Messages from Civil Society to the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2018 and the High Level Political Forum 2018

(Agreed upon during the Regional CSO Meeting on Sustainable Development, held in Beirut on 22 and 23 April 2018, and presented at the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, 26-24 April 2018)

1. Achieving peace and security and safeguarding the unity of states in the Arab Region is a priority, in accordance with the political declaration by the UN, which links development and peace, in the framework of international law and governed by the UN System.

2. Providing services and protection for refugees in countries of refuge (the region contains %46 of the global refugee population) and working towards their safe return to their original places of residence according to international law.

3. Respecting national policy space, including economic and social policies, as a component of the right to development, and implementing governing standards and monitoring frameworks for commitments, in a manner that enhances national ownership of policies, particularly under the political conditions imposed in the framework of development cooperation.

4. Adopting a new development paradigm based on a human rights approach and shifting from unproductive rentier economies to real productive economies that depend on value-added sectors generating decent jobs, while adopting redistribution policies to reverse inequalities, social polarization and marginalization.

5. Adopting comprehensive and rights-based social protection systems, based on social protection floors, which should also include refugees, displaced persons, and migrant workers.

6. Adopting comprehensive national integrity systems that guarantee the principles of good governance and fighting corruption, in the state's legislative, judiciary, and executive pillars, in addition to independent bodies, civil society, the media, and the private sector. This includes regulating the relationship between those sectors and enacting laws guaranteeing a comprehensive approach to participation, accountability, transparency, and disclosure. culture of violence and exclusion.

7. Granting due importance to addressing the cultural foundations for discrimination against women in our societies and in public policies, and protecting women, especially in times of war and conflict, while fighting the culture of violence and exclusion.

8. Providing an enabling safe environment for the civil society to practice its role freely and independently, and developing legislation that achieves that, including the right to access information and the right of freedom of expression, and institutionalizing its effective participation on the national level, in the Arab League, and in other regional and international institutions.

9. Establishing an Arab fund for sustainable human development (including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), and setting mechanisms for funding it through Arab sources, such as regional taxes on the use of natural resources (oil and gas), and financial speculations between countries.

10. Adopting an inclusive non-discriminatory development framework based on rights principles consolidated by international conventions, particularly the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the rights of other groups excluded from the developmental process, and taking appropriate measures to put said framework into practice.

11. Committing to the requirements of sustainability at the national, regional, and international levels and by the private sector, while respecting the state's sovereignty over its natural resources and right to adopt sustainable policies that guard the rights of future generations.

12. Adopting binding standards for human rights that hold the private sector accountable for its practices and responsible for its part in development, as part of the international effort to implement "a binding treaty on human rights and business."

13. Implementing the recommendation of the Doha Meeting 2016 and the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2017 on identifying a specific set of goals and objectives that reflect regional priorities, to form an immediate work program for development parties in the Arab region. The civil society is prepared to work on implementing this recommendation in partnership with all stakeholders.

The Regional Meeting for CSOs on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region
The Reality of Development in the Arab Region: Challenges and Recommendations
Outcome Document

● First: General Introduction

While work was ongoing on achieving the Millennium Goals, the world witnessed unprecedented economic and financial crises, and a surge in inequality and poverty levels, in addition to numerous risks pertaining to natural resources and climate change. The Arab world, in particular, has witnessed since the end of 2010 a political and popular movement that stemmed out from the need to achieve social justice, political participation, dignity, political and personal rights, and the need to end all forms of oppression, discrimination, and exclusion on the basis of political, religious, ethnic, or economic affiliation, or on the basis of gender, age, or disability.

From the onset of discussions on the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, civil society organizations (CSOs) and their regional and national networks participated in many regional and international initiatives in partnership with various parties, such as the offices and programs of national and regional UN agencies, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and the Arab League, in an endeavour to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs), specify the priorities of the Arab region, and include the Arab civil society in the development process.

These forums recommended that the 2030 Agenda should launch from a rights-based approach that places social justice, equality, diversity and inclusion at its core, and pay attention to the structural impediments in the global economic and trade systems. They also called for taking into consideration the political and cultural dimensions as pivotal components of the concept of sustainable human development, much like the other economic, social, and environmental dimensions. These two dimensions must be included in national, regional, and global development strategies.

The Regional CSO Meeting on Sustainable Development was held in preparation for the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development 2018 at the initiative of the following organizations: the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR), the Arab Trade Union Confederation, the Arab Forum for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Arab Network for Democratic Elections, the Arab Network for Environment and Development, the Arab branch of Habitat International Coalition, and the Arab branch of Transparency International. The meeting was organized with the support of ESCWA, and attended by over fifty organizations from the civil society, and about sixty-five participants and experts, as well as numerous UN organizations (World Health Organization, United Nations Development Program, UN Women, and ESCWA). The meeting was a crucial preparatory step prior to the Arab High Level Forum on Sustainable Development, which will witness the participation of Arab governments, Arab League, and the UN system in the Arab region.

● Second: Challenges Facing the Arab Region

Mammoth challenges continue to face development in the Arab region, some of which are linked to the global situation and the power balance of the global political economy, while others relate to regional ties, or the nature of the Arab neo-patrimonial states, rentier economies, and corruption of the governance system. On top of that, the region suffers from crises, armed conflicts, occupation, and political instability. Although one cannot offer a comprehensive presentation of all these challenges, the following paragraphs highlight the most important ones and the most relevant to the topic of the meeting, from the point of view of participating CSOs.

1. Peace and Security

Wars and armed conflicts are not new to the Arab region. After all, the region has the longest surviving colonialism in modern history, that is the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, which continues to adopt expansion policies and continues to encroach upon human rights and international law. This occupation of an entire people's land is a gross violation of the right to self-determination. It is made worse by the adoption of occupying authorities of apartheid and siege policies, as well as aggressive expansion policies that disrupt peace and stability in the entire region. These policies violate the right of the Palestinian people and all other peoples in the region for development. On the other hand, a number of countries that passed through political and institutional transformations faced after 2011 serious political and security setbacks that caused humanitarian catastrophes and had devastating repercussions on countries, people, and development. Henceforth, we do

not believe that crises, wars, peace, and stability in the Arab region can be dealt with in a manner that ignores the difference in their nature and actors, and dismisses the fact that these wars and conflicts constitute an organic component of the international scene and are caused by geostrategic and economic interests of major countries or countries that are internationally and regionally active and directly responsible for the rise, price, and continuity of said conflicts. Alternatively, we do not consider conflicts and wars to be separate from the socio-economic and cultural regimes that fueled or produced them, which are internal factors and dynamics. Thus, it is essential to reconsider the development and governance paradigms adopted in the Arab region, or those that will be adopted in the future, and to seriously contemplate new models as well as rearrange relations with the surrounding and the international system, particularly in countries where construction and reconstruction projects are being discussed, which carry with them the risk of replicating the same problems and crises as before, if not bringing about more serious ones.

Speaking of crises and wars, one must note that there has been a shift in the rhetoric of global organizations towards focusing on the concept of resilience. This concept refers to the ability of communities to adapt, learn, and endure during times of crisis and trauma. This common concept of resilience is based on a neoliberal approach that places the weight of the responsibility on the shoulders of the victims of conflict to adapt with the situation, without seeking to address the causes and sources of these crises. This approach represents a retreat from the rights-based approach, as it absolves those who caused the conflict or fueled its continuity from responsibility and accountability, and deals with crises as matters of fate or natural disasters that one must acclimate to. Thus, it is crucial to keep the rights approach at the core of the development rhetoric for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and not recoil from it. It is equally pivotal not to adopt partial approaches that proved their futility in achieving development, or addressing the causes of crises, or even avoiding the risk of their recurrence.

2. Economic Challenges in Light of Conflicts

It is no longer sufficient to criticize Arab economies as rent economies, as many of these economies have morphed into "war economies" (the entire Arab region has to some extent). This is either a direct or indirect result of wars and crises, which bring about an increase in military expenditure, a restructuring of national expenditure priorities, a change in the nature and size of economic activity, a disruption of economic mechanisms, and restrictions on citizens› freedoms and rights. This includes, in one way or another, states that are not directly involved in crises and armed conflicts, but live in fear of getting involved in regional crises. These crises limit the state's ability to expand productive economy, and force it to adopt austerity policies at the expense of social and developmental priorities. This qualitative transformation gives rise to organized groups whose interests are vested in the continuation of war and conflicts, and aim to disrupt any political settlement. Over the years, they transform into organized groups of economic and political interests that impose their agenda over the conflict resolution and reconstruction agenda, in stark contrast to the development and rights approaches.

Therefore, it is necessary for discussions on the 2030 Agenda to address means to mend this aspect, in the context of developing alternatives to austerity policies that embrace the reality of Arab states while taking into consideration the rights approach of the required development   paradigm.

The old development paradigm, modeled after the conventional neoliberal prototype adopted for decades in regional countries even after the Arab Spring, proved to be unsustainable and incapable of achieving welfare and stability for the people of the region. Accordingly, it is imperative to reflect on a new paradigm for societal organization, economic structures, and political and constitutional institutions that can achieve sustainable development and peace. In this regard, the building and reconstruction process in countries that almost had their entire social fabric destroyed along with their ties, institutions, and resources, should not transform into a mere opportunity for investing in reconstruction and infrastructure projects; it should not be dealt with as a profitable investment opportunity for global mega-corporations. These countries, starting from Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and Somalia (which are the most tragic cases) need first and foremost a political resolution that takes into account international law and human rights, economic and social policies, and innovative institutional arrangements that guarantee sustainable development and peace as well as address previous problems and crises on the basis of the human rights system and human dignity.

3. The Obstructive Global Economic System

The development paradigm in the Arab region has long followed common international formulas based on austerity measures, with an effort to attract foreign investment regardless of its goals or sources, and without taking into account issues of social justice and marginalized groups. This was accompanied by a neo-patrimonial system and unproductive rentier economies that lacked redistribution mechanisms and social protection systems.

This paradigm is a structural challenge impeding development in the Arab region; and, it is greatly linked to the global economic and financial structure, which has yet to be reassessed. The basis of this global financial system is a financial economy instead of a real economy, which increases financial fluctuations. Moreover, the flows from developing countries to advanced ones are more sizeable than the ones flowing in the opposite direction, which adds to the public debt and weakens investments in the Arab region. Additionally, the structure of the global trade system does not accommodate between the capabilities and economies of developing states on the one hand, and the openness of their markets and their involvement in the global markets on the other. The global trade system does not take development into account. Even the trade wars we currently witness pose a threat on economic growth globally. The USA, which benefited for decades from open

trade, is now moving towards a protectionist economy, following the rise of some developing countries like China and the increase in global competition. In general, the global economic governance system does not allow the effective participation of developing countries, which prompted the 2030 Agenda to include a specific target for improving the representation of developing countries in international financial institutions, as part of goal 16 of the SDGs.

4. Unjust Taxation System

Taxation systems are shifting towards either reducing taxes on companies and increasing them on the consumer, through value added tax, or providing concessions and tax exemptions in light of a development paradigm that relies mainly on the role of the private sector. Arab taxation systems are characterized by feeble tax collection and tax evasion, which is linked in part to the weakness of concerned institutions. This is juxtaposed by an increase in the size of unstructured economy due to many factors, such as the policies of "openness", globalization, neoliberalism, youth-bulge, rural-urban migration, and an influx of immigration, in addition to the nature of rentier economies.

The decline in tax revenues augments the need for external funding, consequently leading to an increase in debt and a decrease in investment. The public debt service has become a big part of the budget of numerous Arab countries, whereby these countries adopted a policy of negligence and procrastination or depended on unpredictable political deals. Taxes are an extremely important means of mobilizing domestic resources and promoting accountability, citizenship, and economic and social integration. Yet, instead of handling taxation for the primary sustainable resource that it is, linked tightly to the national developmental and economic vision of a certain country, it is being used almost exclusively to cover the deficit or improve the financial balance of a state's budget. With these givens at hand, the need for a paradigm shift in taxing systems and philosophies in Arab countries becomes paramount, including regaining the organizational role of the state in implementing policies that protect the rights of citizens, especially marginalized groups, and provide fair distribution of wealth.

The adopted approach to the objectives of tax systems, including the means of collection and redistribution, must be scrutinized, particularly the role taxes play in supporting the economy and encouraging investment in strategic sectors, which should be one of the priorities of the adopted national policy for the support of a real and productive economy in highly competitive sectors and sectors with added value that generate work opportunities.

5. Fragmented Social Protection

Social protection policies in Arab countries are mostly partial and targeted, and do not adopt a comprehensive rights approach. This social protection usually involves "social security networks" and social aid programs that offer momentary and limited solutions that do not break the cycle of poverty. These programs suffer from limited coverage, which often excludes or is unfair to informal workers, the unemployed, children, elderly, and persons with disabilities. They also suffer from bad governance and inadequate funding. These means and tools have proven unsuccessful in reducing poverty or even bridging the inequality gap in Arab societies; still, obstinacy rules the day, and promoting these programs that are alien to comprehensive social policies remains the trend, which goes against the 2030 agenda.

On the other hand, important international initiatives, such as the social protection floor initiative, do not garner the attention they deserve. Noting that these approaches can form a basis for working towards adopting comprehensive protection systems for all, which can be adapted to the social protection priorities of our region and added to the priority groups to be covered by the social protection floor, such a refugees, displaced persons, and migrant workers. Due to austerity measures, promoted for by global financial institutions and adopted by Arab regimes, the rights of workers have been eliminated. Moreover, work flexibility is being promoted, which actually means work fragility. The reduction in spending on social protection has particularly impacted women, who were further burdened by care work, as a result of the gap left by the absence of the state.

6. Feeble Partnership with the Civil Society

Real and institutionalized dialogue in the Arab region between development partners is almost absent, and that includes the private sector, CSOs, workers' organizations, media, grass-root organizations, and marginalized groups' organizations. The civil society faces many obstacles when seeking to participate in charting policies, in the form of restrictions and oppression. This limits the capability of the state to adopt and implement inclusive, consistent, and effective development policies. This is caused by a weak democracy and an absence of a participatory model of governance. Stakeholders have no genuine participatory role in decision-making and implementing programs. Moreover, there is a lack of social dialogue and a difficulty in accessing information and resources.

7. Problems of International Partnership

Development cooperation among various partners is an important point mentioned in the 2030 Agenda, which is an improvement to the Millennium Goals. It stipulated partnership on the basis of «common but differentiated responsibility» for cooperation between developed and developing countries. There has been considerable resistance at the global level to limit this principle to the environmental aspect without expanding it to include other dimensions of the development process, and it continues to be an open struggle between the civil society and developing countries, and countries of the North, international companies and international financial institutions. Practically, this principle means the rearrangement of relations between partners at different levels and the distribution of roles and responsibilities to ensure comprehensive development. Arab countries are under considerable pressure from globalization, which affects the national policy space, and does not allow for

policies that support the priorities of national development. This begs for reconsidering the relations that govern the global system and which hinder the development process. Providing a policy space indicates primarily disposing of conditionality, and providing a financial margin for the state to effectively contribute to the development process. Although official developmental aid played a major role in bridging financial gaps at some point, it failed to play a notable developmental role; especially that most of said aid turned to humanitarian aid under occurring crises, and a large portion of it was subject to political conditionality.

The 2030 Agenda presents itself as a transformative agenda (it is titled: "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development); henceforward, the SDGs must be viewed from this perspective. However, this is far from what is applied. Despite a slight change in the rhetoric of international financial institutions, the policies of liberalization, privatization, and austerity continue to prevail, along with the priority of integrating into the global system. It should be noted that relying on a productive private sector that generates work opportunities can contribute to the developmental process; but, it cannot replace a developmental democratic state.

8. Bad Governance

Good governance is the foundation of development and building security and peace. SDG 16 stipulates that "There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development." That is why good governance with all its branches must cross over all development goals and be a prerequisite for achieving development. Good governance generally includes the relation between the state and the citizen, which is based on the principles of democracy, participation, accountability, responsibility, and inclusion of all. Good governance requires national integrity systems, which include a set of laws that guarantee governance, social accountability, separation of powers, disclosure, and provide peace and justice. Yet, Arab states are witnessing increased corruption rates, as per the results of statistics on bribery mostly occurring in the security and judicial sectors. There is a lack of judicial independence in Arab countries, with what that indicates about a mechanism for accountability and follow-up on complaints capable of protecting marginalized groups. The judicial system is politicized in most instances, which reflects on its monitoring performance of the administration, the Constitution, and the finances. In addition to that, Arab states lack transparency in governing the private sector. Furthermore, the relation of said sector with the state itself is far from transparent, especially in light of the latter's weakness towards the private sector and major corporations on the one hand, and the lack of mechanisms of reporting on corruption and following-up on complaints on the other. This especially applies to the partnership between the private and public sectors. Good governance requires democratic electoral systems that allow the participation of women and youth, as well as parliaments that hold others accountable and are held accountable in turn. In this context, one must speak of the importance of ensuring freedom of the press, especially with increased incarceration rates of journalists, escalating to murder at times; and the right to access information must also be guaranteed. It is pivotal to provide the civil society with an enabling environment and to include it as an effective monitor since it is the sole sector whose motive and vested interest is purely monitoring the process.

However, governance is not merely an administrative crisis, nor is it limited to the national scale. The discussion of governance problems cannot be separated from the structure of the global system, which greatly leads to the spread of crony capitalism and furthers the global trend of patrimonial capitalism, at the expense of capitalism which values labor, initiative, and competence. It also increases debts of developing countries. The limited policy space allowed to developing countries due to this global structure directly affects the sovereignty of the state and its ability to arrange its policies in accordance to its national priorities. This, consequently, leads to disrupting accountability and liability mechanisms and resorting once more to external accountability mechanisms.

It is necessary as well to speak of structural corruption in Arab regimes, and to open a fundamental discussion on the concept and meaning of corruption. Discussions, in the framework of the 2030 Agenda, focus on corruption in the form of abuse of power and public funds by people in authority, which requires the building of effective institutions and the promotion of judicial independence while ensuring transparency and accountability. But the corruption found in most Arab states is a structured and institutionalized one. Entire political systems and economic ties are now beyond accountability, with corruption often being the basic adopted pattern and the nucleus of the established relation between the citizen and the state. This is the main facet of the neo-patrimonial state. It is important to point here to the political aspect of corruption, that is its connection to the nature of the state and governance systems, and not only the technical or administrative aspect that can be confronted with already existing mechanisms. Additionally, corruption is not limited to the national level, but extends to diverse global mechanisms and institutions. Case in point is the Panama Papers, which revealed the dark secrets of the global tax evasion system. Moreover, many foreign institutions were revealed as actively corrupt parties, especially in post-conflict states.

9. Exclusion of Women

Arab states have the lowest rates of female participation in politics and economy. Although all Arab countries ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, reservations on its articles continue to prevent social, economic and political justice between women and men. This is largely due to the patriarchal culture that systematically excludes women (along with youth, teenagers, and all vulnerable groups of society). There are systematic attempts to exclude women from the political and economic domains. And in case women are involved, their participation remains simple and formal with the goal of adding legitimacy to a system that continues to be patriarchal at its core. Women are regularly excluded from decision-making posts, although their capabilities are exploited in the economic sphere, where they provide unpaid domestic work, care work, and cheap labor especially in the informal economy, and in the political sphere, where they participate in protests and demonstrations. While there have been efforts to abolish discrimination in laws and introduce new ones to protect women from violence, a gap still exists between legislation and practice, the basis of which is the widespread patriarchal mentality and culture, and the lack of seriousness on the authorities' side in effecting their pledges and promises. It should be noted that this exclusionary patriarchal culture is not limited to women›s rights and their status in society, but also includes other categories, and goes across various social, political and economic issues; it is rooted in a culture that glorifies power and violence.

The gender gap is intertwined with all other gaps, which represent other aspects of discrimination, whether on the basis of religion, sect, geographical location, class, and others. The situation worsens if a woman falls into more than one of these discriminatory gaps. Thus, it is paramount that issues of equality between women and men and women's human rights are dealt with as cross-sectoral matters, and not as an added item on the development agenda. Most debates on gender equality and empowerment of women within the framework of the sustainable development agenda are confined to gender mainstreaming in institutions, eliminating discriminatory laws, and establishing small-scale programs to empower women's participation at the economic and political levels. Today, it has become necessary to talk about a deep and consistent integration of the gender perspective in the development vision, in a way that assimilates the structural and socio-economic impediments that prevent women from accessing resources in a similar manner to men, and keep them vulnerable to repression and violence.

In the final analysis, it is no longer feasible to ignore the fragmented manner of dealing with this issue in Arab countries, and it is no longer possible to continue ignoring the cultural and socio-cultural roots of discrimination against women. This dimension must be given the priority it deserves on all development and rights agendas of civil society organizations. Furthermore, an effective plan must be set for a genuine transformation in the dominant patriarchal and masculine culture, which is often invoked to cover up the failure to implement governmental (and non-governmental) obligations that realize the rights of all women on the grounds of respect for culture and customs. The cultural and socio-cultural dimension are a primary pathway for working on shifting society away from the patriarchal culture, inherent to and supported by non-democratic regimes, which impedes development in all its dimensions.

10. Exclusionary Development

Current development efforts in the Arab world continue to suffer from the exclusion of many segments of society from development work, and not only women. It should be noted that the exclusion and marginalization of the youth, persons with disabilities, marginalized and vulnerable groups, and some small or vulnerable population groups (commonly referred to as minorities) constitute a violation of human rights and a hindrance to the development process in the region, which negatively impacts the society as a whole. The 2030 Agenda insisted on leaving no one behind, which means that all categories and individuals have access to the same level of development and well-being. This emphasizes the importance of inclusive development, which stipulates observing the needs and specificities of each category. And since integration is not limited to removing obstacles in the path of the agenda's marginalized groups, it is essential to involve them in planning, decision-making, implementing and monitoring.

● Third: Recommendations

Based on the discussions and inputs that took place during the regional meeting and through specialized workshops, the organizations participating in the regional meeting reached a set of recommendations that are presented to development partners in general and to policy makers in particular in order to advance the efforts of the 2030 Agenda for SDGs, and to meet the numerous and complex challenges that humans face in the Arab region. The recommendations are divided into general recommendations and substantive recommendations relating to key challenges.

1. General Recommendations

At the Level of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals

•Emphasizing that the cultural and political dimensions are key components of the development process and the concept of sustainable human development, in addition to the social, economic and environmental dimensions.
•Adopting a comprehensive, multi-dimensional development approach that addresses the root causes of the region›s problems rather than solely tackling their results. The constructive implementation of this approach requires tapping into the resources and capacities of the Arab region. The wealth in culture, heritage, and human capabilities pose an important opportunity for developmental planning.

At the Level of National Strategies

•Implementing national development plans and strategies, and following-up on the work until its execution, as well as identifying priorities and indicators according to the national context, through a participatory and transparent process guided by the ambitious level of the global sustainable development goals and targets, while taking into consideration national circumstances.
•Integrating national plans beyond the sectoral approach, and adopting an integrated approach in national development efforts. This requires working across individual goals and objectives, and seeking existing thematic ties among them, without focusing on some of the goals / sectors and ignoring others.
•Bolstering coordination and cooperation between ministries and within departments, and achieving overall coherence of public policies, as well as within regional bodies.
•Establishing an effective and participatory institutional framework capable of coordinating and holding dialogue with various stakeholders, and is involved in planning, developing strategies, following-up on their implementation, and monitoring progress in the implementation of sustainable development goals.

2. Recommendations Relating to Challenges

On Crises, Wars, and Occupation

• Emphasizing that development work requires a climate of prosperity and peace, which necessitates the cessation of wars and armed conflicts, the achievement of stability, and termination of foreign interventions in the countries of the region, and underscoring the role of the United Nations in carrying out its responsibility to promote and establish peace and security for the communities of the region.
• Including the goal of ending Israeli occupation explicitly among the goals of development partners, and setting a time frame for it.
• Recognizing the right to self-determination of the peoples of the region, and adopting it as a fundamental principle in light of existing conflicts.
• Adopting peaceful approaches for conflict resolution, consolidating the principle of transitional justice, strengthening the rule of law, and supporting a democratic transition for the implementation of development goals, while adopting comprehensive approaches that address the root causes of regional instability that are directly linked to political, economic, and cultural dimensions, which impact the development path.
• Adopting dialogue as a means of conflict resolution, and finding adequate solutions to all parties.
• Calling upon the United Nations and the Arab League to continue their efforts in addressing the issue of displaced persons and refugees via an approach that ensures their rights and dignity and takes into account the specificity of each group, particularly the most marginalized groups, especially women, children and persons with disabilities, since this matter affects political, social, and economic stability.
• Focusing on reconstructing not only the infrastructure, but also communities. Conflict may be an opportunity to truly build a real society and state, and to address a new mechanism to enhance the capacity of states and societies to rise and overcome crises and provide basic life needs. Stressing that reconstruction projects and plans must take into account national priorities away from politicized external interventions, and asserting the participation of the community in implementing reconstruction programs.
• Rephrasing the terminology and concepts used in issues of conflict, disputes, and wars, and taking into consideration the subtleties of their use in describing the cases that regional countries suffer from.

On Trade and Investment Frameworks

• Working on national policies that contribute to the transition from neo-patrimonial and rentier economies to a productive and diversified economy, especially by supporting emerging industries, and adopting a production policy that strengthens national capacities and creates competitive advantages.
• Shifting radically the approach of trade and investment policies away from the unfair trade model and towards strategic openness that is consistent with national economic policies and production priorities.
• Emphasizing the concept of the right to development through the right to control natural resources and the right to choose suitable economic and social growth paths.
• Regaining the political, organizational, and administrative role of the state as a key player in the development process, especially with regards to respecting rights of citizens, protecting them, and obliging investors and capital to abide by necessary standards, laws, and measures.
• Organizing the role of the private sector in the development process, and adopting a binding international mechanism to control its practices based on human rights standards.
• Encouraging collaboration among national partners in development to protect national policy space, which is under pressure from globalization, in order to succeed with national development strategies.
• Setting regional policies that encourage development policies, which support developmental activities and are compatible with the needs, resources, and market of each country, and contribute to the creation of decent and sustainable jobs.
• Contemplating regional production value chains in order to allow labor mobility between countries according to supply, and enhancing production capacities while reducing competition, and contributing to the expansion of markets and the movement of goods.
• Pressuring and acting on directing the global trading system towards development, and assessing the implications of current and planned economic and social trade agreements.

On Tax Polices

The tax system has four main functions, none of which can be overlooked: redistributing wealth in a just manner among citizens; stimulating economic activity; providing national financial resources for development and the public budget; and building citizenship.
• Applying progressive taxes to address inequities while achieving fair returns, collecting higher percentages from high incomes compared to low incomes, and allocating resources for the benefit of the most disadvantaged segments of society.
• Promoting the principle of tax equity, and balancing between taxes on individuals in the form of income taxes and taxes on purchases on the one hand, and taxes on companies and large investments on the other.
• Eliminating discriminatory tax incentives and tax havens, and curbing tax evasion of transnational corporations and capital flight. Large corporations must be obliged to regularly report their due taxes, as well as their impact on

sustainable development and human rights.
• Restructuring the Value Added Tax to ease the burden on the people, and increase the VAT on the consumption of luxuries.
• Increasing public financial transparency at the national level to ensure access to information on tax collection and means of spending revenues. This must be achieved through legislative frameworks that guarantee access to information and enhance citizen awareness and understanding of public finance transparency.

On Social Protection Policies

• Transitioning from the concept of care and targeting to a rights-based concept that assimilates comprehensive social protection. States are legally bound to establish comprehensive social protection systems through a new social contract that recognizes social protection as a human right and one of the most important means of redistribution and wealth. And increasing the percentage of social spending as part of the total government expenditure, and linking reform plans by adopting and implementing a comprehensive and integrated social policy.
• Calling on the international community to adhere to the Social Protection Floor Initiative, which is based on a comprehensive human rights approach, and commitment to adequate financial assistance and technical support, rather than adopting fragmented approaches to social protection at the national level.
• Adapting social protection floors to respond to the challenges of the region by adding refugees, displaced persons, and migrant workers to the categories that should be covered by the main protection package through appropriate procedures.

On Labor Policies

• Enhancing productive options and developing the industrial and agricultural sectors, which are capable of generating sustainable, decent, and integrated employment opportunities in the framework of a new development model; and, encouraging the adoption of new economic alternatives, such as the solidarity economy, and increasing its contribution to national revenue.
• Applying the decent work standards that the Arab states have committed to, which include guaranteeing the right to work, securing appropriate terms, conditions, and allowances, protecting the right to trade union representation, and enabling trade unions to participate effectively in public policy-making and in the multilateral social dialogue, while emphasizing the need to ensure decent work conditions for migrant workers to and from Arab States.
• Redefining the labor market in general, and redrafting the definition of unemployment based on the labor force, in light of regional conflicts and their effects, such as the

surge in asylum seekers, the inflexibility of immigration laws in the region, as well as the high level of unemployment among the youth; a thing that reflects directly on the labor market through the expansion of the informal sector at the expense of formal work, which poses a danger to social protection floors.

• Adopting frameworks, policies, and programs that provide opportunities for empowering marginalized groups, especially persons with disabilities, in order to integrate them into a labor market that is founded on the principle of respect for the individual potential of workers and the productive labor force, while embracing the inevitable role that this segment plays in production processes and economic development.

On Development Cooperation at the National Level

• Restoring the role of the civil society at the national level by providing an enabling environment that offers a set of legal, regulatory and political conditions that affect the capacity and activity of the civil society, as well as involving it in all stages of designing, implementing, following-up, and monitoring policies and programs.
• Involving trade unions and protecting their independence, without rendering them meaningless or neglecting their important role in achieving development; and, involving other grass-root organizations that represent marginalized groups.
• Highlighting the key role of the private sector in the development process, especially in the fields of investment and production that generate employment, while paying special attention to the risks posed by public-private partnerships due to the weakness of public institutions in Arab countries. These risks may lead to an imbalance in said partnerships for the benefit of the private sector, and jeopardize citizens' right to access public services, due to increased prices of a certain service or its low quality; they may also add huge financial burdens to the public budget.
• Starting a dialogue with social movements and networking with them, as it is pivotal to have a popular base to support development efforts, especially that the work of CSOs targets cities and specific cases that may not be central to the demands of social movements, and trade unions in numerous Arab countries are debilitated to the point where they no longer perform a meaningful role.

On Development Cooperation at the Regional Level

• Confirming the importance of partnership on the national and international levels between all stakeholders (governments, civil society, and private sector), provided that it is an actual partnership and not just a formality. This partnership must be based on institutionalized dialogue among all parties.
• Bolstering the role of institutions and frameworks that sponsor such dialogues, including the Economic and Social Council of the Arab League, at a time when the world is shifting from a global unipolar system to a world system comprised of multiple regional systems, which in turn depends on channeling conditional funding to suit the donor's agenda, without taking into account the specific circumstances of each country in implementing the sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda.
• Preparing an action plan for the implementation of the Decade of Arab Civil Society Organizations (2016-2026), adopted in December 2015, with the participation of concerned experts from Arab CSOs and international and regional experts. The plan aims to expedite the implementation of the activities and programs listed in the Decade of Arab Civil Society Organizations, while stressing the need to involve Arab, regional and international organizations, unions, networks and civil society bodies in these activities, specifically since it was adopted to support Arab civil society organizations working to implement sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda.
• Establishing a regional mechanism to build consensus over the means of financing at the regional level, and effecting commitments and promises by involving the Arab private sector in place of foreign funding, while emphasizing its commitment to social and environmental responsibility and human rights.
• Emphasizing the importance of regional cooperation in the field of knowledge and technology in a way that reduces costs and increases efficiency and contributes to enhancing the principle of transparency.

On Development Cooperation at the Global Level

• Supporting the capacities of CSOs and enhancing their competence in development work, as per the Istanbul Principles, and supporting them to carry out their role and face challenges.
• Building genuine international partnership founded on equality, respect, social and political integration, and commitment to the rights system and the direction and authority of the global agenda.
• Achieving transparency, democracy, and participation by having developing countries push for access to information, and revising the voting system, including in international financial institutions, which adds to the efficacy of representation and influence of developing countries in the decisions of these institutions.

On Governance

• Adopting comprehensive national integrity systems that guarantee the principles of governance in the legislative, judicial, and executive pillars of the state, and in independent bodies, civil society, media, and the private sector. This stipulates organizing ties between these sectors, and decreeing laws that maintain a comprehensive approach to partnership, accountability, transparency, and disclosure.

• Incorporating the civil society and media in accountability and monitoring by effecting laws that guarantee public freedoms and the right to access information, and protecting informants and witnesses in accordance with international standards. As well as applying governance principles to these sectors.

• Enforcing constitutional provisions on separation of power in a manner that ensures the financial and administrative independence of the judiciary and regulatory bodies. And assuring the integrity of judicial decisions away from political influences. Activating the role of legislative authorities in accountability and follow-up of the reports of regulatory bodies on the performance of the executive authority.

• Adjusting national legislation to international conventions and abiding by enforcing them, especially the international Convention against Corruption.

• Adopting decentralization as a basis for local administration, and granting it the power to implement its plans for development and services according to its independent local needs.

• Adopting transparency in defense budgets.

• Setting guarantees against impunity, while prosecuting corrupt individuals, recovering stolen funds and assets, to be fairly redistributed later, and enforcing laws to combat money-laundering.

On Equality between Women and Men and Empowering Women

• Granting sufficient importance to addressing the cultural dimension of discrimination against women and the culture of violence and exclusion by confronting the exclusionary patriarchal culture, abolishing the coupling of politics with religion, and limiting extremism, which primarily affects women, and opposing the stereotyping of women in education and media.

• Developing a unified Arab vision that addresses the 2030 Agenda from a gender perspective, in light of the priorities of the Arab region. This includes gender responsive budgeting that adopts social and economic policies that respond to the various or diverging needs of women and men. These policies are important tools that reduce gender inequality.

• Implementing comprehensive social protection systems, and adopting gender budgeting to empower women economically, socially, and educationally. Reducing discrimination in decision-making posts, adopting transparency in recruitment procedures and criteria, and

integrating gender equality issues and the empowerment of women in matters of security and natural resources.

• Enacting restraining laws, at the legislative level, that limit violence and harassment, establishing fair legislation for agricultural and domestic work, adopting international conventions and treaties particularly with regard to nationality law, and lifting reservations on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

On Achieving Inclusive Development

• Combating the exclusion of youth with all its dangerous repercussions, such as an incline in crime, drug-use, and extremism, which has become the region's malady.

• Reinforcing the right of housing, because this right or the absence of it or the lack of potential to improve its conditions has many social implications, especially on the youth and poor segments.

• Adopting a comprehensive development framework based on the human rights principles listed in the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and ensuring the representation of all segments of persons with disabilities in all stages of the development and implementation of national and regional development plans, and implementing legislation that respects international standards and agreements and contributes to the integration of economically and socially disabled persons, and ensuring the application of said legislation.

• Promoting equal opportunity, including the development of fair laws, affirmative action policies, and accessible mechanisms, while taking into account the diverse needs of persons with disabilities, and working on transforming the culture of marginalizing and excluding persons with disabilities, and ensuring available inclusive services for all, including transportation.

• Integrating the needs of persons with disabilities into the public budget and social security, and prioritizing these needs.

On Culture

• Culture is one of the fundamentals of development, and it should be linked to the 2030 Agenda on the basis of science, skills, innovation, values, and behavior, through promoting the values of citizenship, human rights, equality between men and women, and venerating and advancing productive work values that reflect on economic development and overall development, promoting values of sustainability, values of peace and security, and adopting concepts and values that enhance economic and social integration frameworks.

• Reforming education, particularly the integration of the human rights system and sustainability in the curriculum, and altering the concepts that have always contributed to the consolidation of isolation and marginalization.

• Shifting curricula from indoctrination to participation, interaction, research, and innovation.

• Promoting the reform of technical education, and overcoming the artificial separation between academic and vocational education, and acclimating to the needs of the labor market.

• Reforming university education through the establishment of joint research centers at the regional level, promoting and reinforcing innovative thinking tools.

On Natural Resources and Future Generations

• Committing countries to achieving sustainable development goals, without breaching their obligation to protect natural resources for future generations.

• Highlighting the need for countries to acknowledge that preserving the environment and achieving development go hand in hand, and that development cannot be implemented by violating the right for a healthy, clean, and sustainable environment.

• Transforming the economy in a comprehensive manner, and transforming the philosophy of consumerism along with random and unbalanced urban sprawling in order to achieve sustainability.

• Ending non-participatory management of natural resources, especially treaties on swapping vast areas of land, forests and agricultural lands, and halting the threat to the environment. This is at the core of the responsibility and obligations of governments, while protecting these resources from third parties that threaten or harm them.

• Focusing on sustainable development goal number 12, on sustainable consumption and production patterns pertaining to the fair and sustainable management of natural resources, and committing investors and various trade activities to preserving both environment and biodiversity, with the participation of the civil society and the indigenous people.

• Highlighting the role of concerned national forums in implementing sustainable development by following-up on and monitoring the conservation of the sustainability of natural resources, respecting their regeneration, and preserving the ecological balance in deserts and forests, while urging governments to adopt policies and laws that respect and protect the environment.

• Urging international financial institutions to provide information on projects with regional courtiers that use natural resources, as well as extractive industry projects.

• Creating democratic participatory frameworks for local communities to manage and sustain natural resources.

•Emphasizing the right of the Palestinian people to manage their natural resources, while refraining from recognizing the practices of the occupying authorities in exploiting these resources. And reminding international financial institutions of the need to cease supporting or aiding the occupation, which violates the right of the Palestinian people to enjoy and manage their natural resources.

•Joining the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, with the partnership of the civil society and the private sector.