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## United Nations Environment Programme

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Regional Civil Society Forum  
Manama, Bahrain, 21-22 November 2004

### FINAL REPORT

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. As part of the regional preparatory process leading to the Sixth Global Society Forum and 23<sup>rd</sup> UNEP Governing Council February 2005, UNEP/ROWA organized a Regional Civil Society Forum was held in Manama, Bahrain, on 21-22 November 2004.
2. The Regional Civil Society Forum provides a unique opportunity for civil society at regional level to provide their views on the Global Environmental Governance and on the definition of UNEP's work programme for the biennium 2006-07 which will be decided during next GC23/GMEF. The Regional Civil Society Forum is also a platform to prepare the 6<sup>th</sup> GCSF on a balanced basis
3. At the end of the Forum, the participants issued a Statement that stated their opinions and identify the priorities and positions of civil society in the West Asia. The Final Statement is attached as Annex 1.

### I. BACKGROUND

4. In May 2000, UNEP organized the First Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF) prior to the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF) in Malmö Sweden. Governments endorsed this practice through Decision SSVII.5 adopted at Cartagena, Colombia, in 2001, which requested:

*“the Executive Director to continue the current practice of convening a civil society forum that is regionally balanced and representative in conjunction with the meetings of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum in close consultation with civil society”.*

The GCSF is the main entry point for civil society participation at governance level. It is a two-day event and its mirrors that of the Ministerial discussions. The next and 6<sup>th</sup> GCSF will be held in Nairobi, Kenya, February 2005 in connection with the 24<sup>th</sup> Session of the Governing Council.

5. In decision SS.VII/5 of the seventh special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Executive Director was requested “to further develop, and review and revise as necessary the strategy for engaging civil society in the programme of activities of the United Nations Environment Programme, in consultation with Governments and civil society. The strategy should provide clear direction to the secretariat to ensure that all programmes take into account opportunities for multi-stakeholder participation in design, implementation, monitoring of activities, and dissemination of outputs.”
6. Civil society is a natural ally of UNEP - an ally in working with peoples, governments, and non-state organizations. The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the design, implementation and monitoring of a range of projects and programmes is widely recognised. Over the past 30 years, UNEP has established a strong linkage with civil society.
7. The integrated outcomes of the meetings and regional forums will be incorporated into a regional assessment report, being prepared to reflect on the achievements,

constraints, challenges and needs to advance the sustainable development in the region.

8. Within this framework, the United Nations Environment Programme, Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA) convened the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regional Civil Society Forum in Manama, Bahrain, on 21-22 November 2004.

## **II. ATTENDANCE**

9. The Forum was attended by representatives from 5 national and 8 regional Civil Societies, in addition to West Asia Youth Advisor.
10. The complete list of participants is attached as Annex 2

## **III. OPENING SESSION**

11. The Forum was opened by Mr. Habib El-Habr, Acting Regional Director & Representative who welcomed the participants, and highlighted the context and objective of the meeting. He stated that the Civil Society in the Arab region today is assuming a greater role and responsibility towards sustainable Development issues. He said that civil society participation is crucial to the success of any sustainable development effort and that their involvement in strategy making as well as in the implementation of projects must be encouraged. Mr. El-Habr wished the participants success in fulfilling their endeavors and extended his thanks to them. He asked the participants to introduce themselves.

## **IV. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

12. Ms. Habiba Al-Marashi was nominated by one of the participants as the Chairperson of the Sessions, Dr. Saeed Abdulla Mohammed as the Vice-Chair.
13. A Drafting Committee was formed which included Mr. Ibrahim Al-Zu'bi, Mr. Muhammad Al-Sayrafi and Ms. Meena Kadhimi.
14. The Agenda was adopted as presented in Annex 3.

## **V. PROCEEDINGS**

15. Following the adoption of the agenda, an overview of the Global Civil Society Forum was given by Mr. Gaetano Leone who mentioned that the GCSF has a global and a regional focus, reflecting UNEP's efforts to improve civil society engagement both globally and regionally. They can help implement UNEP's work programme far beyond UNEP's capabilities, their strengths include the ability to raise funds and play a proactive role in the design, implementation and monitoring of a range of projects and programmes related to the environment.
16. A brief presentation on the objective of the meeting was given by Ms. Serin Al-Majali, who emphasized the unique opportunity the forum provides for civil

society at regional level to provide their views on the Global Environmental governance and on the definition of UNEP's work programme which will be decided during the next GC23/GMEF, and highlighted the main topics of the Governing Council (Energy, Transport, Air pollution, Climate Change, Industry, and other issues).

17. The meeting then considered the discussion of documents provided by DPDL, with a special reference to the accreditation process at UNEP as a chance to provide CSOs with the consultative status at UNEP within the existing rules of procedures of the GC/GMEF.
18. The meeting then discussed UNEP programme of Work, and then started to write down points to be include in their final statement to be presented at the GCSF.

## **VI. MAIN ISSUES DISCUSSED**

### **A. Needs and Priorities of Sustainable Development in the Arab Region:**

19. Achieving peace, security and environmental protection are top priority issues that should be tackled in order for the region to achieve sustainable development.
20. Increase public environmental awareness is a requirement for environmentally sound and socially responsible sustainable development. Awareness programs must be directed towards decision makers, the business sector and national public figures.
21. Continued amendments are needed in the environment institutional set up, and their assigned responsibilities, in order for them to cope with the environmental problems.
22. Improving and updating in the formulation and enforcement of environmental laws through combining government environmental institutions with other authoritative powers in the country.
23. Set regional and national strategies for management of natural resources, land, biodiversity and water resources. Such strategies should include sensitizing the Arab citizens on the diminishing supply of water in the region.
24. Improve information and telecommunication infrastructure capacity and further incorporate environmental information in the decision making process.

## **VII. FINAL SESSION**

25. Election of the 4 Civil Society representatives for the 6<sup>th</sup> GCSF was held by the participants themselves, and the following representatives were elected: Meena Kadhimi, Muhammed Al-Sayrafi, Habiba Al-Marashi, and Dr. Abdullah Naseer.
26. Mr. El-Habr expressed his reservation on the results of the election, as it was a representation from the Gulf Countries only, and Mashreq sub-region was not represented, although it has been highlighted by Mr. Habib El-Habr, and Mr.

Gaetano Leone that we need a fair regional representation. On the other hand, they insisted on their decision.

27. The elected representatives chose two participants to attend the Drafting Group Meeting which will be held in Nairobi 3<sup>rd</sup> December (Meena Kadhimi, Muhammed Al-Sayrafi).

## **Final Statement**

### **The 3<sup>rd</sup> Regional Civil Society Forum 21-22 November 2004 (Manama-Bahrain)**

#### **West Asia Civil Society (WACS)**

1. While appreciating UNEP's work on the area of war and environment, West Asia Civil Society – (WACS) would like to see special emphasis on this region by exerting UNEP's influence on the Governing Council and the Environmental Ministerial meetings to direct more funding towards the occupied and afflicted areas.
2. The West Asia Civil Society (WACS) would like to obtain from UNEP additional professional, technical and sustained training for all stakeholders in the form of intensive courses and workshops on the National, Regional and Global levels.
3. West Asia Civil Society (WACS) recommends that UNEP should advocate for official recognition by governments of the region of Civil Societies as partners in sustainable development.
4. West Asia Civil Society (WACS) attributes incomplete/inadequate environmental legislations in the Region as one of the major challenges in the realization of sustainable development. Therefore, West Asia Civil Society (WACS) requests UNEP to continue to exert pressure on governments to facilitate the development & implementation of adequate environmental legislation.
5. West Asia Civil Society (WACS) recommends that UNEP takes a proactive role in facilitating exchange and transfer of experience and expertise amongst NGO's at the regional level and foster cooperation between them.
6. West Asia Civil Society (WACS) urges governments of the region to allocate regular and adequate financial resources to UNEP to support initiatives in the West Asia Region, in particular to support UNEP and civil society partnership programmes.
7. West Asia Civil Society (WACS) recommends that UNEP should take into consideration the particular sensitivities of West Asia Region, especially in issues pertaining to religion, culture and language. It strongly urges UNEP to have more information materials and other resource tool in Arabic Language, as Arabic is one of the six official languages of the United Nations.
8. West Asia Civil Society (WACS) endorses the idea of the evolution and upgrading of UNEP into a stronger body, i.e. the World Environmental Organization – (WEO). Such an attempt will have a positive impact on rapid implementation of the sustainable development agenda.

9. West Asia Civil Society (WACS) recommends building effective partnership with UNEP to emphasize and enhance environmental awareness through innovative use of Media at the Regional Level.
10. West Asia Civil Society (WACS) generally agrees with the comments and conclusions reached by the VARDA Group and supports its recommendations, especially with regards to the need to prioritize the activities of UNEP, transparency of the origin of resources and its distribution in a fair manner to all regions concerned, and the need to rationalize the presentation of the programme of work. West Asia Civil Society (WACS) also supports the recommendation related to more meaningful involvement of NGO's in the preparation of the programme of work.
11. Upon reviewing the programme of work and focusing on regional environmental challenges, West Asia Civil Society (WACS) would like to see UNEP direct its attention on crucial issues, like water, green and clean production, sustainable consumption patterns, the highly significant issue of green architecture, etc.
12. West Asia Civil Society (WACS) welcomes the new emphasis put by UNEP on the collaboration with Civil Societies and the steps taken by UNEP to ensure effective and meaningful civil society involvement in the process leading to the Governing Council's upcoming session. West Asia Civil Society (WACS) urges UNEP to continue looking for ways to build bridges with Civil Societies, especially in this region.

## List of Participants

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