

## Preventing Violent Extremism in the Arab States: beyond security solutions

**February 25, 2019** –In Tunis, UNDP initiated and co-hosted along with the Government of Tunisia the first regional workshop of its kind on Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) that saw the participation of Arab government representatives, besides academics, researchers and civil society organizations.

The two-day workshop served as an interactive forum for sector's experts and practitioners to exchange knowledge, experiences, best practices and lessons learnt, as well as discuss challenges and opportunities of developing and implementing policies to prevent radicalisation. The main objective of the workshop was to share progress made in the region at the national and local level in preventing violent extremism.

The Director of UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States, Khaled Abdel Shafi remarked that whilst the primary responsibility to prevent and respond to the threat of violent extremism lies within each country's borders, UNDP and the UN system at large provide proactive support to go beyond security solutions and scale up development intervention in the region. To prevent radicalisation, resilience building interventions must be linked to job creation, quality education and institutional accountability that aim at addressing vulnerabilities to violent extremism.

The event brought together 75 participants, including government representatives from 8 countries (Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Algeria) and UNDP Country Office representatives from 10 countries (Libya, Somalia, Yemen, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia).

Civil society organizations and academic experts provided valuable inputs to the discussion about the role of religious leaders and institutions in PVE. Another topic was how collaboration between internal security forces and other actors can contribute to increase trust and ensure that human rights standards are integrated in PVE efforts. Participants also discussed and shared best practices for the development and implementation of National Action Plans which include youth-led and community based PVE programmes.

All the attendees expressed their appreciation for the content of the sessions and requested more regional exchanges and platforms for knowledge and information sharing, but also thematic meetings.



# Promoting inclusive electoral processes in the Arab States

**February 4, 2019** - The Organization of Arab Electoral Management Bodies (ArabEMBs) held a two-day regional conference on electoral complaints and appeals in the Arab States. The event, which took place on the side of the ArabEMBs 3rd General Assembly at the Dead Sea, Jordan, brought together over 90 representatives from electoral management bodies of 14 Arab Countries including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen, Comoros, Algeria, Kuwait and Egypt. The experience and lessons of other regions were also shared, with senior representatives from electoral management bodies of Russia, India and Maldives taking part in the event, as well as representatives from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).



The conference served as a platform to share regional and international best practices in electoral justice and practical examples of electoral dispute resolution mechanisms; it enabled discussions on the role of EMBs in effectively managing electoral complaints and appeals, and on the importance of putting in place a legal framework that enables inclusive electoral participation.

Participants also identified the lack of data and research on the role of women in electoral justice and the impact of electoral dispute resolution mechanisms on women's participation.

The country presentations were a unique learning opportunity for all the participants, which shared their views on building up more inclusive, effective and efficient electoral processes.

Mr. Khaled Abdel Shafi, the director of the UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States (RBAS) emphasized the importance of ensuring fair, transparent and inclusive electoral processes to increase citizens trust in public authorities and enhance social cohesion in the region.

As an outcome of the conference, ArabEMBs committed to establishing a regional task force to develop guidelines and share best practices in electoral dispute resolution in the region. The conference also resulted in a number of recommendations for electoral management bodies, including:

- Educating voters and candidates through awareness campaigns on electoral complaints and appeals process;
- The creation of specialized independent electoral complaints commissions;
- Consulting electoral administration bodies while drafting electoral legislations to identify and fill possible gaps;
- Collecting and analyzing gender disaggregated data on complaints and appeals;
- Conducting research and analysis on the impact of electoral dispute resolution mechanisms on women's participation;
- Integrating international best practices into national legislations;
- Building capacities of staff and judges responsible for electoral complaints and appeals by facilitating regular meetings and trainings on EMBs' systems and procedures.

The conference was the result of a successful partnership between ArabEMBs, the Independent Election Commission of Jordan, the Venice Commission and the UNDP Regional Electoral Support Project for Arab States.

## National Seminar on Egypt National Single Window

**Cairo, January 22, 2019** –Senior directors of the Egypt Customs Authorities (ECA) and relevant agencies in charge of the implementation of Egypt National Single Window (Egypt NSW) gathered in Cairo for a two-day National Seminar organized with UNDP's support and moderated by its technical experts.

Dr. Ehab Abu Aish, Egypt Deputy Minister of Finance for Public Treasury, Mr. Al Sayed Kamal Negm, Commissioner of ECA and Mr. Yakup Beris, Regional Coordinator at UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS), opened the seminar. Egypt expressed determination in putting the Single Window digital platform to the service of the public, including businesses and industries. A number of activities has already taken place in this regard and a new website for the platform will be activated in the coming days.

In this occasion, Dr. Ehab Abu Aish, launched the implementation of the technical assistance programme to ECA and concerned agencies which aims at modernizing control procedures to improve the delivery of services to the public, while at the same time boosting economic competitiveness, and facilitating e-business practices. To that end, Egypt will need to leverage information and communication technology (ICT) and digitalization to accelerate trade and ensure high level of compliance to national regulations.

Mr. Yakup Beris emphasized the enabling role of technology to support efforts towards good governance and inclusive growth. "National single windows offer an entry point to facilitate trade, and Egypt, thanks to its geographic location and human capital, has the potential to capitalize on it to generate more job opportunities and contribute to make the business environment friendlier to investors and manufacturers", he said.

The seminar saw the participation of 75 senior directors and managers of ECA, in addition to experts from the Department of Customs of Jordan and line ministries who brought their experience and good practices to inform the discussion around the draft Roadmap of Egypt NSW. Participants also brainstormed the requirements to facilitate trade and investment through efficient control and the optimization of trade costs.

The seminar resulted in a series of recommendations that were endorsed by the Commissioner of ECA and that will serve as guideline for the implementation of Egypt NSW.

Participants expressed their appreciation for the support provided during the consultations by UNDP, the Swedish International Development Agency and by experts from the Jordan Customs.



## Digitalizing Trade Facilitation in the Arab Region

Around 180 representatives from 8 Arab countries attended a two-day Regional Conference on Digitalization for Trade Facilitation, organized in Amman by UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States in close collaboration with UNCTAD, World Customs Organization and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), under the patronage of HE Prime Minister Dr. Omar Razzaz.

The conference served as an interactive forum for sector's experts and practitioners to exchange knowledge, experiences, best practices and lessons learnt, as well as discuss challenges and opportunities of deepening connectivity and cross border exchanges through accelerated digitalization among Arab countries. Internet and digitalization opens new frontiers in facilitating on-line transactions, reducing the costs of participation to the markets and more importantly, channeling information in a seamless and timely manner. As such, it contributes to address major challenges of Arab economies in diversifying economic transactions and sectors, and at the same time, generating jobs.



HE. Dr. Tarek Al-Hamouri, the Jordanian Minister of Trade opened the conference on behalf of the Prime Minister, stressing how trade and economic integration within the Arab Region have the potential to boost inclusive growth and sustainable development. “To improve competitiveness and achieve these results, good governance should capitalize on new productive factors, such as enhanced use of ICT and the increasing importance of the private sector to strengthen Arab economic integration”, he said. “Digitalization will help Jordan to move towards a new customs concept that is based on risk management and innovation. Surveillance procedures are necessary, and policies and regulations are being put in place for the development of these tools and procedures”.

H.E. Erik Ullenhag, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Sweden to Jordan reiterated the importance of investing in trade and the digitalization of its procedures to bolster economic growth and prosperity, enhance transparency and most importantly promote peace and stability in the region. He also highlighted the necessity of strengthening regional cooperation and partnership with neighboring countries while leveraging on the comparative advantages of different Arab economies and the potential of women in the labor market.

The Conference discussed twenty-three topics, facilitated by domain experts from UNDP, UNCTAD, World Customs Organization, Agadir Technical Unit, besides officials of the Government of Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, as well as from the private sector such as Unilever, SEEBURGER, IBM, Maersk, and Aqaba Container Terminal. The role of the private sector in pursuing transformational changes has been stressed by several panelists over the two days. In particular, the Senior Technical Officer of the WCO mentioned bringing new actors in the supply chain (including SMEs, public and private sector) among the key priorities of the Arab region.

Participants discussed opportunities for higher trade efficiency and effectiveness in the Arab region, reflecting on the potential of digitalization for improved competitiveness, inclusive growth and innovation.

Ms. Sara Ferrer Olivella, UNDP Resident Representative to Jordan said: “In a region where economic integration has been slow and disrupted by conflict and crises, we need to invest in trade to ensure that it becomes a powerful engine of inclusive growth towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals”.

Dr. Abdelmajid. Al-Rahamneh, Director General of the Department of Jordan Customs thanked UNDP for the progress made towards trade facilitation through its regional project on Strengthening Arab Economic Integration for Sustainable Development. The project promotes policy reforms and modernization of custom procedures, especially through the support to the National Single Window system, that leverages innovative data exchange methodologies and other technologies to make procedures more efficient and transparent, thereby increasing and



speeding up trade flows. He also added: “There is an urgent need to control movement of products and goods transiting through Jordan and improve procedures to be up to international standards. One of the challenges Jordan is facing nowadays is being competitive to push investments into the country while at the same time keeping the surveillance standards of Jordanian customs high”.

The Conference resulted in the development of 11 recommendations aimed at promoting digitalization for better livelihood, women empowerment, trade and transport facilitation towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

At the end of the Conference, all the participants expressed their high appreciation for the support provided by the Government of Sweden, UNDP and UN sister agencies for facilitating such a useful learning and exchange experience, that enhanced their capacities and knowledge to design and implement customized solutions to enhance Arab interconnectivity, contributing to the economic growth of their region and the welfare of Arab citizens.