

AFED annual conference kicks off at AUB, Beirut

An Arab Roadmap to Implement Sustainable Development Goals

Beirut, 10/11/2016

The Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED) launched today its annual report *Sustainable Development in a Changing Arab Climate*, at the opening of its ninth annual conference held at the American University of Beirut, 10 to 11 November.

The Report emphasizes the need to shift to a green economy in order to achieve the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the Arab region by 2030. It points out that more than 10 out of 22 Arab countries are either under occupation or suffering from wars or disputes, while tens of millions of people are refugees or internally displaced, and many lack basic needs and rights. Even if all conflicts and wars stop immediately, the Arab region will not be able to achieve these goals by using traditional methods. Therefore, the report recommends an alternative approach, based on integrating principles of sustainable development within the anticipated rebuilding efforts.

AFED's secretary general Najib Saab noted the significance of releasing the report simultaneously with the climate summit in Morocco, explaining that AFED seeks to "sketch a roadmap for the implementation of SDGs in the Arab countries, in light of wars, conflicts, critical economic conditions and commitments to Paris Climate Accord."

Saab noted a set of messages presented by the report in this regard. First, the need to stop treating Arab countries as a monolith, as individual countries have distinctive needs, priorities, and economic, political, and social contexts that must be recognized when developing implementation plans. Second, the need to tackle a common set of key challenges, especially securing effective participation of non-state sectors, job creation, and institutional and public policy capacity building. Third, resource mobilization to achieve the SDGs, through partnerships between regional and national economic and social development Funds, and providing favorable conditions for private sector investment. Fourth, adopting a genuine cross-sectoral approach to sustainable development, which entails the integration of climate change considerations in the implementation of the SDGs, mainly based on the water-energy-food nexus. Fifth, engaging the civil society, especially youth and women groups in conflict areas, to take a strong leadership role in integrating SDGs implementation and climate action in the rebuilding process.

The conference brought together about 500 delegates from 58 countries, representing 160 institutions from public and private sectors, universities, research centers and civil society.

The opening session included a welcoming speech by AUB president Dr. Fadlo Khuri, who referred to AUB's role to promote sustainable development in the region. "This university has throughout its existence been at the forefront of efforts to ending

poverty and hunger, to ensuring better health, promoting gender equity, protecting the environment, even fostering world peace at the foundation of the UN in 1945," he said: "The challenge of leading innovation in sustainable education in the Arab states is one that we must, and will, take up," he added.

AFED's board of trustees chairman Dr. Adnan Badran stated that challenges facing the Arab region, especially wars and political, economic and social crises, will have major implications on the achievement of SDGs. He pointed out that AFED report called for "giving priority to the Arab Green Triangle of water security, energy security and food security." Badran hailed convening the conference at AUB, the academic member of AFED, as part of its 150th anniversary celebrations. He said: "This scientific institution has produced generations and leaders who made history and built a modern Arab human civilization," adding that more than seven prime ministers of Jordan were AUB graduates.

Saab and Badran presented AFED Environmental Life Achievement Award to the chairman of AFED's executive committee Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Awadi. He was also honored by Dr. Khuri as a distinguished 1958 AUB graduate, for outstanding achievements in public service.

The conference sessions discussed challenges and prospects in achieving SDGs in Arab countries, financing the SDGs, achieving zero hunger in a changing climate, zero food waste in the Mediterranean, and a water-energy-food nexus approach for SDGs. 52 university students from 12 Arab countries discussed their views on sustainable development in the Future Environment Leaders Forum (FELF) supported by AFED.

The conference continues Friday with sessions on sustainable development in post-conflict countries, education for sustainability and health for sustainability. Conclusions and recommendations will be released in a closing plenary.

Full AFED report on Sustainable Development in a Changing Arab Climate can be downloaded from www.afedonline.org

Photo captions

Photo 1: Najib Saab at the conference opening

Photo 2: Dr. Ibrahim Abdel Gelil presenting AFED report on Sustainable Development

Photo 3: Saab, Badran and Khuri honoring Al-Awadi