

Arab Forum for Environment and Development First Annual Conference

Manama, 26-27 October 2008

Conference Recommendations

The Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED) held its first annual conference in the Kingdom of Bahrain's capital city of Manama on October 26-27, 2008. The conference brought together 350 delegates representing both the private and public sectors, alongside AFED members, experts, and civil society organizations. Conference delegates deliberated the findings of the report, *Arab Environment: Future Challenges* that was issued by AFED. Draft recommendations prepared by a drafting group, drawing on the comments and input from participants, were presented at the closing plenary session of the conference. The conference endorsed the following recommendations:

First, the conference calls upon Arab Governments to:

- 1- Request Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment to review of the progress made towards the implementation of the commitments of the Abu Dhabi Declaration about the future of environmental action in the Arab World, which they endorsed in February 2001, including the identification of any impediments to fulfilling these commitments.
- 2- Devote more efforts and resources (human and financial) in each country to monitor and assess the state of the national environment, to establish credible documentation and archival data banks, and to set a number of strategic indicators which can help the country to compare developments against baseline values.
- 3- Give serious attention to the major environmental problems in the Arab world: water shortage, desertification, air pollution and deterioration of marine and coastal areas, will be exacerbated by global climate change, since major industrial and tourist centres in most of the Arab countries are located on coastal areas of seas and gulfs. Therefore, Arab states need to design doable long-term plans to address these challenges, including the establishment of early warning systems for drought and water shortage detection.
- 4- Develop national plans for urbanization that particularly address the imbalance between infrastructure and uncontrolled growth **of buildings** as well as tackle problems of slums and informal settlements.
- 5- Develop practical national plans to handle the large volumes of solid waste produced daily through reduction from the source, re-use, recycling, and proper landfilling.

6- Conduct studies on the environmental effects of wars and local conflicts, and participate effectively in international actions, particularly the UN endeavours related to this issue.

7- Devote serious effort and clear commitment to deal effectively with the cross-sectoral areas:

- a) Environmental institutions: environmental institutions must be strengthened financially and empowered with executive authority to plan, coordinate, and enforce legislative programs for environmental protection as well as provide the long-term planning necessary to cope with global changes, such as declining economic growth, the use of crops for the production of fuels and its effects on food availability and national oil incomes as well as on development plans in general.
- b) Integration of environmental consideration into development planning: using market mechanisms and incorporating natural resources and ecological accounting principles and the various types of environmental assessment (strategic, cumulative, project) are urgently needed.
- c) Environmental legislation: provisions should be included in Arab environmental legislation that commit to harnessing market forces and mechanisms for compliance with environmental law. Other provisions must be incorporated to professionalize environmental occupations and vocations in a manner that permits only those who are qualified to practice. Finally, environmental legislative mandates and laws must be made effectual and any impediments to enforcement have to be removed.
- d) Education: revamping of academic curriculums aimed at including environmental education at all levels and grades is urgently needed with the goal of raising the level of environmental commitment in students.
- e) Scientific research: allotting more funds for environmental research. Moreover, researchers and centers of research networks need to be created at the national and regional levels.
- f) Communications and media: environmental training programmes for reporters and media experts should be developed. In addition, committing space and programmes in the print and audio-visual media is needed in order to raise public awareness about environmental degradation, the costs and benefits of environmental protection, and the rational use of natural resources.

8- Make a serious coordinated effort to become active players in global endeavours dealing with global environmental problems affecting the Arab world: climate change, water scarcity, combating desertification, biodiversity protection, biotechnology, and hazardous waste transport.

Second, the conference calls upon the private sector, non-governmental organizations, scientific research institutions, and the media, to contribute significantly to the implementation of these recommendations.

Third, the Sine qua None basic recommendation is ensuring a real political will at the highest leadership level in each Arab state to take environmental deterioration seriously if we are to meet our moral obligation towards future generations. The conference hopes that the Arab leaders will find it feasible to confirm this will at the forthcoming Economic Arab Summit that will be held soon in Kuwait, and whose agenda includes addressing the issues of climate change, waste management, safeguarding from natural disasters, and the Arab Environment Facility.

Fourth, the conference wishes to thank the Arab Forum for Environment and Development for organizing this conference and looks to AFED to put a mechanism to follow up on the implementation of these recommendations and to present the findings at its second annual conference.

Fifth, the conference expresses its deep thanks to the Kingdom of Bahrain for hosting the event, and extends its gratitude to the partner-sponsor Aluminium Bahrain (Alba).