manager, Scientific Culture Directorate, Kuwait Institute for the Advancement of Science; Mr. Essam Khamis, member, UNESCO Open Science Advisory Committee; and Mr. Neemat Frem, President and Chief Executive Officer, INDEVCO Consultancy, Lebanon.

54. The discussion addressed the open science initiative, a solution to the knowledge and research gap among Arab States and between the Arab scholarly community and the broader public more generally. Emphasis was placed on the need to address poor productivity in scientific research and low spending and incentives, and to ensure that research was suited to the technological needs of societies. Speakers highlighted the need to adopt performance benchmarks for basic and applied scholarly research. Proposed solutions included ensuring proper coordination and distribution of economic leadership roles among States of the region; consolidating the developmental and knowledge-based aspects of open science on a regional scale; and formulating an overarching vision of the region with a view to leveraging science to achieve development goals. It was announced that the Regional Office of UNESCO would shortly launch an Arab interactive platform for open science to exchange ideas, publications and shared scientific research, with a view to connecting decision-makers and producers and developing partnerships.

Special session 9: COVID-19 and its impact on the environment

55. The session was facilitated by Ms. Aseel Al-Mkhaimer, Projects Manager at the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD). The participants were Mr. Adel Khalifa Al Zayani, Head of Human and Environmental Affairs, Gulf Cooperation Council Secretariat; Ms. Nezha Mejjad, postdoctoral researcher in geochemistry, Morocco; Mr. Hicham Chanager, President of the Cedar Association for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development, Algeria; and Mr. Abdulqader Alkharraz, Consultant, UNEP COVID-19 Environmental Impact Assessment Project, Yemen.

56. Participants addressed the negative environmental impact of COVID-19 on the Arab region and factors that could help strengthen decision-makers' capacity to respond to its effects and build back better. The discussion focused on the green recovery that should form one of the bases for action in the post-COVID-19 phase, and the need to leverage new opportunities created by the pandemic, while preserving the environment and biodiversity and combating climate change. Participants stressed the need for Governments and civil society to cooperate in order to develop smart climate solutions.

Special session 10: Accelerating gender justice in the Arab region, removing gender inequalities from laws and changing them for the benefit of women, and empowering current and future generations of women and girls in the region

57. The session was facilitated by Ms. Mehrinaz El Awady, Director and Cluster Leader of Gender Justice, Population and Inclusive Development, ESCWA. The following took the floor: Ms. Susanne Mikhail, Regional Director, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) Regional Office for Arab States; Ms. Shamsa Saleh, Secretary-General, United Arab Emirates Gender Balance Council, United Arab Emirates; Ms. Fatima Barkan, Director of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and Family, Morocco; Ms. Fadia Kiwan, Director-General, Arab Women Organization; and Ms. Karina Nersesyan, Deputy Regional Director, Arab States Regional Office, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

58. The discussion focused on gender equality in legislation and, in particular, on the Gender Justice and Law regional initiative, which addresses legal and regulatory frameworks and public life, violence against women, the labour force and economic advantages, marriage and the family, and sexual and reproductive health and related rights. Participants highlighted good practices to tackle gender inequality before the law in the Arab region, overcome obstacles to women's empowerment, and amend legal provisions and access-to-justice mechanisms with a view to upholding justice, particularly in response to the pandemic. Solutions were proposed in order to address the multiplicity of sources of law, the persistence of customary practices and the lack of coordination between the justice and security sectors.

Special session 11: The nexus between humanitarian work, development and peace as a transformative pathway for making progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in protracted crises, including COVID-19: challenges and opportunities

59. The session was facilitated by Ms. Shaden Khallaf, Senior Policy Advisor, Head of Middle East and North Africa Policy Unit, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Opening remarks were delivered by Mr. Khaled Abdel Shafi, Regional Hub Manager, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, and by Ms. Kristina Mejo, Senior Regional Liaison and Policy Officer and Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa Region, IOM. The following took the floor: Mr. Asad Yusuf, Head, Donor Engagement Office, Somalia Crisis Recovery Project Coordinator and Principal Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development, Somalia; Ms. Lamis Al Iryani, Head, Social Fund for Development, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, Yemen; Ms. Elke Löbel, Commissioner for Refugee Policy and Director for Displacement, Migration and Crisis Prevention and Management, Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany; and Ms. Yasmin Kayali, co-founder and Chief Commercial Officer, Basmeh and Zeitooneh relief and development association, Lebanon.

60. The session highlighted the importance of joint humanitarian and development action to build social solidarity in situations of displacement. The support offered should be comprehensive and should encompass displaced persons, host societies and the most vulnerable categories. It was stated that the nexus between humanitarian work and development could be strengthened through two processes: (1) ensuring that humanitarian assistance was directed to supporting long-term recovery efforts and (2) supporting development efforts, including by strengthening basic infrastructure to ensure that humanitarian assistance continued to reach its beneficiaries. Participants emphasized the role of civil society as a main partner in strengthening that nexus.

## D. Special events

61. The Forum included four special events: (1) a special event on the 2021 Food Systems Summit: Arab regional food systems dialogue; (2) a youth round table; (3) a session on strengthening regional collaboration in the Arab States; and (4) a high-level multi-stakeholder dialogue.

### Arab regional food systems dialogue

62. The session was facilitated by Ms. Nawal Al Hamed, Deputy Director-General, Public Authority for Food and Nutrition, Kuwait. Opening statements were delivered by Ms. Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary, ESCWA, and by Mr. Dy Ould Zein, Minister of Rural Development, Mauritania and Chair of the General Assembly of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD). The session comprised three discussion groups.

63. The first group addressed the topic “2021 Food Systems Summit: parameters and process for dialogue.” The participants were Mr. Martin Frick, Deputy to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Food System Summit 2021, and Mr. David Nabarro, Senior Advisor for the Food Systems Summit Dialogues. The second group addressed regional perspectives on the food system. The participants were Ms. Jihad Abdullah Alfathel, Member of the Shura Council of Bahrain and Deputy Chair, Parliamentary Network for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa and the Arab World; Ms. Fatima Eltahir Alhassan, Secretary-General, Food Security Technical Secretariat, the Sudan; and Mr. Tareq Hassan, Head, Arab Youth Sustainable Development Network. The third session consisted of a dialogue among participants. The discussion was facilitated by Mr. Rami Zurayk, Professor of Ecosystem Management, Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, American University of Beirut. Mr. Ibrahim El Dukhairi, Director-General, AOAD, delivered a closing statement.

64. Proposed solutions included adopting a food systems approach that would consolidate cross-system and cross-sector nexuses. Attention was drawn to the numerous achievements of food systems and their effect on food security, nutrition, the environment and socio-economic issues. Additional solutions were also put forward, including the idea of providing incentives for environmentally-friendly and climate-smart agriculture, with a focus on the nexus between water, food, energy and the use of new and appropriate technologies. Speakers addressed the necessary change process and, in particular, the development of evidence-based decision-making processes underpinned by the scientific collection, exchange and analysis of data on food systems. Participants underscored the importance of tackling inequalities related to gender, age and livelihood, and to ensure that food systems were flexible, sustainable and resistant to shocks and pressures.

### Youth round table

65. The youth round table discussions were facilitated by Mr. Hatim Aznag, Regional Focal Point for the Middle East and North Africa Region, United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth, Morocco. The participants in the discussion were Mr. Saddam Sayyalah, Founder and Executive Director, “I Learn” initiative, Jordan; Ms. Yara Abu El Wafa, Healthcare Technical Advisor, Mott MacDonald, Egypt and co-founder of the health care organization Health 2.0; Mr. Wissem Sghaier, political activist and expert on youth and youth movements, National Youth Observatory, Tunisia; Krystal Khalil, Programmes Director, Berytech Entrepreneurship, Lebanon; Mohammed Ali al-Ahmadi, Director of Investments at the Tamkeen labour fund and member of the Arab Voluntary Union, Bahrain; Ms. Maysaa Mahjoub, Founder and Chair, Volunteer Hub Organization, the Sudan; Fadwa Bakhdhah,

Regional Director, Arab World Region, International Planned Parenthood Federation, Morocco; Ms. Hanin Odeh, Director-General, Royal Health Awareness Society, Jordan; Ms. Salma al-Asbahi, Executive Director, Three Tracks Organization, Yemen; Mr. Ala' al-Sayigh, social innovator at the Daleel Tadamon initiative and organizer and political activist with the Lihaqqi organization, Lebanon.

66. The discussion focused on the pressing need for a new, advanced, interactive education system responsive to the needs of youth and the changing market. It addressed the need to put in place solutions to engage with youth in awareness-raising and training programmes, and to work towards youth-centred sustainable development. Proposals included empowering youth and involving them in the development of policies, strategies and plans, particularly in the area of health, and providing youth and adolescents with reproductive health care services consistent with their needs and priorities. Participants stressed the need to remove obstacles to youth participation in their societies; create an environment that would empower them and mainstream them into development and volunteer initiatives at various stages; and facilitate youth networking through inclusive, democratic and cohesive networks that would enable them to benefit from successful trailblazing experiences in the region.

#### Session on strengthening regional collaboration in the Arab States

67. The discussion addressed the Secretary-General's reform agenda. Mr. Mounir Tabet, Deputy Executive-Secretary, ESCWA, representing the Regional Collaboration Platform for Arab States, set out the progress made on that promising agenda in 2020 and, in particular, the reforms undertaken at the regional level. The purpose of the reforms was to make optimal use of the regional capacities and resources available to the United Nations and to provide better support for Member States to implement the 2030 Agenda by fostering inter-agency collaboration through the Platform, which was underpinned by a range of issues-based alliances. Mr. Tabet also set out the expected outcomes for 2021.

#### High-level multi-stakeholder dialogue

68. In the course of the Forum, a high-level multi-stakeholder dialogue was held to discuss the priorities of the Arab region at the outset of the Decade of Action for the realization of the sustainable development goals and to look ahead to the future. The special guest of the dialogue was Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed. The session was chaired by Ms. Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary, ESCWA, and facilitated by Ms. Maisaa Youssef, Secretariat of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2021. The panellists were Ms. Hania Sholkamy, Professor, American University in Cairo; Mr. Adnan Al Amine, Professor, Founder of the Lebanese Association for Educational Sciences, Lebanon; Mr. Mohamed Al Maitami, Professor, former Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen; Ms. Zahra Langhi, member of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum and co-founder and Chief Executive Officer, Libyan Women's Platform for Peace; Mr. Ibrahim Al Zu'bi, Chief Sustainability Officer, Majid Al Futtaim Group; Ms. Hiba Ghandour, post-doctoral researcher in heart surgery and social activist, Lebanon.

69. The discussion focused on certain urgent development challenges facing the Arab region. The speakers emphasized the need for a change in the discourse concerning poverty, inequality, solidarity at the regional and global levels, sustainable development in conflict countries, and knowledge production. A new vision of science, culture and innovation was needed, one that would facilitate a different type of social and rights-based project, particularly for Arab youth. Reference was made to the pivotal role of Arab women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution; the role of the private sector in transitioning to a more sustainable mode of consumption and production; and the need for an enabling environment that would allow Arab youth to

shift the human health paradigm and move towards fairer, healthier and more caring societies.

## **E. Closing session**

70. In closing, the Chair of the Forum, Mr. Faisal Al-Ibrahim, thanking ESCWA and its partners for organizing the Forum, said that Saudi Arabia would transmit the outcomes to the high-level political forum to be held in New York in July 2021 and would endeavour to ensure that they featured prominently in the ministerial declaration to be adopted at that event.

71. Ms. Dashti thanked Saudi Arabia for chairing the Forum and all participants and partners for contributing to its success. She said that ESCWA was committed to adopting a consultative approach in fulfilling its mandate of working to achieve prosperity and human dignity in the Arab region.

## **III. Participants**

72. Some 1,644 participants attended the Forum, including high-level representatives of governments and parliaments, civil society youth groups, think tanks, the private sector, regional organizations from the Arab world and beyond, regional actors involved in sustainable development, funds in the Arab region, media correspondents and representatives of the organizing entities.

73. Twenty-one Arab States attended, represented by ministerial delegations and agencies involved in sustainable development from Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

74. The United Nations was represented by the Deputy Secretary-General and the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, and by representatives of FAO, the International Labour Organization, IOM, OCHA, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNDP, UNESCO, UNEP, UNFPA, UN-Habitat, UNICEF, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the United Nations Volunteers programme, UN-Women, WHO and the World Food Programme.

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**Annex****Outcome documents of the preparatory meetings for the 2021 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and the high-level political forum on sustainable development**

Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, held in November 2019

<https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/2020-parliamentary-forum-agenda2030-final-report-ar.pdf>

Consultative meeting on the environmental dimension of the sustainable development agenda, March 2021

<https://www.unescwa.org/Regional-Consultation-Environmental-Dimension-SDG12-ArabRegion>

Regional meeting of civil society organizations on sustainable development in the Arab region, March 2021

<https://www.annd.org/ar/activities/details/-حول-التنمية-المجتمع-المدني-الاجتماع-الإقليمي-لمنظمات-المجتمع-المدني-حول-التنمية-المستدامة-في-المنطقة-العربية>

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