

ARAB PARLIAMENTARY BULLETIN

Quarterly newsletter published by UNDP's Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region (PDIAR) with the contribution of Arab parliaments and parliamentarians.

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EDITORIAL

The third quarter of 2009 was marked by the celebration, on the 15th of September, of the International Day of Democracy.

Celebrated in many countries across the globe, the Democracy Day was an occasion to highlight the role of parliamentary institutions in consolidating democratic practices that ensure the equality and prosperity of peoples and nations. The Lebanese parliament commemorated this day by opening its doors to the public and organizing a series of events including discussions with MPs and guided visits.

In our third issue, we are pleased to share with you the experience of Ms. Aseel Al Awadhi, who has honored us with an enlightening contribution on her experience as one of the first four Kuwaiti women to enter the National Assembly. It provides a glimpse of the challenges women face and accomplishments achieved, giving hope to woman across the Arab world and motivating them to continue their struggle to get their voices heard.

Anti-corruption bodies have recently gained increasing attention as a means to curb corruption. The UN Convention Against Corruption recommends the establishment and reinforcement of independent anti-corruption entities. One of our articles sheds light on the experience of some Arab countries in this area, particularly on the laws regulating these bodies and the role played by the parliament in the legislative process.

Another article examines the role that civil society is playing in overseeing national parliaments in some Arab countries, and how this relatively recent trend can potentially promote transparency of accountability in Arab parliaments, and reinstate citizen's confidence in the legislative institution.

Two important publications have been added to the list of Arabic-language knowledge materials on strengthening democracy and promoting human development. First, the 5th volume of the UNDP *Arab Human Development Report* (2009), focused on the theme of human security, was launched in Beirut in July. It identifies seven challenges to human security in the Arab region and provides recommendations for action, improvement and reform.

The second knowledge product titled *Towards Strengthening the Role of Arab Parliaments in the Reform of Political Party Legislation* was published by PDIAR. It compiles the knowledge built in the framework of the *Working Group on Parliaments and the Reform of Political Party Legislation* launched by PDIAR in 2006. In addition to workshop reports, the publication includes the regional studies commissioned by UNDP on key issues affecting political party life, such as party finance and internal governance. One of the goals of this working group was to build consensus over minimum standards for political party legislation in the Arab countries. The final version, approved by representatives of over 40 Arab political parties, has also been published.

We thank our readers for the continuous demonstration of interest and support for this e-bulletin and reiterate our invitation to MPs and practitioners to send us their contributions in the form of articles, news briefs, or updates on recent parliamentary events in the region.

WE INVITE YOU TO VISIT
OUR WEBSITE:
www.arabparliaments.org

Arab Parliaments' News

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"Open Doors" at the Lebanese National Assembly

The Lebanese National Assembly, in cooperation with UNDP, organized a day of "Open Doors" in the Parliament on 15 September 2009, commemorating the [International Day of Democracy](#) that was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007 as a way to celebrate democracy, and as a reminder of the need to promote and protect it. The event reflected the Parliament's commitment to democracy and provided more than 150 Lebanese students from various universities and affiliations the opportunity to spend a day on the premises of the Lebanese Parliament. The Day was launched with a presentation on the history of the Parliament, followed by a guided tour of several departments in the parliament, including the main hall where discussions with several MPs took place. The Speaker of Parliament addressed a message stressing the importance of maintaining the democratic system and called for incorporating democracy as the basis of the Lebanese school curriculum.

Arab Transitional Parliament Regular Session

The activities of the Arab Transitional Parliament's second regular session were launched in Damascus, Syria on September 13 and 14, 2009. The discussions focused on the draft permanent Arab Parliament's Statute, which includes the Parliament's goals, election process, membership and representation of member countries, in addition to representation of women in the Parliament, and the Parliament's oversight and legislative role.

Arab Legislation

Algeria Approves Draft Law on the Prevention of Crimes Related to Information and Communication Technologies

The National People's Assembly of Algeria approved a draft law in July 2009 on the prevention of crimes related to information and communication technologies. The new procedure will help the government formulate the necessary technical arrangements and put in place the legal framework which should enable it to prevent any criminal and terrorist attacks on information systems of government institutions. The draft law also aims to prevent organized crime, pirating, and attempts by terrorists to incite hatred and promote violence. The Algerian Minister of Justice assured that individual freedoms will not be violated as any action by the government requires judicial approval.

Accession of Iraq to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

The Iraqi Parliament has approved a law on May 11th, 2009 for the accession of Iraq to the [UN Convention to Combat Desertification](#). The law aims to prevent desertification and enhance the process of flood control and in reducing the silting up of river beds, reservoirs, and irrigation canals, and would allow recovery of the forest after cutting. Programmes have also been designed for developing existing forests and creating new ones. An estimated 2000 hectares of natural forests are depleted annually in Iraq due to the production of firewood and charcoal, which remains within the capacity of forests to supply so long as adequate laws, arrangements, and measures have been adopted

In The Spotlight

ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSIONS IN ARAB LEGISLATION

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In recent years, corruption¹ has received increasing worldwide attention, more particularly in developing countries. Corruption is a worldwide phenomenon which undermines democracy and the rule of law, threatens the security of citizens, hinders social and economic development and hampers the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In this regard, parliament plays a crucial role in drafting legislation establishing and regulating anti-corruption commissions. This article sheds light on the experiences of some Arab countries in establishing such entities, and the role of parliament in building the legal framework that regulates the functioning of regulating anti-corruption institutions.

International Instruments

The international community has contributed to raising awareness about the dangers of transboundary corruption. Several regional and international conventions have been adopted, namely the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC)². To date, 140 countries have signed this convention, 16 of which are Arab countries³. This convention provides a global and binding anti-corruption framework, and highlights the need to take institutional measures to combat corruption. As per article 6 of the Convention⁴, each State Party shall, in accordance with the fundamental principles of its legal system, ensure the existence of a body or bodies that prevent corruption. According to article 36, State parties shall “ensure the existence of a body or bodies or persons specialized in combating corruption through law enforcement.” Article 65 highlighted the need to take the necessary administrative and legislative measures to ensure the implementation of the state parties’ obligations under this Convention.

International Experiences

Drafting laws on anti-corruption commissions poses several challenges, as choosing the best model for an anti-corruption commission to serve the best interests of the State is not a simple task. Some countries have established a new anti-corruption commission, while others have altered the duties of existent bodies to include combating corruption. Some have merged both models, depending on the needs and the available human and financial resources.

Laws on Anti-Corruption Commissions in Arab Countries

During the past few years, several Arab countries, such as Jordan, Algeria, Iraq, Qatar, Morocco and Yemen⁵, have established anti-corruption commissions. International experiences provide a number of success stories and lessons learned and are likely to guide the choices made by countries in creating anti-corruption bodies and enacting legislation which determines the prerogatives and degree of independence. A quick review of the laws regulating anti-corruption commissions in the above-mentioned countries shows some interesting differences in this area.

Independence of the Commissions

The anti-corruption commission is linked to the Prime Minister in Jordan, to the Heir in Qatar, to the President of the Republic in Algeria, and to the Prime Minister in Morocco, while it is under the supervision of the Parliament in Iraq. These commissions in Jordan (Article 3), Algeria (article 18), Yemen (article 6) and Iraq are a moral entity with financial and administrative independence, according to the law. In Morocco, the law provides for including the budget of the commission under the budget of the Office of the Prime Minister (article 16).



Duties and Authority

Anti-corruption commissions seek to promote transparency and good governance, by developing national anti-corruption policies and strategies and coordinating with the local and international community to achieve this goal. In Morocco, the goal of the commission is restricted to the prevention of bribery, while in Jordan it covers a wide array of issues including preventing defamation.

Different prerogatives were given to the commissions in the countries chosen in this article, namely:

- Requesting information
The law in Jordan (article 17), Algeria (article 20) and Yemen (article 33) grants the commission the authority to request information from any party.
- Investigation
In Jordan (article 7), Qatar (article 3) and Yemen (article 34-35), the commission is entitled to investigate any corruption case or complaint received from citizens regarding corrupt practices, by collecting information and questioning the concerned, as necessary. In Algeria, the commission has to refer to the General Prosecutor's Office to collect evidence and conduct inquiries on corruption-related facts (article 20).
- Disclosure of Financial Assets
In Iraq, the anti-corruption commission annually receives disclosures of financial assets from the President, parliamentarians, ministers and other civil servants. It reviews the information submitted and makes them available to the public (section 7). In Yemen, the commission receives disclosures of

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION (ICAC) – HONG KONG

In 1974, Hong Kong established an Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), one of the first established independent agencies in the world to combat and prevent corruption and raise awareness. Political will and the prevalent culture contributed to the success of this experience, as Hong Kong had adopted anti-corruption and bribery laws since 1897, and had set up the Police Force's Anti-Corruption Branch. The independence, wide authority to conduct investigation, efficient internal management, and the system of checks and balances implemented, also contributed to the success of the commission.

financial assets from civil servants both in the legislative and executive authorities (article 8). The Commission in Algeria receives disclosure of properties owned by the presidents and members of elected local assemblies, while the President, the members of Parliament, the Prime Minister, the ministers and a number of other civil servants submit it to the President of the Supreme Court. The information, in the case of Algeria, shall be published within 2 months after the appointment or elections in the official gazette (article 6).

- Seizure, trial and recovery of public funds
In Jordan, the anti-corruption body is entitled to prosecute any person violating the anti-corruption law, seize their fixed and unfixed assets, prevent them from traveling, suspend them, halt the payment of their paycheck, bonuses and all financial benefits, if necessary (article 7). In Algeria, the anti-corruption body, when faced with incriminating facts, transfers the case to the Minister of Justice, who informs the General Prosecutor to file a public lawsuit, if necessary (article 22). The commission in Morocco, upon receiving information related to acts of bribery sanctioned by law, informs the judicial authorities (article 8).

The laws both in Algeria (article 51, 57-71) and Yemen (article 32) provides for the recovery of assets, revenues and illegal money, and the importance of international cooperation and coordination in this field.

- Sanctions

The law in Jordan (article 22), Algeria (article 25-50), Yemen (article 40-41), Iraq (section 6) provides for sanctions on perpetrators of corruption crimes by imposing a fine and/or imprisonment.

- Drafting laws

The commission in Iraq (section 4), Qatar (article 3) and Yemen (article 8, 20) is entitled to assess legislation and draft new laws to prevent and combat corruption in line with international agreements. In Yemen, the commission is also entitled to conduct studies on the establishment of specialized administrative courts, and ask relevant authorities to establish these courts according to the legislations.

Several Arab countries are still discussing the laws on anti-corruption commissions such as Bahrain, Lebanon, Tunisia and Kuwait. Though a one-fits-all model does not exist, many factors contribute to the empowerment of such commissions. In addition to the factors mentioned above such as the independence, authority and financial and human resources of the commission, political will and support from different civil society organizations are important for the fulfillment of its role. Coordinating the efforts of these commissions with other supervisory bodies such as the Ombudsman and the Auditor is also crucial.

Many experiences have proven that in addition to laws on anti-corruption bodies, other legislation are necessary to guarantee their success, such as the laws on financial disclosure, access to information, prevention of money laundering, and other laws contributing to promote transparency and good governance.

1. *The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines corruption as: the misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit – through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement.*



Fighting Corruption to Improve Governance: Policy Paper. UNDP, 1998.

2. *Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 58/4 of 31 October 2003, and came into force on 14 December 2005.*

3. *Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, the Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The following countries ratified it: Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. 3 countries are in the accession phase: Iraq, Lebanon, and Mauritania.*

4. *Article 6 of the Convention:*

1. *Each State Party shall, in accordance with the fundamental principles of its legal system, ensure the existence of a body or bodies, as appropriate, that prevent corruption by such means as:*

a) *Implementing the policies referred to in article 5 of this Convention and, where appropriate, overseeing and coordinating the implementation of those policies;*

b) *Increasing and disseminating knowledge about the prevention of corruption.*

2. *Each State Party shall grant the body or bodies referred to in paragraph 1 of this article the necessary independence, in accordance with the fundamental principles of its legal system, to enable the body or*



Parliaments of the World

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bodies to carry out its or their functions effectively and free from any undue influence. The necessary material resources and specialized staff, as well as the training that such staff may require to carry out their functions, should be provided.

3. Each State Party shall inform the Secretary-General of the United Nations of the name and address of the authority or authorities that may assist other States Parties in developing and implementing specific measures for the prevention of corruption.

5. The laws on these anti-corruption bodies were chosen as an example for comparison.

Jordan established the Anti-Corruption Commission as per Law No. 62 of 2006.

Iraq established the Commission on Public Integrity by the Iraqi Governing Council as authorized by the Coalition Provisional Authority's order 55 (2004); it was then included in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution (article 102).

Qatar established the National Commission for Integrity and Transparency by Royal Decree No. 84 of 2007.

Yemen established The Supreme National Anti-Corruption Commission as per Law No. 39 of 2006.

Algeria established the Anti-Corruption Association as per Law No. 06-01 of 20 February 2006.

Morocco established the Central Commission for the Prevention of Bribery as per Decree No. 2.05.1228 of 13 March 2007.

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Regional Support Unit for the Arab Anti-Corruption and Integrity Network

<http://www.nazaha.iq>

Institutional Arrangements to Combat Corruption: A Comparative Study. UNDP, 2005.

The Establishment of Special Anti-Corruption Bodies: Overview of International Practice. Center for the Study of Democracy.

Secretaries-General Forum of Asia-Pacific Parliaments (SGFAPP)

The first ever Secretaries-General Forum of Asia-Pacific Parliaments was held in Seoul on July 8 - 9, 2009. The Forum, hosted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, was attended by 42 delegations of parliamentary assemblies from 32 countries. Under the slogan "Beginning of a new Asia-Pacific Era" the Forum provided a platform for exchange of information and practices on the topic of e-Parliament, as well as for participants to appreciate the technologies used in the digital chamber of the Korean legislature and at the Library of the National Assembly. The Forum agreed on a final document - the Seoul Communiqué - which stresses the importance of inter-parliamentary cooperation in the region.

International Day of Democracy

On September 15th 2009, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and parliaments across the world celebrated the second [International Day of Democracy](#). The choice of September 15 for the International Day of Democracy corresponds to the adoption of the [Universal Declaration on Democracy](#) by the IPU in September 2007.

Fifth Annual Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament

The Fifth Annual Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament was organized by the National Council of Austria and the Inter-Parliamentary Union and held on July 13 - 14, 2009 in Vienna, Austria. The two-day meeting focused on the challenges of achieving gender equality. It particularly focused on two main themes: violence against women and the impact of the global financial crisis on women. The meeting aimed to evaluate and document progress made and challenges faced in achieving gender equality to contribute to the preparations of the fifteen year-review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action 2010, the Millennium Development Goals 2010, and the Third Conference of Speakers of Parliament 2010.

In Focus

PARLIAMENTARY MONITORS: AN EMERGING TREND IN THE ARAB REGION

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As one of the main functions of parliament, “parliamentary oversight” creates a system of checks and balances and ensures the smooth functioning of democracy; however, the question that has recently been gaining increasing attention is: who oversees parliament and monitors its performance? Monitoring parliament has its numerous merits, especially as it leads voters to elect their representatives based on a rational and well-informed choice, and increases parliamentarians’ accountability towards their constituents.

Media and Parliamentary Transparency

Currently, the task of covering parliamentary proceedings and activities is, by and large, secured through the efforts of the media; an effective tool in countries that practice transparent democracy, but one that is impeding to a vibrant political sphere in the case of parliaments that restrict media access to parliamentary information and proceedings and constrain what can be publically reported. In this regard, Arab media institutions and agencies are becoming increasingly involved in covering parliamentary news and activities, and the practice appears to be gradually gaining momentum. Several Kuwaiti newspapers, for instance, include a section to cover parliamentary news, a practice that has contributed to enhancing citizen’s interest and involvement in parliamentary life. This, and other practices, confirms the role media can play in parliamentary monitoring in the Arab Region.

NGOs Overseeing the Parliament

Similarly, in striving to achieve transparent and accountable democracy, a number of civil society institutions have been focusing their efforts on monitoring their national parliaments to create a strong connection between the represented and the representative. The work logic of these organizations is based on providing abundant and accessible information on parliaments,

parliamentarians, legislation processes, and parliamentary activities and documents; a process that would enhance the emergence of informed citizens and transparent representatives.

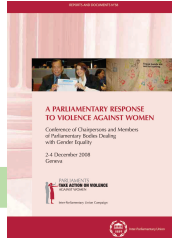
One such example is the Openpolis Association in Italy, which has developed a web-application for monitoring parliament, enabling the public to follow an act or law from the time of its proposal to its final approval, in both chambers. The application also tracks the voting process and, and provides access to related documents, speeches and the space for citizens to interactively discuss legislation while it is occurring. Within the Arab region, monitoring parliamentary performance is a relatively recent trend which was instigated by the [Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace](#) through its “Lebanese Legislation Monitor” (2004-2007) in an effort to monitor the compatibility of laws being drafted or reviewed. A number of initiatives have followed, including the [Lebanese Parliamentary Monitor](#), and the [Jordanian Parliamentary Monitor](#).

The Lebanese Parliamentary Monitor has been carrying out its activities since 2005. It compiles parliament and parliamentarian-related information and organizes meetings between citizens and their representatives. Through making this information accessible, the Monitor aims to spread a culture of transparency and accountability, hold parliamentarians to account, spread political awareness concerning legislation and parliamentary activities, and enhance citizens’ active participation in the political sphere.

Similarly, the Jordanian Parliamentary Monitor (JPM), launched by [Al Quds Center for Political Studies](#) in cooperation with NDI and USAID, aims to contribute to increased parliamentary openness, transparency, and accountability, through conducting national surveys and ongoing

A PARLIAMENTARY RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

This report, recently published by IPU, includes the proceedings of the third conference for members of parliamentary bodies



8 dealing with gender equality it had organized in 2008. Titled "A Parliamentary Response to Violence Against Women" the conference tackled key issues such as approaches to end violence against women, and recent trends and emerging forms of violence against women. It also emphasized the international and regional legal frameworks established to address violence against women, and ways to ensure funding for implementing these legislation, and means to monitor governments' actions in implementing them. In addition to the experts' presentations, case studies, and overviews of the debates, the report contains the recommendations of the conference.

consultations with civic groups, citizens, and members of parliament. The JPM also keeps track of voting records, attendance, member participation and other indicators, and has recently published a series of unprecedented reports on parliamentary monitoring in Jordan. The reports provide information and analysis to citizens and civil society on various elements of the Jordanian Parliament's performance.

Similar projects are currently being developed in a number of other Arab countries including Omani and Yemen. Such promising projects will undoubtedly contribute to increasing the transparency in Arab parliaments, building trust between them and civil society, and enabling better-informed citizens to hold their representatives accountable.

Finally, it is worth noting that several factors are vital to the success of such good practices, including the legal framework that enhances the accessibility and transparency of parliamentary institutions. Many Arab parliaments have recently passed or are currently debating Freedom of Information (FOI) laws in an effort to further strengthen and entrench democratic values and practices in their societies.



Knowledge Building

Towards Strengthening the Role of Arab Parliaments in the Reform of Political Party Legislation

In an effort to strengthen capacities of Arab parliamentarians and initiate thematic Arab parliamentary networks, the Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region (PDIAR) launched in 2006 the Working Group on Parliaments and the Reform of Political Party Legislation. This working group brought together more than 80 parliamentarians, experts, and representatives of political parties from eight Arab countries to review and assess existing and proposed Arab political party laws, their impact on the political scene, and the role of parliaments in proposing and amending party legislation.

The three-year consultative process has resulted in a wealth of knowledge products compiled in this publication, as a new contribution to PDIAR's mission to build and disseminate knowledge on parliamentary development. Available in Arabic, and partly in English, it includes the studies presented in the three regional meetings and the focus group meeting, as well as the reports of those meetings. The publication also includes *the General Principles for Political Party Legislation in the Arab Region* endorsed by the Working Group members in 2008.

A CD-Rom is also enclosed and includes additional knowledge products such as the Arab Political Parties Database with information on over 100 political parties in four Arab countries, and the Legislation Database which provides access to constitutional texts and related legislation of most Arab countries (political party laws, electoral laws, media laws, association laws).

This publication is available online at:

<http://www.arabparliaments.org/publications/books/politicalpartieslegislation-e.pdf>



The Road to Parliament



**By MP Aseel Al Awadhi,
Member of the Kuwaiti National Assembly**



A successful experience might be easy to recall. However, as much as my journey might have been unique and enriching, I always try to keep in mind that the road to Parliament was a steep, rocky path.

Deeply rooted in society and adopted by both men and women, the chauvinistic culture was the first challenge I faced. Separate roles are assigned to men and women, giving men the exclusive privilege of being involved in politics. After years of women being deprived of their political rights consecrated by the Kuwaiti Constitution, it was hard for those who grew up and adopted this mindset to vote for a female candidate. I must also mention that the Electoral Law was only amended recently, giving women the right to vote and run for office in the Kuwaiti elections, and that posed an additional challenge to many of the women candidates, the May 2009 elections being the second time Kuwaiti women were able to vote or run for office.

Despite these challenges, the 2009 electoral race was a truly unique experience, allowing Kuwaiti women to overcome most of these difficulties. My campaign did not end in a mere victory but in a triumph, as I came in the second place in a highly-competitive constituency.

Victory was possible as Kuwaiti citizens rallied around our cause and believed in the role of women in politics. It was also possible thanks to a non-traditional electoral campaign proposing a different political agenda and style. I had to be a female candidate representing women and defending their causes, and simultaneously a citizen representing the nation and defending its causes. That was my first challenge. My intention was not to be compared to other female candidates, but rather to be seen as a true competitor to both men and women candidates.

In a tense environment characterized by fierce competition, it was necessary to put forward something different. As such, my campaign presented a different model of rational and calm political discourse, based on logic and facts rather than slogans. I had the duty to offer a different model, not as a woman, but as a citizen with a vision for a new country. I wanted my campaign to reflect the aspirations of citizens longing for a better life. During the campaign, we communicated with citizens in a simple and straightforward language, we raised the issues we both faced as citizens and avoided petty political bickering. We delivered an optimistic discourse, expressing faith in our capacity to introduce change. At that historical moment of our nation's history, each and every one of us had to be aware of their responsibilities.

I believe that success was also possible thanks to the team of young leaders I had the honor to work with, which defined the style and political discourse of the campaign. This was not Aseel Al Awadhi's campaign; this was the campaign of the Kuwaiti youth, carrying their hopes, ambitions and style. Competent young men and women ran the entire campaign and

succeeded, proving the ability of the Kuwaiti youth to lead and innovate in politics.

We live in a country that has survived several challenges over time. This was not just another

political campaign; it reflected the attitude of Kuwaiti citizens, who are able to build a strong, secure and prosperous country whenever they are given the chance to work hard.

The Initiative

The Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region (PDIAR) is a joint project launched by UNDP's Global Programme on Parliamentary Strengthening (GPPS) and the Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR), with the support of the Belgian government to address the increasing demand for parliamentary assistance in the Arab Region. It builds on recent activities, findings, and lessons learned, and aims at promoting democratic governance through enhancing the role, capacity and image of the legislative institutions in the Arab countries and supporting the work of their members and administrations.

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Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries

5th Volume of the Arab Human Development Report

*The United Nations Development Programme launched the 5th volume of the Arab Human Development Report series on July 21st, in a two-day event held in Beirut. The report, entitled **Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries**, was prepared by independent scholars from across the Arab region.*

The launching ceremony was organized in the Beirut Grand Sérail, with the participation of Mr. Fouad Siniora, Prime Minister of Lebanon, and Mr. Abdel Rahman El-Solh, representative of the Secretary General of the League of Arab States.

Mrs. Amat Al Alim Alsoswa, Assistant UN Secretary-General and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, presented the main findings of the Arab Human Development Report 2009 and highlighted the necessity to focus on the security of the citizen as an entry point and fundamental condition both for the security of the state and for human development.

The Report identifies seven challenges for human security in the Arab world and provides recommendations that could help Arab countries improve the situation focusing on: protecting the environment; strengthening the rule of law; safeguarding the rights of women; addressing the weak structural underpinnings of the Arab oil economy; tackling poverty and ending hunger; boosting public health; and ending occupation, armed conflicts and military interventions.

Over a one-year period, and in an effort to promote regional dialogue on the key issues addressed in the report, a series of roundtables and public debates will be organized across the Arab region. The first of these debates was held in Beirut on the day following the launching ceremony, and focused on the conceptual framework and various definitions laid out in the 2009 AHDR. These dialogues and discussions, organized in collaboration with the well-known magazine "Weghat Nazar", will provide a unique opportunity to a large number of decision-makers, opinion leaders, and civil society organizations to study and discuss options to address the issues put forth by the Report.

As part of its continuous efforts to engage Arab members of parliament in key regional policy dialogues, UNDP's Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region (PDIAR) facilitated the participation of a dozen MPs (including six prominent women MPs) in the launch and post-launch panel discussions which took place in Beirut.