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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on their efforts in
2012 to implement the outcome of the WSIS**

Submission by

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This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on “Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels” (to the 16th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

DISCLAIMER: The views presented here are the contributors’ and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

**ESCWA's Contribution to the
2013 Annual Report of the Secretary-General to the Commission on Science and Technology on the
Implementation of and Follow-up to the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society**

I. INTRODUCTION

Following the Arab Spring events of 2011, the ESCWA region hoped for a more stable 2012, if not politically, at least economically. That goal remained elusive to a number of ESCWA member countries (EMCs), specifically those countries that had gone through or were still undergoing political and social upheaval. Syria, in the throes of a civil war¹ and under internationally-imposed sanctions, incurred a steady economic contraction and currency devaluation². Spillover effects have impacted the economies of neighbouring Lebanon³ and Jordan⁴. Tourism, a major contributor to the Egyptian economy, was hit hard by continued unrest on the streets of Cairo and other cities⁵. One of the three newest EMCs⁶, namely Tunisia, witnessed intermittent bouts of civil unrest, which resulted in lacklustre economic performance⁷.

The 2012 economic outlook for the ESCWA region is not all bleak. Some EMCs have managed to buck the downward trend. The yearly growth rate of the economy of Qatar may be slower than it was in the early 2000s, but it continues to show healthy results. Heavy government spending in infrastructure projects aimed at helping Qatar meet the needs of the World Cup that it will be hosting in 2022 will be a major factor in keeping the country's economy in the black⁸ for a few years to come. The relative stability of global oil prices throughout 2012 and increased public spending have helped UAE GDP grow by 4.5%⁹. Notwithstanding its better performance during 2011, Oman's economy continues to perform at healthy levels¹⁰.

The mixed score of the economies of the ESCWA region during 2012 reflects the political and social realities on the ground in which countries experiencing political and social instabilities underperformed, while countries that are relatively stable socially and politically fared much better. Nevertheless, an otherwise logical conclusion which assumes that badly performing economies negatively impact the progress of the information society should be cast aside. The situation in ESCWA member countries experiencing economic, social and political instability, with particular emphasis on Syria and Egypt, continues to defy conventional logic. In real terms, this instability has promoted the use of the Internet to a large number of citizens who would have otherwise been slower adopters of information society (IS) tools, more specifically social media. While clear-cut conclusions have not been drawn and effective measurements of the impact of social media on social and political uprisings have not been made, there is no denying their role. The public's perception of this role is such that the uprisings have acquired telltale monikers such as "Egypt's Facebook Revolution" and "Syria's YouTube Uprising"¹¹. In the same vein, Arab Spring uprisings may have played an active role in improving the penetration rate and the use of mobile and smart phones by the general population¹².

The continuing instability in a number of its member countries has presented new challenges to the ability of ESCWA to carry its mandate. As an example, ESCWA has had to carefully plan its conferences and meetings to allow for last minute changes that would factor in the fluid security situation in some

¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/12/us-syria-crisis-un-idUSBRE85B1BI20120612>

² <http://www.globalresearch.ca/syria-s-economic-crisis-al-assad-government-roles-back-neoliberal-reforms/32363>

³ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/16/lebanon-banks-idUSL5E8MG6KA20121116>

⁴ http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/08/world/middleeast/effects-of-instability-spill-over-to-syrias-neighbors.html?_r=0

⁵ http://english.nuqudy.com/North_Africa/Egypt_Tourism_Lags_-4170

⁶ <http://www.english.globalarabnetwork.com/2012091912540/Economics/flag-raising-ceremony-for-libya-morocco-and-tunisia-in-front-of-un-house.html>

⁷ <http://www.imf.org/external/region/mcd/deauville/note101212.pdf>

⁸ <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/23/256687.html>

⁹ http://www.uaeinteract.com/docs/UAE_GDP_growth_to_hit_4.5_in_2012/52311.htm

¹⁰ <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Business/Oman-s-economy-to-grow-by-5-in-2012-says-IMF-1st>

¹¹ <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=791>

¹² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/29/arab-spring-captured-on-cameraphones>

member countries. Against this backdrop, ESCWA was able to carry out during 2012 a large number of activities that are aimed at the promotion of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society in the region, some of which are detailed below.

II. REGIONAL FOLLOW-UP OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

The Information Society Portal for the ESCWA Region (ISPER)¹³ aims at tracking the progress of WSIS implementations in EMCs. ISPER is a dynamic, bilingual (English/Arabic), database-driven, open-source application that showcases ESCWA publications, such as the Regional and National Profiles of the Information Society. It contains information society topics that ESCWA is championing, such as cyber legislation, Internet governance, and the promotion of an effective and innovative ICT sector in the region. It provides real-time discussion forums that are used by information society stakeholders to deliberate on the aforementioned topics. During 2012, ESCWA migrated the content management system of ISPER to Drupal¹⁴, an open-source platform that improved and simplified the backend operations of the portal.

III. ACTION LINES

C4: Capacity building

During February 2012, ESCWA, the Arab Lawyers Union (ALU) and the Arab Center for the Rule of Law and Integrity (ACRLI) organized a capacity building workshop entitled "ESCWA Directives of Cyber Legislation in the Arab Region"¹⁵. Participants included lawyers from the Beirut and Tripoli Bar Associations in Lebanon, in addition to legal experts from Iraq, Jordan, Palestine and Yemen (refer to C6 for the main ESCWA cyber legislation activities of 2012).

During October 2012, ESCWA, in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates University College of Law organized a capacity building workshop entitled "Cyber Legislations in the Arab Region"¹⁶. Sessions included a presentation and a discussion of international models for the protection of children online as well as a detailed account of the activities that ESCWA had carried out with regard to the development and harmonization of cyber legislation in the Arab region. During November 2012, similar activities took place in Algeria and Sudan.

C6: Enabling environment

The establishment of a reliable legal and legislative framework for cyber space plays an important role in the development of the ICT sector and the establishment of an enabling environment for the information society in the Arab region. In this context, ESCWA started implementing in 2009 a project entitled "Regional Harmonization of Cyber Legislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab World". Its main objective is to enhance regional integration through the harmonization of national cyber legislation in the Arab region¹⁷. A brief description of the main activities of the project during 2012 follows:

- During March 2012, ESCWA organized, in collaboration with the League of Arab States (LAS), a workshop entitled "Developing and Harmonizing Cyber Legislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab Region"¹⁸. Trainers and presenters gave a concise analysis of the various areas of cyber legislation, clarified the applicability of the ESCWA cyber legislation directives at the national level and provided guidelines for the enhancement and harmonization of cyber legislation at the regional level.

¹³ <http://isper.escwa.un.org>

¹⁴ <http://drupal.org/>

¹⁵ <http://www.arabruleoflaw.com/activitiesListing.aspx?postingID=363&categoryID=5&Id=242>

¹⁶ <http://fl.uaeu.ac.ae/News%20and%20Events/cyber%20workshop.asp>

¹⁷ <http://isper.escwa.un.org/FocusAreas/CyberLegislation/Projects/tabid/161/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

¹⁸ <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1785E>

- During May 2012, ESCWA officially launched the “ESCWA Cyber Legislation Directives”¹⁹. The publication aims at guiding Arab countries in the formulation and enactment of national cyber laws, the promotion of regional integration and the facilitation of electronic transactions between countries in the region. The directives cover various areas of cyber legislation, namely electronic communications, freedom of expression, personal data, cyber crime, electronic transactions, electronic signatures, e-commerce, consumer protection and intellectual property. At the request of Bahrain, Oman, Palestine, Jordan and Syria, ESCWA provided advisory services on the applicability of these directives to the legislation of the requesting countries.
- During December 2012, ESCWA organized the last activity of the project, a seminar entitled "Legal and Regulatory Requirements for a Sustainable Knowledge Society in the Arab Region"²⁰. The event brought together more than 50 ICT and legal experts representing the public and private sectors, NGOs and international organizations. The main objective of the seminar was to discuss the legal and regulatory frameworks of a knowledge society in the Arab region. The seminar highlighted the achievements of the project and included discussions on emerging trends in mobile money, cloud computing and cybercrimes and the protection of personal data.

C8: Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content

Arabic speakers constitute 5 percent of the world's population but the number of Arabic Websites and Web pages in the Arabic language is still limited. During 2012, ESCWA built upon previous cultural diversity efforts with the following activities:

- Publishing a study entitled "Status of the Digital Arabic Content Industry in the ESCWA Region"²¹ that describes and assesses the digital Arabic content industry in the ESCWA region. The study also explores current and potential DAC markets in view of the considerable growth in digital content development and the emergence of highly successful DAC enterprises.
- Preparing a study titled "Business Models for Digital Arabic Content"²² that updates previously developed business models for start-ups and SMEs in the DAC industry and reflects the most recent innovations whether in mobile applications or in social media. ESCWA believes that the updated, profit-making models will encourage young entrepreneurs to launch start-up DAC businesses.
- Organizing during October 2012, in partnership with the Jordanian Royal Scientific Society, an expert group meeting²³ that examined the mechanisms of partnership between various DAC stakeholders, such as ICT ministries and regulatory authorities, innovation funds, business and technology incubators, ICT associations as well as international and regional organizations. This meeting was organized within the framework of the ESCWA initiative entitled “Promotion of the Digital Arabic Content (DAC) Industry in the Arab World”.

For more than 9 years, ESCWA has actively promoted and supported cultural diversity on the Internet by encouraging and facilitating the use of the Arabic language in Top-Level Domains (TLDs). ESCWA believes that Internet Arabic domain names will help overcome the barrier that keeps a large segment of the population, namely unilingual Arabic speakers from being active in cyberspace. Within this context, ESCWA cooperated with LAS to apply for two generic Top Level Domain Names (gTLDs), namely ".arab" and its equivalent in Arabic, "عرب.". It is worth noting that ESCWA has also had a valuable role in developing standards for the use of Arabic in domain names.

¹⁹ <http://isper.escwa.un.org/Portals/0/Cyber%20Legislation/Regional%20Harmonisation%20Project/Directives/Directives-Full.pdf>

²⁰ <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=2002E>

²¹ http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA ICTD 12 TP-4 E.pdf

²² <http://css.escwa.org.lb/ictd/1901/2.pdf>

²³ <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1901E>

During January 2012, ESCWA hosted the final meeting between the Steering Committee of the Arab Top Level Domain (Arab TLD) project and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The meeting aimed at putting the final touches on assigning the registry functions of Arab TLDs to the UAE TRA. During April 2012, LAS submitted to ICANN an application aimed at securing the two aforementioned Arab TLDs. On 13 June 2012, ICANN released a list containing all applications for new TLD names. The list included 14 applications for TLD names in Arabic.

C11: International and regional cooperation

Many of the above-mentioned ESCWA initiatives were carried out in partnership with regional and international organizations. Collaborative efforts are coordinated primarily with the governments of ESCWA countries, non-governmental organizations, a host of stakeholders from the private sector, other United Nations Regional Commissions, UN specialized agencies and programmes and the League of Arab States. Below is a sample of activities that ESCWA co-organized with regional and international partners.

- With the League of Arab States: ESCWA and LAS organized a regional workshop on "Developing and Harmonizing Cyber Legislation in the Arab Region" (Cairo, 14-15 March 2012²⁴). Throughout 2012, ESCWA and LAS worked extensively to establish, launch and lead the inception phase of the Arab Internet Governance Forum (AIGF) process (see section "MT1: Internet governance" for details).
- With the private sector: The ESCWA Technology Centre (ETC)²⁵, an ESCWA offshoot, partners regularly with national and regional innovation hubs and financial institutions to organize commercialization tours for technology investors in order to help them identify suitable investments and to help inventors develop their ideas into profitable products and services.
- With UN-DESA: In November 2012, ETC and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized a regional consultation process in support of the 2013 annual ministerial review (AMR) on innovation, science and technology for sustainable development²⁶.
- With UNODC: During April 2012, ESCWA and UNODC organized a workshop aimed at collecting data on the state of cyber crime and cyber legislation in the Arab region. Through its participation in this event, ESCWA ensured that this vital data collection exercise was well adapted to the needs of the EMCs.

IV. MAIN THEMES

MT1: Internet governance

ESCWA has been spearheading Internet governance activities in the Arab region since 2003. In 2006, ESCWA played a major role in the inception and maturity of the Arab Working Group on Internet Issues. In 2009, in cooperation with LAS, ESCWA developed the "Arab Dialogue on Internet Governance" (ArabDIG)²⁷, an initiative that produced in 2010 a publication entitled "Arab Regional Roadmap for Internet Governance: Framework, Principles and Objectives"²⁸. In 2012, ESCWA and LAS established the Arab Internet Governance Forum (IGF)²⁹. The adoption of ESCWA resolution 306 entitled "Development of the Arab IGF process and sustaining efforts in the Arabic domain names field" during the 27th ESCWA

²⁴ <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1785E>

²⁵ <http://etc-un.org/pr/default.aspx?ln=1>

²⁶ <http://etc-un.org/PR/Default.aspx?ln=1&pid=4828&pvr=0>

²⁷ <http://isper.escwa.un.org/Home/FocusAreas/InternetGovernance/tabid/153/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

²⁸ <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/ICTD-10-TP-5.pdf>

²⁹ <http://www.igfarab.org/>

Ministerial Session³⁰ emphasized the importance that ESCWA places on Internet governance issues in general and on supporting the Arab IGF process in particular.

"The Conference and Public Consultation to Establish the Arab IGF"³¹, which took place at the end of January 2012, spawned the Arab IGF (AIGF) process. AIGF is a decentralized platform which falls under the joint umbrella of ESCWA and LAS and involves several stakeholders that include the National Telecom Regulatory Authority (NTRA) of Egypt³², which is the home of the Arab IGF Secretariat, and the Kuwait Information Technology Society (KITS)³³, which was the host of the first annual AIGF meeting.

In its first year of establishment, participants in the Arab IGF process formed the Arab Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group (AMAG) and convened two meetings and a public consultation (Cairo, 18-19 June 2012³⁴, and 4-6 September 2012³⁵). These activities mainly aimed at paving the way for the First Annual Meeting of the Arab IGF (Kuwait, 9-11 October 2012³⁶) which was held under the theme "Better Internet for a Better Arab World". In addition to the aforementioned entities – NTRA and KITS – participants included other AMAG members representing a wide array of stakeholders³⁷, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and the Réseaux IP Européens Network Coordination Centre (RIPE NCC). The first annual meeting of the AIGF drew 350 participants and witnessed the birth of several coalitions, including one on regional peering and another on the domain names industry in the Arab region. AIGF activities held during 2012 constituted a learning process for the various stakeholders of the process. ESCWA and LAS are currently working on enhancing the cooperation model, clearly denoting roles and responsibilities and setting a financing mechanism aimed at ensuring the sustainability of the Arab IGF process.

MT3: Measuring the Information Society

Throughout 2012, ESCWA played an active role in the "Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development", an UNCTAD-led initiative. In this context, ESCWA participated in an interactive debate for a panel on "Measuring e-commerce", presented its findings on the barriers to measuring e-commerce and proposed a development measurement framework as well as a set of related recommendations.

During the same period, ESCWA developed research and development Indicators (RDI) that are useful and relevant to energy, water, construction, manufacturing, ICT, and food production. The developed indicators helped identify technology gaps as well as challenges in the water and renewable energy sectors.

V. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Carrying through the suggestions and recommendations listed below will help EMCs meet WSIS goals. Note that they have been grouped by action line or main theme and that the list is not exhaustive³⁸.

C1. Role of Public governance authorities in the promotion of ICTs for development

- Allocate the funds necessary for the implementation of ICT strategies and revise them periodically in accordance with regularly updated information society indicators, national needs and economic outlooks.

³⁰ <http://www.un.org/regionalcommissions/ESCWAreseng2012.pdf>, page 6

³¹ <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1759E>

³² <http://www.tra.gov.eg/english/main.asp?>

³³ <http://www.kits.org.kw/>

³⁴ <http://www.igfarab.org/index.php/the-first-meeting-of-the-advisory-committee>

³⁵ <http://www.igfarab.org/docs/meeting.pdf>

³⁶ <http://www.igfarab.org/index.php/latest-news/item/86-25-09-2012-1059>

³⁷ <http://www.igfarab.org/index.php/advisory-committee/members-of-the-committee>

³⁸ For a comprehensive list, refer to http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA ICTD_11_4_e.pdf

C2. Information and communication infrastructure

- Accelerate the implementation of ICT infrastructure projects and reduce Internet-subscription costs to a level that would be affordable to a wider section of the community.

C3. Access to information and knowledge

- Encourage the development of new telecommunication technologies in order to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural/remote areas.

C4. Capacity Building

- Implement policies that promote research and development and that provide the environment necessary to encourage thinkers and researchers not to emigrate towards more developed countries.

C5. Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs

- Adopt innovative methodologies aimed at developing safe and reliable e-services and applications that would be resilient to external risks and threats.
- Raise the awareness of public sector workers, business owners, adults and children on protection mechanisms available for the digital environment.

C6. Enabling environment

- Develop, implement and harmonize cyber legislations covering topics related to cyberspace, in particular those related to cybercrime, privacy and confidentiality of personal information.
- Create venture capital and investment funds to support the creation of start-ups and SMEs in the ICT sector and encourage national and foreign investment in the ICT sector.

C7. ICT applications

- Maximize the benefits of ICT applications by working towards increasing the level of ICT literacy in the general population with media campaigns and capacity-building measures.

C8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content

- Support the incubation of DAC (digital Arabic content) applications, including those for mobile devices and tablet computers.

C9. Media

- Reduce legal and legislative constraints on mass media, remove censorship and promote freedom of expression.
- Enhance radio and television signals to enable people in rural and remote areas equal access to those living in urban areas, and encourage the production of cultural and educational programmes.

MT1: Internet governance

- Encourage public and private entities to become active Internet governance players by stressing the importance of the global IGF and regional AIGF processes and highlighting their impact on the realization of the information society.

MT3. Measuring the Information Society

- Develop the capacity of national statistical entities to measure the indicators of the information society and the knowledge based-economy.