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Arab NGO Network for Development
شبكة المنظمات العربية غير الحكومية للتنمية



Arab Civil Society Position Paper on COP28

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Despite the complex and tragic circumstances afflicting the region, the UN's twenty-eighth Conference of the Parties (COP 28) on Climate Change is scheduled to be held in Dubai this year between the 30th of November and the 12th of December 2023. In this context, the Arab NGO Network for Development organized an expert meeting, in person and online, on 25 and 26 October 2023 to discuss the issues raised in COP and elaborate a position from civil society's perspective.

The experts participating in these meetings agreed unanimously that war, whether in Gaza or Ukraine, remains a critical obstacle to implementing the Paris Climate Agreement. War is expected to be the main excuse used by major countries (in size and emissions) to backtrack on their pledges to reduce emissions. Inevitably, funding the near-global war comes at the expense of climate finance. However, the reasons for this retreat precede the war. In particular, the commitment of developed and industrialized countries to finance the climate fund with one hundred billion dollars annually starting in 2020 has not been fulfilled to date, and there is almost no hope that they will do so this year due to the new wars, as previously mentioned.

The meeting's general recommendations focused on the following:

- **It is necessary to stop wars and conflicts** and avoid additional environmental and human tragedies and losses, exacerbating and intensifying the effects of climate disasters, whose global impact exceeds that of wars. Countries facing wars and conflicts require exorbitant financial resources for sustainable reconstruction and toward limiting and adapting to climate change. Moreover, despite the need for large-scale technological transfer, reconstruction in these countries may entail ignoring the carbon emissions accompanying these processes.
- There is a need to hold accountable those historically responsible for emissions accumulating in the atmosphere since the "Industrial Revolution" in the West. Civil society adheres to holding advanced and wealthy countries accountable for their "historical responsibilities" due to the

accumulation of emissions over the years, as evidenced by all related scientific reports. The goal of "reducing" emissions, central to climate talks, must remain the primary responsibility of industrialized and developed countries. The participants also stressed the need to adhere to the demands of developing countries, namely that developed countries must shoulder historical responsibilities without excuse. They must change their strategies to reduce emissions and stop relying on imports and consumption, moving towards adopting more modest policies that respect ecosystems.

- Arab civil society emphasizes that **the dominant civilizational model, based on a market economy and competition, is responsible for destroying global ecosystems and causing climate disasters.** The agenda of the annual climate talks must include reviewing the global economic system, as there is no solution to the climate system's crisis except by reforming the underlying economic system.
- **There is a need to adopt a human rights-based approach and the framework principles on human rights and the environment** as stated in the report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment in 2018 and following the UN General Assembly's resolution at its sixty-sixth session, Resolution No. 300/76 on "The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment." The approach must also be in line with the Human Rights Council Resolutions No. 13/48 and 14/48, which aim to recognize that enjoying a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is considered a human right, and the decision to create a special rapporteur on climate change and human rights - respectively, issued in October Early 2021. These resolutions stress that providing a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a human right. We are pushing for the recognition of environmental rights at the national levels through constitutions and laws, respecting human rights approaches in designing environmental policies, and taking into

account the perspective of equality and non-discrimination, the responsibilities of commercial enterprises, the effects of armed conflicts on environmental rights, and the obligations associated with international cooperation in the context of multinational companies and transnational harm.

- There is a need to **redress gender inequality** caused by environmental projects by providing the appropriate vision and management. Women and men around the world are differentially affected by climate change, deforestation, land degradation, desertification, unsustainable infrastructure, increasing water scarcity, and inadequate sanitation. The relationship between gender equality goals on the one hand and environmental sustainability on the other must be strengthened. Women and girls may also experience differential health impacts from air pollution and chemicals. Our countries rarely integrate these issues into environmental data collection and policy-making.

Loss and Damage Fund

The participants also recommended changing the negotiation strategy since we moved from climate change to climate disasters. It forced those gathered at COP 27 last year to put the issue of “losses and damages” on the agenda. In this context, the participants recommended the need to clarify responsibilities, as mentioned earlier, taking into account the historical responsibility for emissions by major countries and also the current burden of countries that pollute the most and cause climate disasters, especially those whose emissions have historically exceeded those of developed countries.

Moreover, civil society refuses to hand over the Loss and Damage Fund to the World Bank (even if temporarily as proposed), which has taken responsibility for managing debt globally. The current issue is compensation (donations and grants), where developed countries are supposed to compensate the affected countries for losses and damages caused by climate disasters caused by their

progress.

The participants also warned against falling into the trap of discrimination between countries concerned with compensation and those who would benefit, that is, between developing countries in general and those classified by developed countries as the “weakest and poorest” or the least developed (whose number does not exceed 46 countries). However, countries such as Pakistan, which was hit by floods last year, and Libya, this year, are not classified among “the poorest.” The same applies to most countries in the region, which are expected to face many climate disasters.

On the other hand, participants warned of attempts to change the fund's name and obfuscate the purpose of its establishment. They called on the negotiators at the Dubai meeting not to consider the recommendations of the committee charged with establishing its structure and determining who should pay and who should benefit. Contributions to this fund should not be “voluntary. They should be binding for major industrial countries, such as the US and the EU, particularly, and the major emerging countries that now cause the most emissions (such as China), the rich oil countries, the major extractive companies, and the supporting banks. Financing sources must be in the form of compensation resulting from binding taxes, not gifts, donations, or loans. Moreover, the fund is not supposed to be approved without specifying the amounts for losses and damages it is supposed to collect, which are estimated by relevant studies to be three times the cost of mitigation and adaptation.

The meeting recommended that Arab government representatives and negotiators review the relevant legal basis if developed countries do not fulfill their obligations to pay compensation for losses and damages when resorting to international courts. This review can be based on the UN General Assembly's decision in March 2023, allowing countries to request the International Court of Justice's opinion regarding countries' obligations towards climate.

Just Transition

There is a need to reconsider and clarify the concepts of just transition, known as transitional justice or climate justice. The transition from fossil fuels to renewable energies, entailing a technological transformation (produced in the West) by advanced countries, may not help address development or climate change issues. Moving from depleted and ineffective fossil energy to clean technologies also requires using rare and depleted minerals in production. There is no alternative to fossil energy at the current level of global output and consumption (if developing countries are enabled to copy developed countries in the style of living, production, consumption, and access to energy) except nuclear energy, which has the highest cost and always entails the most increased risks. According to civil society, the transition must include a shift from a civilizational model that requires a lot of energy to a system that depends on and lives on less energy. It was also pointed out that we live in countries that lack energy, and a just transition must take into account energy as a right and steer away from our current concept of energy as a commodity that can be sold and bought. The commodification of energy reinforces a logic of privatization and control that reproduces the harms associated with accumulation and the focus on perpetual growth.

At the policy level, there is a need to create new ways of translating commitments into actual policy actions that pay attention to the lived experiences of local and marginalized communities and their local contexts. This means changing the consumer civilizational model and the rules of competitive and commercial globalization to a more just and efficient system. A fair procedural transition must also be considered, involving all stakeholders in decision-making and ensuring full and equal representation.

Technology Transfer

Civil society calls for reinstating the question of technology transfer, which was abandoned in recent years, in the negotiation agenda. It does not accept the argument made by

developed countries that this technology is the property of the Western private sector that created it and is not the responsibility of countries to transfer it and give it to developing countries. However, before the current wave of globalization, science, and research had been funded by states, taxpayers, and revenues from resources belonging to successive generations, not just one. Many research experiments took place in developing countries, and the leading scientific products should be considered a historical heritage and a right of every human being. The participants also recall the COP27 decision regarding the Santiago Network, where countries agreed to institutional arrangements to activate the Santiago Loss and Damage Network to stimulate technical assistance to developing countries vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. They stressed that climate and transitional justice is also intergenerational justice and that one, two, or three generations do not have the right to use depleted resources (formed over millions of years, such as fossil fuels) in two hundred years and deprive future generations of this historical legacy. The same applies to the rare materials used in green technology. The participants also emphasized that reconsidering the technology transfer clause in the relevant negotiations means removing this technology from the monopoly of companies, the laws protecting intellectual property, and the WTO regulations. It must become the property of everyone and allowed to be localized and produced in a decentralized manner. Justice also means the right of everyone to access resources without depleting them, ensuring the rights of workers in old technologies after the transition, and reducing working hours to secure greater job opportunities.

Climate Finance

The participants expressed great concern about the involvement of major countries in financing the recent wars in Ukraine and Palestine, which come at the expense of the financing requirements of climate funds. They supported the historical demands of developing countries to increase funding. They called on developed countries to fulfill

their obligations to pump one hundred billion dollars annually starting in 2020, equal funding for mitigation and adaptation (currently at 20% for adaptation and 80% for mitigation), and link the global goal for adaptation with additional financing.

The participants also considered that adjustment projects should pay attention to the critical impact of climate change on water resources, causing droughts and threatening water and food security, due to the high sensitivity of the question of water in the Arab region. They called for reconsideration of large dam projects in climate negotiations, in addition to reconsidering expensive desalination projects that require a lot of energy and cause increased sea salinity, destroying whole ecosystems. They also supported the long-standing recommendation by developing countries to facilitate financing mechanisms.

The participants proposed a tax on major extractive companies, banks that still support carbon-producing activities, and advertising that encourages more consumption and causes escalating disasters on many levels.

The experts almost unanimously agreed that the Paris Agreement remains inadequate in preventing deterioration and not allowing the global temperature to exceed one and a half degrees. They considered the agreement weak and ambiguous, contradicting itself at times. It is also non-binding, without clearly assigned responsibilities, constrained within specific rules of measurement, and does not mention sanctions on non-compliant countries or companies. Despite the consensus on the above description, there was no consensus on calling to reconsider the Paris Agreement and amend some of its articles, particularly those related to compliance (instead of the so-called "nationally determined contributions") and assigning clear accountabilities, especially when establishing the Loss and Damages Fund's regulatory and executive framework and obligations to compensate the affected developing countries. Recent reports and estimates showed that the cost of losses and damages from climate disasters is three times greater than the cost of mitigation and adaptation, which was estimated

according to the Paris Agreement to be one hundred billion dollars annually starting in 2020.

There was also no consensus on civil society taking a position not to go along with the demands of some oil countries that will be put forward in COP 28 to retrieve and store carbon, replacing this expensive and so far unacceptable proposal at the international negotiating level as a safe technology to reduce emissions, and to replace these high retrieval and storage costs by subsidizing adaptation and mitigation projects in the Arab region.

The participants unanimously agreed that civil society and its institutions should review the concepts used in issues related to sustainable development, climate change, and climate justice. They need to support the production of intellectual and media materials to reach a new civilizational model that is more just and respectful of ecosystems. Many Western concepts that were imposed or adopted without scrutiny must be reconsidered. They include the use of expressions such as "climate change" amid "climate disasters," the need to shift from the phrase "donor countries" to terms such as "responsible countries" or "perpetrating countries," and distinguish between gifts, subsidies, loans, compensation, and entitlements or between what is voluntary and what is compulsory.

Recommendations to Arab Governments and Delegations

- The Arab region should have some initiatives at COP 28, similar to those launched at COP 26 in Glasgow two years ago in terms of moving away from coal, ending support for fossil fuels, reducing methane gas, and the forest protection initiative. The Arab region should present a qualitative initiative to change the dominant global diet (fast food) that depends on the overconsumption of meat (raising livestock requires an increase in water consumption, the elimination of many forests, and emitting large amounts of methane emissions, which is 30 times more dangerous than Carbon dioxide.

There should be a return to the traditional Mediterranean diet, which was closer to the vegetarian system and did not depend on meat except on occasion, thus reducing global emissions from agriculture and livestock by a third. They should also consider planting many of the old rain-fed crops, which save water, are drought-resistant, and are more adapted to climate change.

- Governments must develop sustainable development strategies that include plans to mitigate climate disasters. They should readjust their policies, especially in energy and transportation, the leading causes of emissions, towards supporting and developing public and shared transport and building systems that rely on less energy and include saving and rationalizing consumption in all sectors, especially energy and water. Moreover, decentralized production of clean and renewable energies must be encouraged.
- The participants suggested reviewing population and demographic policies to control population growth and adopting integrated and balanced development policies between the countryside and cities to mitigate concentration in cities, which causes 70% of global emissions.
- Agricultural policies must lead to adopting crops adapted to climate change that require less water, modernizing irrigation methods and changing types of crops, amending tourism policies to control water consumption and reduce environmental and energy impact, encouraging circular production in industries and production, consumption, and import systems, and regulate the emissions of major industries. Waste management must also be improved, adopting the principles of circular economy, mitigation, reuse, and recycling and prohibiting waste incineration and arbitrary landfilling that cause methane, the most deadly emissions to the environment.
- The participants called for reducing working hours, facilitating work from home to save energy and transportation, and providing additional job opportunities to fight

unemployment and poverty. A change is also needed in construction systems that require vast amounts of energy and water, such as glass buildings, going back to traditional, green construction, which is also more economical at all levels. The above goes hand in hand with protecting forests, increasing green spaces, and combating smuggling and illegal logging.

- Regional response plans must be developed for emergencies and the changes and disasters caused by climate change at all levels, including health, especially since temperatures have risen to record highs in the past eight years. Public parks in cities must be expanded and rehabilitated as an outlet for people and improving the atmosphere. The plans must be ready to deal with floods, droughts, and rising sea levels. Early warning systems must be established or developed to contribute to reducing deaths, and specialized teams should be trained and equipped to address various types of disasters (such as rescue from drowning, draining water, protection from heat, and combating forest fires). They should also be able to manage climate displacement and asylum. Furthermore, legal teams should be established to file lawsuits demanding compensation from climate disaster perpetrators.
- Privatization trends must be controlled, restoring the role of the welfare state entrusted with the protection and sustainability of resources and upholding the human rights of current populations and those of future generations.