



UNDP Human Development Report launched in Abu Dhabi, calls for global action on equity and environmental challenges

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, January 8 2011— The latest Human Development Report was launched at a high-level forum here today in the capital of the United Arab Emirates, the highest-ranking country in the region in the Report’s annual Human Development Index.

Featured speakers at the Forum included UN Under-Secretary General Rebeca Grynspan, UNDP’s Associate Administrator, who pointed to the UAE’s commitment to more sustainable development models for its economy and for its growing urban population. “The creative approaches to a more sustainable future that we see here in Abu Dhabi provide an excellent example of the kind of new thinking and action that we need to see worldwide,” Grynspan said.

“Achieving truly sustainable development globally and in the Arab states will require bolder action on social inequalities and environmental hazards”, she added, referring to the main messages of the 2011 Human Development Report, published this past November by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Also speaking at the Human Development Report launch were Amat Al Alim Alsoswa, Director of UNDP’s Bureau for the Arab States, and Elissar Sarrouh, the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in the United Arab Emirates. The forum at the Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research was opened by the UAE Minister of Economy, Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansoori, who welcomed the UN officials to Abu Dhabi and underscored the UAE’s emphasis on sustainability and human development principles in its own long-term planning. The three UN officials also congratulated the UAE on its fortieth anniversary of the signing of the constitution establishing the Union of the Arab Emirates as a state.

The 2011 Human Development Report—“*Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All*”—calls for broader efforts worldwide to foster equitable human development by reducing gender imbalances and expanding opportunity for the marginalized and disenfranchised, while at the same time protecting the environment for people today and for future generations.

The Report advocates new funding sources to help pay for balanced development and a shift to renewable energy, especially in the poorest countries and communities. “Investments that improve equity—in access, for example, to renewable energy, water and sanitation, and reproductive healthcare—could advance both sustainability and human development,” UNDP Administrator Helen Clark writes in the Report’s foreword.

The new Report notes that Arab countries have made steady progress over the years in income, education and health, as measured by its Human Development Index (HDI). The United Arab Emirates (#30), Qatar (#37) and Bahrain (#42) all rank in the top “Very High Human Development” category of nations in the HDI, while three Arab states—Sudan (#169), Djibouti (#165) and Yemen (#154)—are in the “Low Human Development” category. Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco are among the world’s top 10

performers in HDI improvement over the past four decades, the Report shows. The 2011 HDI covers a record 187 nations and territories, including 19 Arab states and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The Report notes that human development advances in the Arab region are at risk from the widespread gender and generational inequalities which have generated deep public discontent in many Arab countries. Half the population in Arab States is under 25, and youth unemployment is rising. In Egypt, for example, some 25 per cent of college graduates cannot find full-time jobs, and in Tunisia youth unemployment has reached 30 per cent, says the Report.

Despite strong human development achievements in many Arab states, the region lags behind other areas of the world in empowering women, the Report shows. The United Arab Emirates (#38) leads the region in the Report's Gender Inequality Index (GII), followed by Bahrain (#44) and Tunisia (#45). Yet women in Arab countries still comprise a relatively low share of the paid work force - around half the global average- and have significantly less schooling than men, the Report shows. Yemen ranks as the world's most unequal society from a gender perspective (#146), while Saudi Arabia (#135) and Sudan (#128) are also among the least equitable in GII terms.

Major ecological challenges—including urban air pollution and degraded soil and water resources —could put further stresses on human development in the region, the Report argues.

Water scarcity and quality problems are paramount in many Arab countries, affecting more than 60 percent of the region's poorest people, the Report notes. Faced with very low levels of renewable fresh water, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia consume water in volumes far higher than the estimated sustainable rates, the Report contends.

The Report warns that expanding desertification, diminished water resources and other anticipated effects of global climate change could sharpen existing hardships facing the Arab region:

- As countries sharing the world's most arid region, the Arab states collectively have the highest share of people living on land that cannot be productively cultivated: 25 per cent of the entire regional population. In Sudan and Morocco, for example, nearly 40 per cent of the population resides on severely degraded land, four times the global average, compromising the countries' long-term ability to meet domestic food needs.
- Four of the five countries with the highest per capita CO2 emissions in the world are nations in the Gulf region with relative small populations but large oil and gas industries: Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait (Trinidad and Tobago comes in second). Sudan and Iraq have some of the world's most extreme levels of urban pollution, and surveys show that people in Arab nations are among those least satisfied with their local air quality.
- The Report argues that development progress does not require high fossil-fuels consumption or carbon emissions. Norway's carbon dioxide emissions (11 tonnes per capita) are less than a third those of the United Arab Emirates (35 tonnes), for example, although both have high incomes and high levels of oil and gas production.
- The Report strongly backs a UN global energy initiative to provide electricity to the 1.5 billion people who are now off the power grid, and argues for greatly expanded use of solar, wind and other renewable energies beyond the G20 nations, which now account for 90 per cent of clean energy investments worldwide. With ample sunshine and coastal breezes, several Arab countries have embraced such alternative energy sources, though they still account for only 11 per cent of the region's primary energy supplies, less than half the world average, the Report shows.

ABOUT THIS REPORT: The annual Human Development Report is an editorially independent publication of the United Nations Development Programme, with editions in English, Arabic, and eight other languages. Complete texts of all Reports since 1990 can be downloaded as PDFs and e-Books on the Report website: <http://hdr.undp.org/>