

Message from Civil Society Organizations To the Arab Economic and Social Summit in Sharm El-Sheikh (2011)

As an initiative of ANND, a regional forum under the title of “Economic and Social Rights in Light of the Global Crises: what is the Alternative Development Model in the Arab region?” was held in Beirut on the 6th and the 7th of January 2011, with the participation of more than 180 representatives of civil society organizations in 17 Arab countries, as well as representatives of UN organizations and other organizations, in addition to international and regional networks. This came as a part of ANND preparations to cope with the Arab Economic and Social Summit that will be held in Sharm El-Sheikh on the 19th of January.

After the forum, a meeting was held in Al-Ahram Regional Institute of Journalism in Cairo on the 17th of January. The meeting was attended by representatives of the civil society from Egypt and Arab countries who discussed the recommendations and confirmed them.

After discussions on the main chronic and emerging issues and themes concerning civil society, and after the serious developments going on in more than one Arab country during the last months, such as social tensions that led to the fall of the Tunisian President as a result of the absence of freedoms and such as the equitable redistribution of growth and the popular movements in Algeria, Jordan and Egypt, the meeting parties expressed the need to give the social issue, in its different manifestations, the importance that it deserves. Despite the importance of the decision to hold regular economic and social summits, the followers of Kuwait Summit and its results as well as Sharm El-Sheikh Summit and Agenda, can say that the social case is still marginal and that the summits are still focusing on economic issues exclusively while the social issues are still secondary.

On the other hand, the conferees also note that most of the decisions of Kuwait Summit were not implemented, in addition to the decline of the available margin that allows civil society to participate in the preparatory work of the summit itself and this will form the subject of some recommendations in this message. The participants would also like to remind about the document issued by civil society organizations on the eve of the Kuwait Summit in 2009, which included an analysis of the challenges faced by the Arab economies from the perspective of civil society and some recommendations and proposals. Although two years have passed since this issue and the official sides haven't made any comment about it, it is still valid in most of its components, and the conferees decided to develop it in the light of the new global and regional updates that took place during the forum.

The participants in the forum think that the Arab region is characterized by a strong and organic interdependence between political/ institutional dimensions and between the economic, social and cultural development process dimensions. All of this is linked and directly affected by the Israeli occupation of Palestine as the unique case of settlement occupation in the world, and by wars and others conflicts, interior instability situations in many countries that reach the outbreak of civil wars. In countries like Sudan, unity is at risk and this can be a structural barrier that prevents the country from achieving a fair and lasting development.

The region has recently seen an important development represented in the fall of the head of the Tunisian regime as a result of a popular uprising claiming economic and social rights, and expressing the situation of political tension caused by the prolonged suppressions of freedoms and human rights. Although Tunisia has the best development indicators in the region, it couldn't prevent the outbreak of the peaceful protest movements that stressed the importance of the political dimension and its interdependence of economic and social issues. The region is also experiencing many protest movements in many countries that

tend to express the deterioration of the situation that citizens cannot bear anymore. As for the partial treatments that some governments are undertaking in order to avoid the protests, they will not lead to any solution unless they are accompanied with global development approaches based on the principles of human rights.

The participants also stressed the need to consider public and individual freedoms, and democracy in general, as the base of the active participation of civil society in its different intellectual, political and social tendencies. The quality of regional and national options, especially on the economic and social level, are affected by the absence of active democracy that promotes disclosure, the right of access to information, interrogation, the right of diversity and the recognition of the other opinion, the freedom of expression and the formation of non-governmental organizations.

The participants in the forum considered that the approach that must be adopted by governments to address the social conditions is the approach of rights that is based on citizens' rights on both economic and social levels, not only on services or procedural issues. The transition in the relation between society and the state from the state of nationals to the solid foundation of citizenship strengthens the concept of citizenship and good governance and adopts human rights, including political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights.

The recommendations to Arab leaders and governments on the occasion of the Summit are the following:

1- The need of dialogue and participation of civil society:

The participants in the forum voice their reservation about the lack of space reserved for civil society in the course of preparations for the summit and its participation therein, despite the fact that civil society welcomed the initiative of the Arab League during the preparations of Kuwait Summit. They also think that this is against what Arab governments always said, especially in the Summit of Tunisia in 2004, about the role that civil society organizations can play in the development process and the formulation of public policies. The selective way that was adopted in the invitation for Sharm El-Sheikh meetings and for Kuwait Summit formerly, did not allow non-governmental organizations to choose their representatives freely and independently, knowing that they were not involved in the preparation of the agenda of the meeting organized by the Arab League during the preparation for the Summit.

The value that civil society representatives can add to the Arab League institutions, governments and Arab Summits can be summed up in their expression of a point of view independent from that of governments and private sector. Building trust between governments and civil society organizations is based on the recognition of this independence and the acceptance of opening a true dialogue leading to the institutionalization of cooperation and partnership.

Recommendations :

- A- The organization of a direct dialogue between the institutions of the Arab League and representatives of local, national and regional representatives of civil society organizations in the Arab region, with the participation of the United Nations, in order to discuss the mechanisms that lead to the formation of a framework of institutional dialogue, cooperation and partnership.**
- B- The adoption of institutionalized frameworks in the Arab League, similar to these adopted by the United Nations, in determining criteria for the selection of their organization, limiting it to local, national and regional networks of civil society organizations within agreed terms, rejecting the conditions that restrict or prevent the participation of independent networks in these frameworks.**
- C- The invitation of the United Nations to play an effective role in the approximation of points of view between the Arab League and other parties, and to contribute in the formation of these frames which must also include the true representation of the private sector and international organizations, in institutions,**

bodies and activities of the Arab League, as is the case of United Nations organizations and other regional organizations.

2- The call for a high-level meeting to address the social affair in particular:

Despite the call for the Arab Economic and Social Summit for the second time, it still seems that economic and social rights didn't get the importance that they deserve in this summit and in policies in general. Although the summit is economic and social, the real focus remains on the economic side, while the social aspect is still secondary, which goes against the development approach that requires to give an equal importance to both economic and social aspects (and other aspects of course). Many governments have the tendency to adopt economic policies that do not guarantee these rights which affects the lives of millions of people in the region, creates more social tension that might explode in many countries and threaten social and civil peace.

The recommendation :

A- In order to ensure a deep treatment of the social case in Arab countries, we call upon the leaders and presidents meeting at the summit to do an invitation to a high-level meeting held one year later, and devoted to the social issue in Arab countries. Its recommendations should be submitted to the Third Economic and Social Summit held after two years and the following summits should stay committed to the balance between the social and economic dimensions.

3- The need to achieve MDGs in the Arab Region:

Based on the results of the 10 year review of the MDGs held in September 2010 in New York, and based on the national and regional reviews of the MDGs in the region, the participants emphasize the necessity of a serious commitment by the governments to adopt national paths to adopt MDGs that take national characteristics and integration policies into consideration.

The recommendations:

A- Calling upon the Arab summit to turn national and international tendencies into a real national path that contains regional obligations regarding the common cases linked to MDGS, and that surpasses formalities. The conferees also stress the commitment to the new directions based on experience and on the achieved path until now, and the need to deal with the objectives of the millennium as an interrelated package and to overcome the sectoral approach. Moreover, the conferees insist on the need to adapt the MDGs at the

- national level and to integrate them into the paths of national planning. Governments and countries bear the responsibility of leading this path and providing necessary resources to achieve the goals with the participation of all the parties.
- B- Calling upon the League of Arab States to activate the institutionalized cooperation with the United Nations regional organizations in order to ensure a distinct Arab presence in the final revision of the global MDGs and to address the chronic absence of Arab issues and to enhance the Arab contribution on the international level in this area.**
 - C- Considering the issue of fighting human poverty in all its manifestations, and the issue of the pursue of full employment with respect of the requirements of decent work, including youth, women, children and other social groups, as the main focus of regional concerns regarding social and economic affairs in Arab countries, and stopping the methods of hiding this issue through statistics that minimize the problems, address the social, geographical and sectoral gaps and give an impression that the fight against poverty and unemployment is succeeding.**
 - D- Along with the focus on national priorities in respect of MDGs, we call upon the Arab League, the United Nations organizations and development partners, including us as civil society organizations, to fix some of the regional priorities in the millennium goals area, and to develop concrete commitments to address them in the Arab Economic and Social Summit. And we specifically propose:
 - a. The issue of occupations, wars and armed conflicts and their impact on development and the millennium goals as well as providing the required support to countries that suffer from these conditions.**
 - b. The League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council and countries with financial and economic resources are pledged to establish frameworks and institutions (including the establishment of a fund for the MDGs) dedicated to achieving the MDGs in the least developed countries and serve as a regional pledge to the eighth goal (regional partnership for development).**
 - c. The social situation of the refugees in Arab countries should be tackled, as well as migrant workers (holders of Arab and non-Arab nationalities), considering them as the poorest and most marginalized in Arab societies.****
 - E- Calling upon Arab leaders to review the effectiveness of the macroeconomic adopted options, especially in the light of the global financial crisis and its continuous impacts. Therefore, we call upon the participant leaders in the Summit to reject the adoption of policies that can prevent development and the achievement of MDGs, as well as irrationally following the same policies and prescriptions**

that caused previous world and national crises. As an example, there is the prescription that calls for leasing agricultural lands to external parties and big private companies, which would increase poverty in rural areas and deepen the crisis of food security and environmental threats.

- F- Calling upon Arab states to make a step towards the review of the structural relationship between the seven first MDGs and the eighth goal related to the global trading system, the development assistance approaches and debt problem in developing countries.**
- a. According the priority to the foundation of a regional economic cooperation program based on creating a link between the economic and development priorities approaches faced by Arab states, knowing that the project will not be limited to the application of economic and trade liberalization policies. A practical contribution to economic integration between Arab countries should exist in the rehabilitation of productive sectors, especially agriculture, industry and tourism, and in the process of generating employment opportunities. It is also important to consider trade as an expression of economic, social and development options aiming at achieving human development and social justice based on the principles of human rights and the preservation of environmental sustainability and natural resources.**
 - b. Drawing trade policies in services in order to serve development goals of the Arab states, and based on this approach, giving the priority to the completion of the Arab Convention on services, starting with the identification of regional strategic services that may lead to development and citizens' rights and with services with competitive advantage on the international level and to open the field of Arab investments in this area. Appropriate procedures must also be taken in the framework of the reform legislations of services sectors nationally, which allows the balance between the policies of expanding trade in services and the maintenance of policy making and the sector organization to serve the development goals.**

4- The need to promote the culture of tolerance, Human Rights and the respect of women:

Arab societies are experiencing very serious transformations that are reflected in the decomposition of citizenship values, the return to pre-national structures and the amplification of sub-national identities instead of the national unifying identities. Some indicators are also increasing such as intolerance at the social, cultural, linguistic, sectarian and religious levels, as well as the continuation of discrimination aspects against women whether on the civil, political, economic,

social or cultural levels. Arab leaders are first invited to make a courageous step that starts by the recognition of this increasing risk. Ignoring these facts and their real causes may demolish the efforts of many generations in order to build a democratic state that protects the nation and treats its citizens equally; It can also threaten to break up the social and national unity in every country, and some worrying signs are starting to appear in more than one Arab country, and ignoring these facts is not useful.

The recommendations:

A- Taking a decision during the Summit to charge the institution of the Arab League, in cooperation with research centers and civil society organizations and United Nations organizations, to study the different aspects of social disintegration, internal conflicts, and fanaticism in Arab countries, and to prepare for a high-level meeting regarding the social aspect and to present these results and their recommendations in the meeting.

B- Taking the brave decision to review the position of equality between men and women, women's empowerment and their active participation in development, as an internal national and regional path and not as a response for foreign agendas. Therefore, talks should be turned into a real acceptance of the elimination of discrimination in the speeches and in practice and one of the high-level meeting themes should treat this subject.

5- The need of partnership with the Private Sector:

Participants in the regional meeting of civil society organizations are calling the private sector to the active participation in development and to bear its social responsibilities based on full respect of Human Rights in the light of serious challenges threatening growth, development, environment and civil peace in more than one Arab country. Institutions of the private sector in many Arab countries have benefited from many legislative and structural procedures that call for investing and made by the governments over the past 20 years, yet, the output of these institutions regarding the development process are still below the desired level.

On the other hand, we call upon the Arab League and its institutions and governments to develop their vision to the partnership with the private sector and not to limit their cooperation with leading international, regional and national companies and owners of capitals only; The interest of these people doesn't always match with national interests due to the nature of their capital and its international economic activity. Moreover, they don't represent the private and business sectors that include a larger number of national businessmen and big,

medium and small institutions on which we should count in order to reach national development.

The recommendations:

- A- Enhancing the possibilities of supervision and information access about the adopted economic projects and programs in the Arab Economic and Social Summit, and evaluating their social impacts.**
- B- A commitment to openness and dialogue with representatives of business sector, especially those working in productive sectors and fields that have a social impact, and seeking to agree on regional priorities and insisting to put it on the agenda of the Summit and the high-level meeting concerning the social issue.**

6- Following up the Summit decisions:

Based on past experience, and knowing that the Kuwait Summit decisions in 2009 were not properly followed up and most of them were not executed, the conferees recommend the following:

The recommendation:

- A- Calling the Arab Summit to an explicit decision to develop a mechanism to follow up the decisions of the next Summit in Sharm El-Sheikh, to identify the responsibilities of each party and the entity responsible of the follow up, and to put the mechanisms and timing of periodic and special reviews.**

Finally,

The civil society organizations gathered in Beirut on the 6th and 7th of January, and in Cairo on the 17th of January, which adopted this message and its recommendations to the summit, pledge that they will do all the necessary initiatives in order to develop a coordination mechanism between the government institutions and the organizations of civil society in order to follow up the completion of the recommendations and decisions related to social and economic rights taken during Sharm El-Sheikh Summit and which are estimated to serve the vital interest of citizens.

Amongst the participating organizations in the regional forum on “Economic and Social Rights in Light of the Global Crises: what is the Alternative Development Model in the Arab region?” (6th and 7th of January)

1. Union of Jordanian Woman
2. Espace Associatif – Maroc
3. Association of Lawyers for Human Rights
4. Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights
5. Al-Ahram Regional Institute for Press
6. Forum of the Right to Water in the Arab Region
7. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
8. Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services – Egypt
9. New Woman Foundation – Egypt
10. Alternative Development Foundation – Egypt
11. CTUWS – Egypt
12. Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement
13. Bahraini Network of Organizations belonging to the Arab NGO Network for Development
14. Bahrain Society for Human Rights
15. Bahrain Sociologists Society
16. Association of Bahraini Economists

17. Girls Rising in the Navy Association
18. Transparency Society in Bahrain
19. Information and Training Center for Human Rights- Yemen
20. Yemeni Observatory for Human Rights
21. Network of Organizations of Civil Society for Development- Yemen
22. Association of the Civil Institutions in Saida- Lebanon
23. Amal Iraqi Association
24. Network of non-governmental Organizations Working in Iraq
25. Association of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Community Health in Iraq
26. Sudanese Civil Forum
27. Study Group on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights- Sudan
28. Palestinian Civil Organization Network
29. Teacher Creativity Center- Palestine
30. Institution of Health Work Committees- Palestine
31. Bissan Center for Research and Development- Palestine
32. The Palestinian Network for Press and Media
33. Syrian Consulting Bureau for Development and Investment
34. Tunisian Association of Democratic Women
35. Jahez Forum- Tunisia
36. Arab NGO Network For Development
37. Lebanese Center for Syndicalistic Training
38. Islamic Care Institution- Lebanon
39. Arab Union of Palestinian Women- Lebanon
40. Arab Organization for the Fight Against Corruption- Lebanon
41. The Lebanese Association for the Promotion of Transparency: No corruption- Lebanon
42. Health Care Society- Lebanon
43. Resources Development Center- Lebanon
44. Islamic Health Organization- Lebanon
45. Benevolent Association of Social Development- Lebanon
46. National Committee for the Follow-up of Women's affairs and issues- Lebanon
47. Cultural Movement, Antelias- Lebanon
48. International Union of Public Service- Lebanon
49. National Association for Professional Training and Social Services
50. Development Work Without Borders (Nabaa)- Lebanon
51. Democratic Lebanese Women Gathering- Lebanon
52. Environment Waves Association- Lebanon
53. Social Aid Society- Lebanon
54. Association of Civil Institutions in Saida
55. Caritas- Lebanon
56. Amel Institution- Lebanon
57. Social Movement
58. Makassed Philanthropic Islamic Association in Beirut- Lebanon

59. People's Aid for Help and Development- Lebanon
60. Ghassan Kanafani Cultural Foundation- Lebanon
61. Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections- Lebanon
62. Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace- Lebanon
63. Norwegian Popular Aid- Lebanon
64. Foundation of Cooperation- Lebanon
65. Humanitarian Forum- Based in London