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Arab Regional Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda: The impact of COVID-19 on SDG implementation and the role of parliaments

Online, 26 November 2020

Information note

I. BACKGROUND

The current global health crisis is an unprecedented wake-up call that has revealed how crucial it is for countries to have policy and legislation that ensure preparedness and prevention. The socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are uncovering stark asymmetries and structural unbalances in societies. In the Arab region, the COVID-19 pandemic poses additional challenges to an already faltering progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While some Arab countries have been hit harder by the pandemic than others, its impact will be felt in the region for years to come on the different dimensions of development. Therefore, the response needed should not only recognize the interlinkages between the economic, social and environmental dimensions but most of all, it should be aligned with the SDGs.

In the period before the pandemic, the action to deliver on the SDGs was not advancing at the speed required, despite progress on some fronts. Now that most financial resources will be likely absorbed by emergency response, the realization of the SDGs by 2030 may be in danger if national economic recovery plans are not aligned with the 2030 Agenda.

Against this backdrop, parliamentarians have a crucial role to play in ensuring that the policies and measures adopted to contain the spread of the pandemic and respond to its socio-economic impact are responsive to the needs and priorities of their constituents and protect the most vulnerable amongst them. They are also responsible for overseeing the work of the executive and scrutinizing the use of public finances, even if the executive is granted emergency powers to ensure swift and effective delivery. Despite the fragile state-society relations and low public trust of the state in the region, the public continue to look to their governments to ensure their wellbeing and provide solutions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on different sectors and groups. The role of parliaments during crisis is therefore necessary not only to legislate related laws as necessary but also to ensure that the democratic values of governance are upheld, inequalities are combated, the rights of the population are preserved, and social cohesion is strengthened.

Parliaments across the Arab region have engaged in the response to the pandemic. In addition to adopting innovative solutions to ensure the well-being of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, and sustain function during the pandemic, such as holding virtual sessions and adopting tele-working modalities, parliaments have passed laws to address the repercussions of the pandemic, amended emergency laws, and called upon governments to support the social groups worst affected by the pandemic. Some parliaments established ad-hoc committees to help combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the adoption of the Decade of Action, parliaments should hold governments accountable for the goals they have subscribed to. Parliaments should also be able to influence policies and budgets so as to ensure that the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery strategies incorporate the SDGs as a framework in a comprehensive manner.

II. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

A. OBJECTIVE OF THE 2020 FORUM

The Forum, to be held as an online webinar, will offer a unique space to provide parliaments with up-to-date information on the status of SDGs implementation, and recommendations to accelerate transformative change in the region. Parliamentarians will have the opportunity to exchange and discuss common challenges as well as strategies that they could implement to contribute to the realization of the SDGs by 2030 despite the current hurdles. More importantly, the webinar will adopt a forward-looking approach, focusing on what is needed to enhance the capacity of parliaments to ensure that crises response and recovery efforts are more inclusive and aligned with the SDGs.

The Forum will be jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB). It build on previous joint events targeting parliamentarians in the region; namely, the [Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda](#) organized by ESCWA, UNDP and IsDB in collaboration with IPU in 2019 and the [Regional Seminar for Parliamentarians on 2030 Agenda](#) organized by ESCWA, UNDP and IsDB in 2017.

B. DISCUSSION TOPICS

The following topics are proposed for discussion:

- a) key findings of the Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020 including progress towards achieving the SDGs in the region and the main challenges.
- b) means to strengthen parliament's role in crisis response through examining challenges faced in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and reforms required to overcome them.
- c) the role of parliaments in achieving the SDGs within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic covering the most pressing priorities and opportunities for parliamentary action, changes needed to strengthen the parliament's role, and turning crisis into opportunity to deliver on sustainable development.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL AND LOGISTICAL DETAILS

A. DATE AND VENUE

The Forum will be held as an online webinar on 26 November 2020. Connection details will be shared with registered participants.

B. WORKING LANGUAGES

Arabic and English are the working languages of the Parliamentary Forum. Simultaneous interpretation for both languages as well as French will be provided.

C. PARTICIPANTS AND REGISTRATION

The Parliamentary Forum targets parliamentarians from Arab countries, including representatives from upper and lower houses and parliamentary staff, whose work is directly related to the forum topics. Participants will also include experts from regional and international organizations. To confirm attendance, please complete the online registration form before **19 November 2020** by [clicking here](#).

D. CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence regarding logistical arrangements should be addressed as follows:

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