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**STATUS OF COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES
IN THE FIELD OF WATER WITHIN THE PURVIEW OF UNESCWA**

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**OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP OF 77
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Introduction:

ESCWA is carrying out a wide variety of activities aiming to increase the interest of member countries in regional cooperation in the management of water resources. For instance, in pursuant to ESCWA Resolution 244 (XXII), various activities are taking place with respect to cooperation between member states with respect to shared water resources including knowledge mapping and analysis of national capacities in managing shared water resources, enhancing capacities of member states in negotiation skills and providing technical advisory services in the field. Also, ESCWA is supporting the Arab countries to exchange experiences and lessons learnt in implementing the commitments made to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (Goal 7 on environmental sustainability) in the field of drinking water, sanitation and environmental management. That is, a regional assessment report to review the current status of water and sanitation coverage and to evaluate policies and strategies adopted in the development of the sector was prepared and discussed during a High level meeting with the participation of representatives from the Arab Countries. In addition, ESCWA conducted various activities in relation to climate change impacts and adaptation measures in the water resources sector.

The following is a brief overview of established mechanisms and specific activities carried out during the past years with respect to strengthening regional cooperation on management of water resources and promoting Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in the region:

1 – Regional Cooperation on Shared Water Resources

ESCWA implemented an inter-regional project aimed at strengthening the capacity of water management institutions in countries in the Mediterranean region to implement sustainable forms of utilization, management and protection of internationally shared groundwater resources. The Project lasted for three years, ending in February 2008. The project was implemented in collaboration with other partners, namely, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – International Hydrological Programme (UNESCO-IHP), and Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). The beneficiaries included then representatives of water management institutions in selected MEDA countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and Member States in the region: ECE countries (Albania-Croatia-Greece-Turkey); ECA countries (Algeria-Libya-Morocco-Tunisia); and ESCWA countries (Egypt-Jordan-Lebanon-Palestine-Syria).

The project conducted five consultative workshops to enable the participating countries to strengthen cooperation among themselves in order to increase awareness and application of the international norms in sustainable management of shared aquifers and to transfer and exchange know-how on various shared aquifer management issues and mechanisms, including the management of data on shared aquifers; and to strength capability of MEDA countries to engage in inter-State cooperation regarding shared aquifers and to plan and manage their groundwater resources by using the tools and mechanism developed in this project.

The project had several impacts as it initiated and sustained dialogues between MEDA countries on shared water resources issues, in general, and aquifers management in particular; established suitable platforms and institutional arrangements for intraregional and/or inter-regional cooperation on management of shared groundwater resources; Developed regional policies and common strategies for shared water resources management that are in harmony with national policies; and harmonized and exchanged data and basic knowledge on aquifers on the basis of common databases.

In addition to this project, ESCWA is currently preparing a study to assess and analyze the current status of national capacities to manage shared water resources, review of success stories at the global and regional levels, and identify capacity needs, and recommend policies and national organizational reforms needed to strengthen ESCWA Member States for implementing TWRM concepts in managing shared water resources in the region. The study will form the background document of the forthcoming Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on “Applying IWRM principles in managing shared water resources” which will be held by end of 2009.

2 – Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) on Climate Change

In view of the challenges ahead, the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) was established to coordinate initiatives in joint action among the UN system and other organizations in the Arab region, among which climate change issues. In this connection, ESCWA has contributed to the development of an Arab Framework Action Plan for mitigation and adaptation to climate change impacts in partnership with League of Arab States (LAS) and UNEP/Regional Office for Western Asia, in addition to capacity building activities for member states in the field. ESCWA is also preparing various activities to provide support to member states to promote policy dialogue on climate change adaptation measures and to enhance actions for regional cooperation to undertake vulnerability assessments of water resources and related socio-economic aspects in the region. Additionally, ESCWA prepared a document which aimed to review the potential impacts of climate Change on the water resources sector in the ESCWA Region; identify feasible adaptation measures and approach to improve resilience of ESCWA Countries to cope with and minimize the negative implications of climate change on the water sector; and finally identify the main climate Change challenges to face water resources managers in the region.

3 – Establishment of the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association – ACWUA

ACWUA was formulated to assist members from the Region to improve their performance in the delivery of water supply and sanitation services. This association is envisioned to be a self-sustainable, strong regional association of Arab water utilities. The Association can provide many benefits in terms of helping members improve their service delivery, enhance efficiency and performance of utilities, develop and meet technical standards, and ensure that the very large ongoing investment programs in the region are well managed. Moreover, ACWUA can provide a regional advocacy platform for its members to interact effectively not only with each other but also with governments, the private sector, as well as donors and international lending organizations to the mutual benefit of all concerned.

An ACWUA – Steering Committee (SC) was formed during the ACWUA Consultative Meeting that took place in Cairo, Egypt, in September 2006 which was the first among a series of regional meetings within the ACWUA establishment process. The Steering Committee has been leading the process since then with the strong support of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and German Development Cooperation represented by German Technical Cooperation (GTZ). The charter of ACWUA has been approved by the Steering Committee which acted as the Foundation Committee and a Secretary-General has been elected. Seven Technical Working Groups have been established. Membership stands at 70 members of which 50 represent water institutions/utilities from the member countries. The Secretariat of ACWUA will be hosted by the Ministry of Water Resources in Amman, Jordan.

This Association is expected to bring together active water experts and utilities in the Arab region; develop capacities of water utility staff members and other professionals in various water science and management fields; disseminate and exchange of information on technologies and best practices in the water and sanitation industries; and to collaborate and exchange of expertise with other professional associations in water supply/sanitation, environment and other relevant fields within and outside the Arab region. This will lead to improvement of regional orientation of national water strategies, including adoption of cooperation mechanisms and integration of drinking water and sanitation policies within the framework of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) plans in the ESCWA member states.

4 – Operationalization of the Arab Integrated Water Resources Management Network (AWARENET)

AWARENET was established in 2002 as an independent, impartial regional network of training and research institutes, NGOs, government authorities and experts in the field of water engaged in the development and delivery of capacity building programs and resource material on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) policies and practices for the Arab region. The network was officially endorsed by ESCWA in its 22nd Ministerial Session through Resolution 244 (XXII) on the cooperation between

ESCWA member countries with respect to shared water resources and the Arab Network for the Integrated Management of Water Resources. It is hosted by ESCWA as the network secretariat.

AWARENET aims to be demand driven, with strong local ownership, in order to create partnerships to overcome capacity constraints, bringing together multiple disciplines and view points. AWARENET presently counts among its members over 80 leading water related institutions in 18 Arab countries. AWARENET is endorsed by regional organizations, such as UNESCO-Cairo, United Nations Developed Programme - Sub-Regional Resource Facility for Arab States (UNDP-Surf), and United Nations Environment Programme – Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP-ROWA), THE German Development Cooperation agencies, BGR and GTZ, and global networks, like Cap-Net and Global Water Partnership (GWP). Through UN-ESCWA, AWARENET is connected and in communication with various water related institutes and events around the world, and thus providing the network with valuable resources and opportunities.

AWARENET operates by building capacity of its members and by providing them with the opportunity to exchange ideas, coordinate research, and build regional projects related to IWRM. This includes: promoting communication, knowledge exchange and best practices on the application of IWRM among member institutions; improving knowledge and skills on IWRM; and facilitating research in subjects relevant to IWRM in the region, based on crosscutting issues and multidisciplinary perspectives.

AWARENET has national chapters in different Arab countries that conduct local projects and coordinate national efforts on the implementation of IWRM. The network is also establishing regional thematic groups that cover urgent cross-cutting issues related to IWRM, such as climate change and water resources protection. This has given a good boost to the network and raised its visibility among regional and international partners as well as the public at large. A new website located at www.awarenet.org with links to the national chapters of AWARENET and its members and partners is planned to host discussion forums, conferences and wide range of resource materials developed by members.

5 – ESCWA Inter-governmental Committee on Water Resources and its Effective Role of Strengthen Regional Cooperation

The Committee on Water Resources was established pursuant to Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) resolution 205 (XVIII) of 25 May 1995 concerning the establishment of a committee on water resources in ESCWA, endorsed by Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/26 of 24 July 1995. The aim of establishing the Committee is to strengthen regional cooperation by effectively involving stakeholders in member countries in the planning and implementation of the ESCWA programmes of work in the field of water resources. The Committee on Water Resources held eight sessions since its establishment.

The Committee provides a formal forum for discussion of the challenges and obstacles confronting the region in the field of water resources. For instance, during the eighth session that was held in December 2008, newly emerging issues related to water resources management in the ESCWA region were debated such as potential impacts of climate change on the water resources sector and possible adaptation measures, progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Target 10 of Goal 7 concerning access to safe drinking water and sanitation and assessment of water quality management in the countries of the ESCWA region.

6 – Regional Entities and Cooperation of Mechanisms in the ESCWA region

ESCWA is contribution to several entities and mechanisms that were established to strengthen cooperation among countries in the field of water resources in the Arab region. The following are some examples of these entities and mechanisms:

a- Arab Water Council (AWC)

The Arab Water Council (AWC), a non-governmental regional organization dedicated to coordinate efforts and visions of the Integrated Water Resources Management in the Arab World aiming to maximize the economic, social and environmental benefits of water in the Arab countries, was formally launched on 14 April 2004 in Cairo, Egypt in the presence water experts representing Arab States, regional and international organizations, leading universities, research centers, and private sector. The aim of funding the Arab Water Council is to promote better understanding and management of the water resources in the Arab States in a multi-disciplinary, non-political, professional and scientific manner; and to disseminate knowledge, enhance sharing of experience and information for the rational and comprehensive water resources development of the region for the benefits of its inhabitants. The founders aimed at creating a council to influence decision-making process, policy formulation, and strategic orientation for better water management in the region through the preparation of studies and reports on the water resources issues in all 22 Member States. In this respect, the AWC is organizing regional consultations as part of the preparatory process for the regional contribution to participation in the World Water Forum 5 that will be held in Istanbul, Turkey in March 2009 in coordination with other regional and international organizations.

b- Arab Ministerial Council on Water Resources

Also, An Arab Ministerial Council on Water Resources was recently (August 2008) established by the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States to provide the political support at the highest level for implementation of regional and national water resources strategies in the Arab region and to provide a solid platform to strengthen cooperation and coordination among the Arab Countries.

c- Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM)

In addition to the above, the regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) which had its twelfth meeting in September 2008, proved to be a good vehicle for driving common policy and initiatives in joint action among the UN system and other organizations in the Arab region. During that meeting, working groups were established to enhance synergy and coordination on key regional priorities such as: achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Arab region, climate change and food security. This mechanism will assist to enhance regional cooperation and increase strategic partnerships which will lead to have tangible progress in dealing with newly emerging issues in the water resources sector.