



# 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  
10–19 July 2023

**Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease  
(COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda  
for Sustainable Development at all levels**

## Report of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

### Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits, as input to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the report of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, which was organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and held from 14 to 16 March 2023.



# Report of the 2023 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development “Solutions and action”

14-16 March 2023

[Original: Arabic]

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## Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the League of Arab States and United Nations system entities operating in the Arab region, held the 2023 session of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, the theme of which was “Solutions and action”. The session, which was held both in person and virtually from Beirut from 14–16 March 2023, was chaired by the Republic of Yemen.

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 eight sessions were held in Amman (2014 and 2016), Manama (2015), Rabat (2017), Beirut (2018 and 2019), virtually in 2021, and in person and virtually in Beirut in 2022. 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 2022 Arab regional parliamentary forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Promoting climate action in the Arab region (Beirut, 29–30 December 2022); (2) The consultative meeting on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Solutions and action for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the light of the triple environmental crises facing the planet (in person and virtual, Beirut, 2 March 2023); and (3) The regional civil society forum on sustainable development (Beirut, 12–13 March 2023).<sup>2</sup>

4. In addition to the opening and closing sessions, the Forum’s programme of work included seven plenary sessions on the main theme of “Solutions and action” that touched on the five goals to be reviewed at the High-Level Political Forum. The sessions were as follows:

- High-level dialogue: Delivering the Sustainable Development Goals in partnership with the private sector
- Session 1: Data innovation for leaving no one behind
- Session 2: Planning and financing sustainable development in recovery and crises
- Session 3: Water security and accelerating action on Sustainable Development Goal 6
- Session 4: Just and inclusive energy transitions (Goal 7)

<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 (Doha, 13–15 December 2016); 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).

<sup>2</sup> The meeting was organized by the Arab NGO Network for Development.

- Session 5: Sustainable industrial development and rethinking supply chains (Goal 9)
- Session 6: New inclusive and sustainable pathways for cities (Goal 11)

5. The Forum included twelve specialized sessions that focused on priority themes for the Arab region: (1) Achieving food security through food system transformation: priorities and actions; (2) Moving forward on the learning-to-earning agenda in the Arab region; (3) The intergenerational effects of violence: the intersection of violence against women and violence against children in the Arab region; (4) More than a buzzword: how sustainable procurement drives sustainable development; (5) The role of renewable energy in accelerating recovery in fragile and crisis-affected countries; (6) Health preparedness in the Arab region: Sustainable Development Goal target 3d audit findings and proposed actions; (7) Climate security in the Arab States: lessons learned and scaling up; (8) Leaving no one behind: mainstreaming ageing in sustainable development; (9) Sustainable reconstruction: a framework for accelerating inclusive and sustainable recovery in the Arab region; (10) Addressing child food poverty in early childhood in the Arab region by mobilizing food, health and social protection systems; (11) Enabling the circular carbon economy: accelerating sustainable industry (cement, steel and chemicals) in the Arab region through solutions, innovation and cooperation; and (12) Inclusive climate adaptation and mitigation of human settlements in the Arab region.

6. The Forum's programme of work included a special event to announce the winners of the ESCWA Digital Arabic Content Award, a high-level roundtable on voluntary national reviews, and spotlight segments on nine effective and innovative non-governmental initiatives to support sustainable development in the Arab region.

7. 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 10 to 19 July 2023 on the theme: "Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels". The messages were formulated from the perspective of the Arab region, as a regional contribution reflecting the priorities of the region.

## **I. Key messages from the 2023 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development**

8. Following deliberations, Forum participants developed several messages aimed at accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda in general and the goals to be reviewed in particular. Following are the most significant messages:

### **Water security**

- Water security must be protected through the adoption and operationalization of the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems (WEFE) Nexus approach. It is important to increase local community participation in water management, build relevant capacities in government institutions, and mobilize investments in water infrastructure.
- Arab countries should take part in effective data and information exchange systems at the national and regional levels in order to monitor the availability, use and quality of water resources. Research centres should be established for transboundary water resources to collect, process and exchange data, conduct project feasibility studies, and research the impacts of climate change.

## **Energy**

- There should be a focus on renewable energy as a practical path for countries to reduce vulnerability to fluctuations in the fossil fuel market, live pollution, diversify economies, and take positive steps towards combating climate change and achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. Funding should be provided for research and ambitious and clear targets should be set for increasing the share of renewable sources in the energy mix.
- Support should be provided for the development of the energy sector by collaborating with banks and private companies to provide appropriate financial mechanisms to facilitate the financing of projects that might not otherwise be financed under existing banking considerations, especially small projects involving modern sustainable energy.
- Women's participation should be given priority in policy- and decision-making on the management of natural resources, including water and energy, at the local and national levels, and the relevant initiatives should be supported.

## **Industry and innovation**

- Governments should invest in industrial infrastructure, including industrial zones, access to transportation and electricity networks, with the aim of improving the competitiveness of Arab industrial sectors and linking them to regional and global value chains.

## **Cities**

- Decentralization and mobilization of local resources should be promoted and linked to local policies to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. That would help local government and authorities respond to people's needs and provide infrastructure and basic services.
- Efforts should be made to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level through local observatories for the environment and development. Disadvantaged and high-risk groups must be included in local policy making and data collection, including women, persons with disabilities and migrants.

## **Data**

- The national statistics bureaus of the Arab States should be encouraged to maintain the innovative data collection methods piloted during the COVID-19 lockdowns, including online and telephone surveys.
- Modern technology such as satellite images and big data should be used to support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, leaving no one behind, and reducing inequality between regions.
- Legal frameworks should be developed to improve data sharing, support open data, and ensure protection of privacy and confidentiality.

## **Financing**

- The international community should provide support to developing countries to help manage debt in a sustainable manner and facilitate access to concessional loans, including climate adaptation financing. Arab governments should lay out clear plans to establish finance governance and address misappropriation of public funds by implementing stringent anti-corruption measures and enhancing fiscal transparency and accountability.

### **The private sector**

- The private sector should be encouraged to invest in knowledge production, look into investment opportunities related to the Sustainable Development Goals (such as the circular economy and other social goods) and commit to transparent reporting on sustainability.
- Accountability mechanisms should be strengthened. Legal frameworks and social safeguards should be established to ensure that private sector interests are aligned with the public good and the playing field is level for companies investing in the Sustainable Development Goals. Such frameworks would serve as guardrails for a strong public-private partnership.
- Investments should be channelled into the private sector and public-private partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals should be strengthened. Governments should draw investment maps for the Goals and translate them into bankable projects. Central banks should take measures to take the risk out of such investments.

### **Youth**

- Digital education infrastructure should be invested in to ensure that Arab youth acquire the digital skills needed to keep pace with future developments.
- Students should be prepared for the future of work by integrating non-academic approaches that focus on people skills, communication, emotional intelligence, team building, leadership, problem solving, entrepreneurship and other skills into school and university curricula, including through scientific exchange programmes between institutions and countries.

### **Food security**

- Countries and stakeholders should collaborate, coordinate and strengthen partnerships to transform food systems to be more resilient, productive, equitable and sustainable in the light of conflicts, occupation, ongoing crises and waves of refugees in the region.
- Regional investment in Arab food systems should be promoted to achieve food security. That should include transfer of modern technologies, including the production of climate-adapted crops and efficient irrigation and energy techniques, to reduce dependence on food imports from outside the region and build resilience against price fluctuations, thus strengthening national and regional sovereignty.

### **Security and stability**

- Restoring peace and ending conflicts and occupation should be prioritized as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable human development. Transformative and inclusive governance should ensure that long-term decisions are in line with the principles of accountability, rule of law and responsiveness. Citizens' trust in state institutions must be strengthened.
- The reconstruction process must be used as an opportunity to build back better. Nature-based solutions, human-friendly urban design and digitalization must be central components of any new infrastructure. Job opportunities compatible with these changes must be created, the private sector must be empowered, and new forms of community engagement must be created.

- Gender equality standards must be promoted and discriminatory stereotypes broken. Programmes to reduce violence against women and children should be invested in, including child-rearing programmes and programmes that help adolescents manage risks, so as to break the cycle of intergenerational violence.

## II. Sessions and presentations

### A. Opening session

9. The opening session was addressed by: Rola Dashti, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA; Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States; Waed Abdullah Badhib, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation of the Republic of Yemen (in his capacity as Chair of the 2023 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development); and Amina Mohammed, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General. Their remarks addressed the region's development achievements and the challenges it faces. They stressed the need to reorder regional priorities, strengthen coordination and cooperation between countries, increase investments, and forge partnerships to bring about the desired change and push the region forward towards achieving sustainable and inclusive development.

10. As an introduction to the main issues to be discussed at the Forum, a documentary film was screened that highlighted some of the achievements of Arab countries since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and summarized the challenges that continue to stand in the way of sustainable development in the region. It stressed that there were solutions to all challenges and emphasized the importance of adopting an integrated development approach based on rights and knowledge that would strengthen partnerships among all groups, reorder priorities and redistribute available resources, with a focus on investing in human capital.

### B. Plenary sessions

#### High-level dialogue

#### **Delivering the Sustainable Development Goals in partnership with the private sector**

11. The dialogue was moderated by Maisaa Youssef, Cluster Leader, 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal Coordination, ESCWA. The special guest of the session was Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. Panellists included: Noha El-Mikawy, Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the American University in Cairo; Khaled Mahdi, Secretary-General, Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Kuwait; Helmy Abouleish, CEO, SEKEM, Egypt; Kinda Mohamadieh, Senior Researcher and Legal Advisor, Third World Network; Laila Al Hadhrami, Smart Cities Advisor, at RMA Advisory, Oman; and Aya Hrouf, Programme Director, Youth Innovation Forum, Jordan.

12. The discussion focused on the critical role of the private sector in closing the financing gap to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. It highlighted the importance of private sector investment in research, education and knowledge production, and the adoption of a social entrepreneurship approach as a template for increasing private-sector contributions to development. Panellists stressed the need for governments and international organizations to support green entrepreneurship initiatives in agricultural production by setting forth transparent agricultural carbon credit plans, establishing governance systems to make carbon credits more equitable for farmers, and facilitating small farmers' access to financial compensation for such

credits. Interventions stressed the need to strengthen public accountability mechanisms and legal frameworks as a prerequisite for expanding the role of the private sector in the development and harmonizing private interests with the public interest. Emphasis was also placed on the need for a genuine partnership among all actors (government, civil society and the private sector) to enable young people to launch social enterprises; a transparent legal framework for the establishment of social enterprises; facilitated access to finance; greater awareness of the importance of women's economic participation; and capacity-building and enhancement of people skills for young women and men.

### **Session 1**

#### **Data innovation for leaving no one behind**

13. The session was facilitated by Khalid Abu Khalid, Director-General of the Department of Records and Statistical Monitoring at the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Panellists included the following: Dorra Dhraief, Supervisor of the Department of Demographic and Social Statistics, National Statistics Institute, Tunisia; Muhammad Imran, Senior Scientist, Head of the Crisis Computing Division of the Qatar Computing Research Institute; Husameldeen Faroug, Director of Planning and Marketing at Sudatel Telecom Group; Hassan Al Lawati, Head of the National Program for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technologies at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Oman. Discussants included: Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

14. The session highlighted successes in the use of ICT for data collection by national statistics bureaus during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep household surveys going. It included discussions on institutional innovations to overcome obstacles to data sharing between public national agencies and other stakeholders, including the private sector, to support disaster risk reduction and prevention, promote data exchange, and disseminate a culture of open data while complying with privacy protection laws. Focus was placed on high-tech cost-effective data solutions to ensure that no one is left behind. The session concluded by highlighting the potential of high-tech methodological innovations to help bridge data gaps when traditional approaches cannot be used. Recommendations were made on investing in non-traditional data capacities, addressing the lack of financial and human resources available for that purpose, and using such data to guide decision-making processes.

### **Session 2**

#### **Planning and financing sustainable development in recovery and crises**

15. The session was moderated by Rayya Al Hassan, former Minister of Finance and former Minister of Interior and Municipalities, Lebanon. The keynote address was delivered by Mark Malloch Brown, President, Open Society Foundations. Panellists included: Said Mohammed Al Saqri, Minister of Economy, Oman; Taher Belhassan, Head of the Sustainable Development Committee, Ministry of Planning, Libya; Ahmed Kamaly, Deputy Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Egypt; Hiba Ahmed, Director General, Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development; Mahmoud Mohieldin, United Nations Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda.

16. Panellists stressed the importance of strengthening coordination between planning and financing processes in the region and focusing on increasing fiscal space to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and reduce inequality. Interventions highlighted the urgent need to contain the indebtedness crisis and ease borrowing conditions, even as governments accelerate the COVID-19 pandemic recovery process and cope with the repercussions of the climate crisis and the war in Ukraine.

Speakers also drew attention to innovations in public finance management to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals; efficiency gains through digitization of planning, monitoring and taxation processes; the use of blended finance to stimulate private capital to implement the Sustainable Development Goals; the use of debt swaps to help countries with high debt burdens; options for strengthening fiscal space in conflict-affected countries; the impact of tax increases on the middle class; and the need to increase transparency, enhance accountability and fight corruption.

### **Session 3**

#### **Water security and accelerating action on Sustainable Development Goal 6**

17. The session was moderated by Ali Karnib, Senior Water Expert and Professor of Engineering, Lebanese University, Lebanon. Panellists included: Shahira Wahbi, Director of Housing, Water Resources and Disaster Risk Reduction, League of Arab States; Mohamed Al-Hawri, Deputy Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen; Jihad Almahamid, Secretary-General, Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation, Jordan; Mohamed Ousama Al Akhrass, Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Water Resources, Syrian Arab Republic; Waleed Zubari, Professor of Water Resources Management, Arabian Gulf University, Bahrain; Mohannad Abouelrouse, Founder and CEO, Life from Water Foundation and co-founder and CEO, WaterWill, Egypt. Discussants included: Maria Selin, Head, Regional Development Cooperation MENA, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida); and Hans Peter van der Woude, Ambassador, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Lebanon.

18. The session assessed progress in implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6 in the region and presented innovative policy, financing and technical solutions to accelerate the provision clean water and sanitation for all. It addressed strategies to build resilience to crises, including through proactive water action plans. Participants highlighted policy solutions to address water scarcity in the region, including the use of non-conventional water resources, such as treated wastewater, and the adoption of water-efficient agricultural practices, such as hydroponics. They also focused on innovative financing instruments, such as build-operate-transfer contracts in public-private partnerships on large water infrastructure projects and carbon credits in sustainable irrigation, natural riverbank filtration and other small projects. They stressed the importance of strengthening the water-energy-food nexus as a basis for improved data collection and analysis and integrated policy development and action plans, as well as the need for greater transparency, enhanced accountability and inclusive participatory approaches that take into account the needs of all stakeholders, including women and persons with disabilities.

### **Session 4**

#### **Just and inclusive energy transitions (Goal 7)**

19. The session was moderated by Rabia Ferroukhi, Director of Knowledge, Policy, and Finance Centre, International Renewable Energy Agency. Panellist included: Princess Noura Bint Turki Al-Saud, Partner and co-founder, AEON Strategy, Saudi Arabia; Jamal Saghir, Professor, Institute for the Study of International Development, McGill University; Ramzi Abou Said, Managing Director, ASACO General Trade and Contracting, Lebanon; Mustafa Suliman Abdulhadi, Professor and Dean, Environmental and Natural Resources College, Wadi Alshatti University, Libya.

20. The session highlighted the performance of countries in the region on the key indicators of Sustainable Development Goal 7 on ensuring universal access to clean and affordable energy. Discussions resulted in recommendations on how the region can use resources to enable a fair and inclusive energy transition. Speakers stressed the role of technology and green economy interventions in the transition to clean

energy based on the principles of a circular carbon economy that would provide good jobs and help combat pollution. Such interventions could be financed through innovative mechanisms to mobilize financial resources, including climate/debt swaps. Speakers also emphasized the importance of involving the private sector in clean energy transitions, including through public procurement processes that stimulated ongoing interest in the sector, and through price signals that encouraged the adoption of clean energy. They also stressed the need for transformations to be inclusive and meet the needs of communities at risk of neglect to avoid deepening inequalities.

### **Session 5**

#### **Sustainable industrial development and rethinking supply chains (Goal 9)**

21. The session was moderated by Ali Awdeh, Head of Research and Studies, Union of Arab Banks, Lebanon. Panellists included: Nada Lachaal, General Manager, Industrial and Technology Infrastructure, Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy, Tunisia; Neemat Frem, Chair and CEO, INDEVCO Group, and Lebanese parliament member; Reem Albaghdadi, President, Jordan Forum for Business and Professional Women; Bernard Ghanem, Professor and Deputy Director of the AI Initiative, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, Saudi Arabia; and Kaltham Al-Ghanim, Professor of Sociology, Director of the Social and Economic Survey, Research Institute, Qatar University. The discussant was: Adel Darwish, Regional Director, ITU Arab Regional Office, Egypt.

22. The discussions covered various measures adopted by governments to face successive crises since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic with the aim of supporting the work of affected industrial companies, especially small and medium enterprises. Emphasis was placed on the effectiveness of partnerships established with the private sector and its representatives, such as chambers of commerce and industry. Participants warned against full dependence on the rentier economy, highlighted the need for an industrial sector that was flexible as the best choice for economic diversification, and stressed the importance of earnest action to increase industry as a proportion of GDP. In the course of the session, examples were given of industrial sectors that continued to operate and showed resilience to crises, such as food, chemical and pharmaceutical processing. The session also focused on the importance of adopting digital technology to automate the administrative processes of industrial companies, digitize supply chain operations, and mobilize resources for the adoption of fourth industrial revolution technologies, specifically artificial intelligence, which has begun to prove effective in improving the efficiency of the manufacturing process through by automating preventive maintenance, for example. The session stressed increasing the role of the private sector while adhering to the principles of sustainable development and avoiding natural resource depletion and environmental pollution, especially in the manufacturing industries.

### **Session 6**

#### **New inclusive and sustainable pathways for cities (Goal 11)**

23. The session was moderated by Maysoun Ibrahim, Palestinian Syndicate for Information Sciences and Technology. Panellists included: Yousef Al-Shawarba, Mayor of Greater Amman Municipality, Jordan; Fatima Amzil, Deputy Mayor of Agadir, Morocco; Mohammed Khashashneh, Secretary-General, Ministry of Environment, Jordan; Moataz Yeken, Managing Director, Wabel Consulting, Egypt. Discussants included: Rania Hedeya, Regional Representative a.i., UN-Habitat Regional Office for Arab States; Joseph Schechla, Coordinator, Habitat International Coalition; and Abir Saksouk, Co-Director, Public Works Studio, Lebanon.

24. The session highlighted inclusive and integrated governance frameworks at the city level as a prerequisite for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals at the

local level and addressing local priorities in an integrated manner to ensure that no one is left behind. Such local governance frameworks would promote evidence-based urban planning and improve economic and financial resilience in cities. They should be coupled with appropriate monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals at the city level through local environmental and development observatories. Discussions focused on the voluntary local review process as a tool to accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and an appropriate peer learning mechanism to support translation of the global vision for sustainable development into local action. Attention was drawn to decentralization mechanisms, including mobilization and allocation of local resources, to support governments and local authorities in providing services responsive to the needs of people in cities, and the need to deploy a circular economy at the local level to increase resilience to climate change and its impacts, reduce environmental damage, improve public health and well-being, and create new green jobs.

### C. Special sessions

25. At the Forum, 12 special sessions were held 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

##### **Achieving food security through food system transformation: priorities and actions**

26. The session was moderated by Mr. Rami Zreik, Professor at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. Speakers included: Nora Ourabah Haddad, Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Lebanon; Serge Nakouzi, Deputy FAO Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa. Panellists included: Reem Nejdawi, ESCWA official responsible for food and environment policies; Ibrahim El Dukheiry, Director of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development; Nada El Agizy, Director of Sustainable Development and International Cooperation, League of Arab States; Said Zarouali, Agriculture and Rural Development Programmes, High Commission for Planning, Morocco; Hasan Ashqar, Director-General of Planning and Policy, Ministry of Agriculture, State of Palestine; and Sylvia Ekra, Deputy Director of the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. Also taking part in the discussion were: Kamel Abdallah, CEO of Canal Sugar Company, Egypt; Fadi Jabr, Secretary General of the Arab Federation of Food Industries, Jordan; Fadi Gabr, Arab Federation for Food Industries, Jordan; and Darine Dogui, Director of Studies, Research, Analysis and Comparative Tests at the Tunisian National Institute for Consumer Affairs.

27. The session provided an opportunity to exchange views and experiences on policies and programmes to support the transformation of Arab food systems, and stressed the importance of promoting regional investment in those systems to achieve food security. Speakers advocated the transfer and use of technologies such as climate-resilient crops, efficient irrigation, and energy technologies that would help increase production, reduce dependence on food imports from outside the region, and enhance resilience to price volatility. They also stressed the need to broaden the focus of programmes and legislation in the region and strengthen governance to address the root causes of the fragility of the Arab food system, including through improving productivity and efficiency and reducing food loss and waste.

**Special session 2****Moving forward on the learning-to-earning agenda in the Arab region**

28. The session was moderated by Ghadi Bou Moussa, Reporter and News Anchor at MTV, Lebanon. Participants included: Mayada Adil, Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals, Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth; Mohamed A. Gawad Allam, Minister Plenipotentiary (Commercial), Head of Sector, Multilateral Cooperation (United Nations, international organizations and international, regional and Arab financial institutions), Ministry of International Cooperation, Egypt; Sherine Helmy, CEO, Pharco Pharmaceuticals; Amira Naji, Tunis Business School; Yaman Alsabek, Executive Director, Sanad Youth for Development Foundation, Syrian Arab Republic; Salim Araji, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, ESCWA; Nina Shami, Human Resources Manager for the Gulf and Middle East, Chevron, United Arab Emirates; and Anthony Fakhoury, Project and Research Analyst, Knowledge Project, UNDP. Also taking part was Said Elbanna, Director of the Center for Entrepreneurship and Professor of Management, Qatar University.

29. The discussion touched on elements that should be taken into account in accelerating the transition of young people from learning to work. Those included acting within an inclusive strategy and practical programmes, aligning educational skills with skills desirable for the labour market, achieving gender parity in educational opportunities, investing in forward-looking skills, and ensuring high-quality data on youth. The discussion also highlighted the importance of creating infrastructure for economic transformation to provide decent jobs for young people and take advantage of the fourth industrial revolution. Emphasis was placed on making the development of people skills part of school curricula, along with creative thinking, innovation and technology mechanisms; promoting the idea of lifelong learning among young people to better keep pace with the requirements of the labour market; taking effective steps to involve youth in the decision-making and solution-creating processes and give them the space and platforms to launch their own initiatives; facilitating access to finance for young entrepreneurs; and enhancing communication among the private sector, the research sector and universities, which are an essential source of innovative ideas and projects.

**Special session 3****The intergenerational effects of violence: the intersection of violence against women and violence against children in the Arab region**

30. This session was facilitated by Ghida Anani, Director and Founder of ABAAD, Lebanon. Participants included Najat Maalla M'jid, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children; Reem Alsalem, United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls; Alessandra Guedes, Chief of Gender and Development Research, Office of Research – Innocenti; Mohammed Meqdady, Secretary General of the National Council for Family Affairs, Jordan; Raed Ataya, Coordinator of the Manara Network and Coordinator of the Nabaa Programme, Lebanon; and Meryem Bhija, Head of the Women and Children Department of the High Commission for Planning, Morocco.

31. Speakers discussed the roots of violence against children and violence against women in stereotypes that feed gender-based discrimination, as well as the low status of children and women in society. They highlighted statistics indicating that more than half of the world's children had been physically, sexually or emotionally abused in the past year, and that at least one in three women globally experienced physical or sexual violence from a partner. These numbers underscore the urgent need to break the cycle of violence against children and women. The session emphasized the

importance of increasing government investment in collaborative solutions that ensure enforcement of laws, promote gender equality standards and intimate partner violence prevention programmes, and improve access to safe and responsive prevention support services; the importance of working to challenge and change harmful social norms and practices so that violence against children and women becomes unacceptable; and the need for governments to make greater efforts with regard to violence prevention programmes such as parenting programmes and programmes that help adolescents manage risks, which should be cross-sectoral, child-centred and gender-sensitive.

#### **Special session 4**

##### **More than a buzzword: how sustainable procurement drives sustainable development**

32. The session was moderated by Marcus McKay, Procurement Manager, United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). Speakers at the session included: Anne-Claire Howard, Director of the Procurement Service, UNOPS; Jocelyne Jabbour, Director of Procurement at the World Bank Office, Lebanon; Mario Jales, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCWA; and Vanja Ostajic, Chief of Procurement, International Labour Organization (ILO).

33. The session emphasized the importance of sustainable procurement as an enabler of sustainable development and as a private sector reform and guidance agenda. Participants highlighted how sustainable procurement can be used to facilitate dialogue, bring about behavioural change and change the thinking of institutions and individuals on implementing development initiatives. The discussion emphasized that sustainable procurement is a partnership among government, other development actors and the private sector that which can be realized through institutional reform, capacity development and the use of the private sector as a vehicle for change. It was also stressed that sustainable procurement was not a one-size-fits-all model and needed to be adjusted to fit local contexts. The reality of the private sector in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals in the region, including its poor performance on the environment, society and governance was stressed, as was the role of legal frameworks and government incentives as key drivers for aligning private sector work with the Sustainable Development Goals.

#### **Special session 5**

##### **The role of renewable energy in accelerating recovery in fragile and crisis-affected countries**

34. The session was moderated by Radia Sedaoui, Head of the Energy Section at ESCWA. Opening remarks were delivered by Tehmina Akhtar, Senior Strategic Adviser, Regional Bureau for Arab States of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Panellists included Mark Gibson, Operational Lead, Global Platform for Action, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR); Hamzeh Yasin, Regional Programme Manager, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida); Talal Barakati, National Officer, UNHCR; Hazir ElHaj, professor, researcher and independent consultant, Sudan University of Science and Technology; and Hassan Moaz, Electrical Engineer, Rafic Hariri University Hospital, Lebanon.

35. The session highlighted solutions to address energy poverty among vulnerable populations and in situations of conflict and violence, with particular reference to displaced persons. Emphasis was placed on the importance of capacity-building and community participation in identifying new technologies best suited to serve as a basis for the long-term feasibility of projects and business models. The discussion stressed the need to use innovative financing mechanisms and develop enabling

policies and legal frameworks to encourage public-private partnerships and unlock sustainable finance. Options were addressed for local investments in renewable energy that should be explored and tailored to local conditions, including off-grid and microgrid power generation, and pay-as-you-go solutions.

### **Special session 6**

#### **Health preparedness in the Arab region: Sustainable Development Goal target 3d audit findings and proposed actions**

36. The session was moderated by Jana El Baba, Sustainable Development Officer, ESCWA 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal coordination group. Panellists included Housseem Eddine Guezzi, Rapporteur of the Sustainable Development Goal Auditing Committee of the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions; Loubna Slaoui, Magistrate, Supreme Court of Audit, Morocco; Rajaa Mohamed Hassan Sayed Ahmed, Director, Performance Review Department, National Audit Chamber, Sudan; Ziad El Khatib, Assistant Director of Studies, Central Organization for Financial Control, Syrian Arab Republic; Taghreed El Alam, Director of Public Relations, Training and Rehabilitation at the same organization; Arshana Shirsat, Deputy Director General, Professional Competence Department, International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions; Dalia Samhouri, Regional Manager, Emergency Preparedness and International Health Regulations Programme at WHO, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

37. The session highlighted the performance and preparedness of the region's national public health systems in health emergencies and their capacity to leave no one behind. It offered an opportunity for the financial audit institutions of Morocco, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic to review the main results of their audits of Sustainable Development Goal target 3d on strengthening capacities for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks. A set of recommendations was arrived at that included the development and updating of appropriate legislative frameworks for the management of health emergencies; the establishment and periodic assessment of early warning systems to respond to disasters and mitigate risks; the operationalization and institutionalization of multisectoral coordination mechanisms among all stakeholders to respond to health emergencies and build partnerships among relevant parties; leadership by ministries of health of the communication process during health emergencies in cooperation with media networks; the provision of trained health personnel, the relevant sustainable financial resources and capacity-building to ensure the high-quality and inclusive health care services; the engagement of communities in health risk assessments and the design of response programmes; and continued auditing of the functioning of health systems by oversight bodies in Arab countries, with stakeholders encouraged to become involved and engage with the results.

### **Special session 7**

#### **Climate security in the Arab States: lessons learned and scaling up**

38. The session was moderated by Nuran Atef, Regional Coordinator for Africa and the Middle East, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Finance Initiative, Egypt. Speakers included Nada El Agizi, Director of Sustainable Development and International Cooperation at the League of Arab States; Amel Azab, Project Coordinator of the Sustainable Development Goal Climate Facility: Climate Action for Human Security in the Arab States at the Arab Water Council, Egypt; Oscar Ekdahl, Director of the Livelihoods and Resilience Division, Regional Office for the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia and Eastern Europe, World Food Programme; and Ms. Paola Pagliani, Regional Programme Coordinator, UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States, Jordan; Ms. Dena Assaf, United Nations Resident Coordinator, United

Arab Emirates; Maria Selin, Head of Regional Development Cooperation for the Middle East and North Africa at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida); Nadim Farajallah, Director of the Climate Change and Environment Program at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon; and Wadid Erian, Senior Advisor for Sustainable Development, League of Arab States.

39. The discussion emphasized that dialogue between the sectors and policy-makers working on the basis of research and evidence could enable the design and implementation of scalable climate solutions in Arab States, including countries in crisis; and that the twenty-eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 28) would be an important platform for further advocacy of such dialogues. The discussion addressed the central role of the private sector in climate action, and the role of tailored climate solutions that can serve as an effective revenue model in reducing risks to private sector investments in climate and in addressing many major development challenges. It was also emphasized that reducing climate investment risk is crucial to stimulating private investment and increasing the benefits to target communities in the region.

### **Special session 8**

#### **Leaving no one behind: mainstreaming ageing in sustainable development**

40. The session was moderated by Sarah Salman, Population Affairs Officer, ESCWA. Participants included: Ismail Lubbad, Population and Development Adviser, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Arab States Regional Office; Nabil Kronfol, Regional Expert on Ageing Issues, Lebanon; Samar Al-Sibai, head of the Syrian Commission for Family and Population Affairs; Sawsan Mohammad Sa'ada, Regional Director, HelpAge International, Jordan; and Imran Riza, United Nations Deputy Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator.

41. The session highlighted the need to respond effectively to ageing as an emerging priority issue in the Arab region and ensure that older persons are not neglected in development efforts. The session included a presentation on ageing patterns in the Arab countries and speakers addressed the importance of integrating older persons' issues into development policies, with an emphasis on adopting a life-cycle approach in strategic planning. Speakers touched on the challenges faced by older persons and some countries shared their experiences in responding to the needs of older persons in various areas of life, and enhancing their access to services and opportunities, including in times of crisis and war. The meeting also discussed how to enhance the image of the elderly, empower them, maximize the use of their knowledge and contribution to society, and ways to provide opportunities for the exchange of experiences between generations. The meeting concluded with a number of key messages, most notably a call for the adoption of a binding international convention on the rights of older persons and the mainstreaming of the human rights approach in relevant policies and programmes to ensure them a decent life and preserve their dignity.

### **Special session 9**

#### **Sustainable reconstruction: a framework for accelerating inclusive and sustainable recovery in the Arab region**

42. The session was moderated by Ms. Nagwa Lachine, Programme Officer, UN-Habitat Regional Office for Arab States. Speakers included: Rania Hedeya, Regional Representative a.i. of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) Regional Office for Arab States; Fumiko Fukuoka, Partnerships and Communications Adviser, Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP; Renata Rubian, Policy Adviser on Inclusive Growth, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS), UNDP; Ahmed Riad, Co-chair of the ARISE Network for Disaster Risk

Reduction, United Arab Emirates; Abdi Abdullah, Manager of Fragility and Resilience Department, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB); Naim Hassan, Deputy Secretary-General, Ministry of Transport, Jordan; Muhammad Sayed, Manager of the Regional and Local Development Division, Ministry of Planning, Iraq; and Gonzalo Pizarro, Regional Policy Adviser and Team Lead on Sustainable Development Goal Integration, UNDP Regional Hub for the Arab States.

43. The discussion centred on the importance of starting to consider the reconstruction process at the outset of any response to a crisis, since basic infrastructure and services are vital requirements for human well-being and social cohesion. Attention was paid to response mechanisms, which should be comprehensive and coordinated, take into account all sectors and times, and ensure a continuous flow of resources with a view to leaving no one behind. Speakers stressed that sustainable reconstruction should reflect the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, which offers an approach that strikes a balance between urgent humanitarian needs and long-term sustainable development that can contribute to building peace and stability. They stressed the importance of seizing the opportunities offered by the process, which include the delivery of nature-based solutions, human-centred urban design, digitization of new infrastructure, creation of suitable employment opportunities, empowerment of the private sector, and creation of new forms of community participation.

#### **Special session 10**

##### **Addressing child food poverty in early childhood in the Arab region by mobilizing the food, health, and social protection systems**

44. The session was moderated by Hicham Jadaoun. Opening remarks were delivered by Ettie Higgins, UNICEF Deputy Representative in Lebanon; Serge Nakouzi, FAO Deputy Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa; Christoph Hamelmann, Chef de Cabinet, WHO Regional Director's Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; and Kate Newton, Deputy Regional Director, WFP Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa. Speakers included Lara Nasreddine, Professor of Human Nutrition, American University of Beirut; Noha Salheen, Director of the Department of Nutrition, Federal Ministry of Health, Sudan; Karima Al-Hada'a, Planning and Communication Specialist at the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Secretariat, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen; Nazia Habib, Associate Professor at the Centre for Resilience and Sustainable Development, University of Cambridge; and Atef El-Shitany, Advisor to the Minister of Social Solidarity, Egypt.

45. The session highlighted the child food poverty crisis in the Arab region. Discussions took note that 27 million children under the age of five suffer from food poverty in the Middle East and North Africa region, and that one in four children (10 million children) under the age of five suffers from severe food poverty. The session touched on key areas of action to address this crisis, including reforming food systems to provide nutritious and affordable food for families with young children; leveraging health systems to provide basic nutrition services to young children and their mothers, with priority given to those most vulnerable to food poverty; and developing protection systems that respond to the food and nutrition needs of the most vulnerable children and families.

**Special session 11****Enabling the circular carbon economy: accelerating sustainable industry (cement, steel and chemicals) in the Arab region through deployment, innovation and cooperation**

46. The session was moderated by Radia Sedaoui, Head of the Energy Section at ESCWA. Opening remarks were delivered by Princess Mashael Saud Alshalan, Founding Partner, AEON Collective, Saudi Arabia. Panellists included: Fadhl Zayed Fadhl Ahmed, Projects Engineer, Emirates Steel Arkan; Mohamed Salaheldin Ahmed, General Manager, Sidi Kerir Petrochemicals Company (SIDPEC), Egypt; Nael Alhosami, General Director, Amman Chamber of Industry, Jordan; Faisal Al Qurooni, Senior Specialist, Ministry of Energy, Saudi Arabia; Soufiane Hsina, Business Development Manager, Ciments Du Maroc, Morocco; Stefan Buettner, Chair of the Group of Experts on Energy Efficiency, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE); and Rana Ghoneim, Chief, Energy Systems and Infrastructure Unit, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

47. The session highlighted the means being used to implement circular carbon economy principles in the region in order to increase industrial sustainability and efficiency in an equitable manner. Participants noted the need to decarbonize energy-intensive industries such as cement, steel and chemical production to enable a fair and inclusive transition to sustainability and to build local capacity and develop green skills through job retraining and vocational education for youth to accelerate economic growth. The discussion stressed the importance of international cooperation and partnerships, including initiatives to accelerate the deployment of advanced technologies in the region. It also stressed the importance of green finance and government policies and regulations to encourage industries to adopt circular models of production and consumption; green procurement processes that enable the creation of forward-looking markets for low-carbon industrial products; and a circular carbon economy framework suitable for sectors resistant to decarbonization to close gaps and draw the private sector into addressing the triple planetary crisis.

**Special session 12****Inclusive climate adaptation and mitigation of human settlements in the Arab region**

48. The session was moderated by Amal Charif, Director of HalTek, Lebanon. Opening remarks were delivered by Tehmina Akhtar, Senior Strategic Adviser, Regional Bureau for Arab States of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Panellists included Louay Fallouh, Project Manager, Disability Inclusion, UNDP, Syrian Arab Republic; Ayman Zohri, Expert on migration and forced migration, Egypt; Reham Jammal, Mayor's Consultant for Development and International Relations, Greater Irbid Municipality, Jordan; Malak Aljadaan, member of Jordan Inclusivity Youth Council, Jordan; Sophie Mansour, sustainable landscape management specialist, Green Plan, Ministry of Agriculture, Lebanon; and Maya Nehme, Director of Lebanese Reforestation Initiative, Lebanon.

49. The session drew attention to cases of forced displacement and migration that would be caused by sea-level rise, drought and flooding in the coming years. It emphasized the need to pay close attention to inclusion, equity and a rights-based approach to adaptation strategies for human settlement and relief and reconstruction strategies, as well as investments connected with the green transition; and proactive and inclusive protection against disasters and crises with assistance that responds to the increasing demands of development. For example, inclusive municipal planning could offer effective solutions such as rainwater collection and reuse of treated wastewater. Agricultural terrace construction, reforestation and sustainable land use

could be key solutions at national levels. The discussions emphasized the need to involve the most vulnerable groups in the policy planning and implementation process at all levels to ensure inclusive climate adaptation and mitigation measures.

## **D. Special events**

50. The Forum included a special event on the ESCWA Digital Arabic Content, as well as a high-level roundtable on voluntary national reviews.

### **ESCWA Digital Arabic Content Award**

51. This session was dedicated to announcing the winners of the ESCWA Digital Arabic Content Award in its second cycle for 2022–2023. It was organized by ESCWA in partnership with the World Summit Awards. This award is given to the best digital Arabic content products related to the Sustainable Development Goals in two categories: (1) the “Institutions” category, which could be institutions from the public or private sector, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, or civil society organizations; and (2) the “Young Entrepreneurs” category, which could be formal start-ups, youth teams and individuals under the age of 35.

52. The session began with an introductory film about the award and the judging mechanism and stages. That was followed by speeches by Manar Al-Hashash, member of the ESCWA Digital Arabic Content Award Steering Committee and Member of the Global Council of the World Summit Awards, Kuwait, and Alain Daou, Associate Professor of Entrepreneurship, American University of Beirut. The winners in the Institutions category were: Agrogatemasr (Egypt), IoT Kids Platform (Iraq), Learn Arabic Alphabet (Algeria), Syrian Researchers (Syria Arab Republic), and Unified Arabic Braille Portal (Qatar). The winners in the Young Entrepreneurs category were: AlQalam (Egypt), Martha EDU (Jordan) and Therappy (Qatar).

### **High-level round table on voluntary national reviews**

53. The session was moderated Mahmoud Ataya, Director-General, Prime Minister’s Office, State of Palestine. Panellists included representatives of States that would be presenting voluntary national reviews in 2023. They included: Khaled Mahdi, Secretary-General, Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Kuwait; Youssouf Ali Mmadi, official in charge of macroeconomic programmes, General Planning Commission, Comoros; Fadlullah Gharzuldin, Deputy Chair, Planning and International Cooperation Commission, Syrian Arab Republic; Faisal Hammad, Assistant Under-Secretary, Division of Competitiveness and Economic Indicators, Ministry of Finance and National Economy, Bahrain; and Yara Sindi, Head of Data and Research Department, Ministry of Economy and Planning, Saudi Arabia. Interventions were followed by a commentary from Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

54. Speakers shared some of the key messages from their 2023 voluntary national reviews. They also highlighted the importance of voluntary national reviews as a tool to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and mobilize partnerships. Interventions made clear that States were trying to make reviews national rather than governmental. All actors were included, including civil society, the private sector and local actors. Information was collected on the contributions of those actors to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which contributed to raising awareness of and engagement with the 2030 Agenda. It is anticipated that the reviews will reflect major successes in the countries in question, diagnose major challenges to implementation, and identify next steps. Speakers

pointed to the significant improvement in the availability of Sustainable Development Goal data, which would help to design evidence-based national policies.

## E. Spotlights

55. The first spotlight focused on women's entrepreneurship. Ms. Rania Ayman, Founder and CEO of Entreprenelle, Egypt, spoke about the goal of that social enterprise, which supports start-ups headed by women in various fields, including fashion, marketing and financial management, by providing accelerator programmes, courses, business incubators, and consulting and mentorship services. It also provides funding opportunities.

56. In the second spotlight, Mr. Mohamed Zeid, Founder and Director of LYBOTICS, Libya introduced that initiative, which aims to provide school children between the ages of 12 and 18 with access to a STEM-based education programme through the use of robotics applications. The initiative is being implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education and the private sector. It tries to empower children through various activities, including by challenging them to find solutions to pressing national, regional or global problems.

57. The third spotlight focused on sustainable business. Marianne Itani, Director of Sustainability at Beesline Apitherapy, Lebanon, spoke about the company's wild bee conservation programme, through which the company is trying to offset carbon emissions, raise customers' and schoolchildren's awareness of the importance of wild bees, and protect endangered wild bees by funding a three-year field research project on the subject.

58. The fourth spotlight had to do with combating sexual harassment. Ms. Reem El-Mograby, Director of Institutional Equity at the American University in Cairo, talked about the SpeakUp initiative, which aims to raise awareness about harassment through mandatory training sessions for students and staff, a series of dialogues on sexual harassment, and encourage victims to report incidents.

59. The fifth spotlight focused on climate action. Hala al-Shooaha, Senior Programme Officer at Generations For Peace, Jordan, presented the organization's experience in reducing its carbon footprint to zero; engaging and empowering young people to lead effective climate action within their communities through the UNICEF-funded Youth Climate Action (SAWN); providing a media programme, Generation 01, for young people to share their stories about climate change; and drafting a policy paper to reach decision-makers.

60. The sixth spotlight focused on a fair and inclusive transition to clean energy. Hazir Farouk Abdelraheem Elhaj, Associate Professor, Sudan University of Science and Technology, spoke about the Technology Business Incubator initiative, which aims to promote the transfer and development innovations related to clean energy technologies and support entrepreneurs in this field by enhancing knowledge and eliminating factors that limit the marketing of such technologies. She drew attention to the mobile biogas programme, which is designed to meet family needs for cooking fuel and lighting in areas where traditional energy is difficult to access.

61. The seventh spotlight dealt with securing decent housing for vulnerable communities. Ahmed Zaaza, co-founder and co-coordinator of 10 Tuba Group for Urban Studies and Applications, Egypt, spoke about the company's work, which includes efforts to increase the proportion of families in disadvantaged communities living in decent housing by raising awareness and producing knowledge on issues such as affordability, urban reform, public spaces and transportation, services, and through participatory planning.

62. The eighth spotlight focused on supporting young entrepreneurs. Loor Masri, co-founder, LaCom Magazine for Youngpreneurs, Palestine, spoke about the magazine, which targets young men and women, and publishes content digitally in Arabic under nine different categories to help them manage their business and work intelligently. One category is successful young entrepreneurs, which provides specialized articles about their achievements to help disseminate them widely, open up possibilities for expansion, and encourage them to continue to be creative and innovative. It also includes a category concerned with the field of fashion in the business world, promoting sustainable fashion, and reducing the consumption of environmentally harmful fast fashion.

63. In the ninth spotlight, Randa al Chidiac, committee member, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Middle East and North Africa Regional Division, spoke about the Computer Literacy Club initiative launched by the Erriadh Public Library in Djerba, Tunisia. The initiative aims to help women and school dropouts develop their digital skills and enhance their job prospects by introducing participating women to the basics of computing and use of the Internet, social media platforms and other skills, which encourages them to become self-reliant.

## **F. Closing session**

64. In closing, the Chair of the Forum, Waed Abdallah Badhib, thanked ESCWA, its partners, the League of Arab States and the United Nations system operating in the region for organizing the Forum. He stressed that the Republic of Yemen would undertake to convey the messages of the Forum to the High-Level Political Forum to be held in New York in July 2023.

65. In a recorded statement, Lachezara Stoeva, President of the Economic and Social Council, spoke about development progress made since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and remaining challenges, and the importance of implementing transformations and structural changes to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

66. Mounir Tabet, ESCWA Deputy Executive Secretary thanked the Republic of Yemen for chairing the Forum. He also expressed gratitude to all the participants and partners who contributed to the success of the Forum for sharing ideas, experiences and solutions, and for committing to working to achieve equitable sustainable development in the region.

## **III. Participants**

67. Some 1,323 participants (407 in person at the United Nations House in Beirut and 916 virtually online) 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, supreme audit institutions, funds in the Arab region, a number of media organizations, and the organizing entities, namely, United Nations agencies and organizations operating in the Arab region, the League of Arab States and ESCWA.

68. Twenty-two Arab States attended, represented either in person or virtually, by delegations from Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, 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.

69. The United Nations was represented by the Deputy Secretary-General, the President of the Economic and Social Council and representatives of FAO, ILO, the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNEP, the United Nations Population Fund, UN-Habitat, UNICEF, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, WHO, WFP, the United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, UNECE, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Telecommunication Union, the Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the Disarmament Commission, UNIDO, UNITAR, UNOPS, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, United Nations Volunteers, and a large number of United Nations resident coordinators from Arab countries.

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