

Regional Statement and recommendations of the West Asia Regional Consultation Meeting of Civil Society Major Groups and Stakeholders in preparation for the third United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA3) of the United Nations Environment (UNEP) and the seventeen Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF17)

25th-26th September 2017 (Amman, Jordan)

We, the participants of Civil Society Major Groups and Stakeholders representatives of West Asia, have met in Amman, Jordan on 25th-26th September 2017 for the Regional Consultation Meeting to prepare and develop our statement of West Asia to UNEA-3 to be held in Nairobi, Kenya 4th-6th December 2017.

We acknowledge that the earth's natural resources, including clean air, oceans and freshwater, are fundamental for human survival, prosperity and well-being.

Our humanitarian vision is **to protect our people and the environment from the harmful effects of radiation and pollution**. This is extremely pertinent to West Asia, a region that is suffering from multiple forms of pollution and environmental degradation. West Asia is victim to extreme environmental injustice caused by, but not limited to, the following: conflict, war and occupation; population displacement; the failure of West Asian governments to meet their obligations towards international environmental treaties, conventions and protocols; non-compliant sectors, namely transport and industry; poor human rights legislation and policies; lack of involvement of civil societies in environmental policy; poor waste management; oil spills; dredging, artificial reefs; and inefficient resource management across sectors, including agriculture.

We are deeply concerned about the **environmental atrocities driven by war and occupation**. In the West Bank and Gaza where Israeli occupation is blatantly complicit in the unlawful exploitation of the natural and built environment. Restricting Palestinians from access to aquifers and other sources of water; the alarming levels of raw and partially treated sewage flooding Gaza's beach; the spraying of toxic pesticides on Palestinian farmlands; and the uprooting of trees and razing of Palestinian agricultural land are all examples of discriminatory policies employed by occupation. In Yemen, the ongoing military operations, through the bombing and destruction of buildings, infrastructure and natural resources, have generated a calamitous environmental footprint with long-lasting pollution.

We are also deeply concerned about the **environmental impact of the Syrian crisis on Syria and on neighboring countries**. The Syrian refugee influx has aggravated and impaired political, economic, and security challenges, affecting trade, banking and tourism and has increased unemployment among young people.

As such, the following was agreed upon:

1. We strongly urge the United Nations Environment to address the most direct **root causes of environmental destruction and mass migration** in the region; war, occupation and conflict. Complicit states must be pressured to immediately halt military campaigns and dismantle Israeli occupation that result in unlawful environmental damage and resource expropriation. We also call upon the United Nations Environment to push for sending fact-finding missions to investigate environmental infringements in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, the West Bank and Gaza.
2. We call on West Asia governments to conduct a real **Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA)** when required, with the full engagement of local affected communities and stakeholders.
3. We call upon West Asia governments and private sectors to effectively **engage with, financially support partnerships** with civil society organizations in activities involving environmental governance and environmental protection.
4. We strongly request West Asian governments to work on **building the capacity of the environmental judicial system across the region**. This would require national environmental awareness programs with an emphasis on matters of environmental governance, including laws, international conventions and agreements. This would require an open-source database that is easily accessible to the public. We also call on governments to strongly commit to invest heavily on research and advanced clean technologies.
5. We encourage **intra-regional cooperation on environmental laws**, particularly those concerning trans-boundary pollution. The UN Environment must play a key role in bringing together governments, industry, academia, private sector and civil society organizations society to work on a unified goal of environmental sustainability.
6. We call on UN environment to **help boost accountability efforts by governments and civil society organizations** to hold culprits of environmental infringement, including but not limited to the private sector, legally and financially liable.
7. We call on UN Environment to **support and facilitate the engagement** between West Asian governments and civil society organizations on neutral and accredited monitoring of environmental damage.
8. We urge West Asian governments to implement the **“Polluter Pays Principle”** in the form of eco-fees, whereby the polluter bears the costs of precautionary and preventative measures, protecting local communities and stakeholders.
9. We request that West Asian governments **forge a transformative alliance between private sectors and civil society** that will drive forward an innovative, productive, resource efficient low carbon and pollution free economy as a means to deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

10. We urge West Asian governments to **acknowledge the impact of refugees on the environment and natural resources**. More specifically, we call on UN Environment and governments to respond to the increasing pressure and impacts of the Syrian crisis in Lebanon on the natural resources and ecosystem, arising from the sudden increase of 37% of the population due to the addition of 1.8 million displaced persons and refugees. The displaced population is significantly affecting the fragile environmental situation in the region of West Asia.
11. We strongly encourage West Asian governments to take the **required action to combat all forms of pollution** including use of plastics, hazardous materials, pesticides, coal incineration of plastics and waste, and to ban methyl tertiary-butyl ether (MTBE) pollutant as a gasoline additive, as well as address waste management by monitoring compliance with regulatory frameworks.
12. We call upon West Asia Governments to **ban and combat Illegal Trade of Hazardous Waste and Wild Fauna and Flora**.
13. We, the civil society organizations express our willingness and commitment to:
 - a. Our role as partners in conserving the environment and addressing climate change challenges in West Asia;
 - b. Work with governments and stakeholders to promote a resource efficient and pollution-free region, sound environmental management and sustainable use of natural resources;
 - c. Work closely with local communities to transmit their priorities and concerns;
 - d. Play a pivotal role in bridging efforts between public, private and non-governmental actors to expedite environmental rehabilitation, and to ensure that such efforts are executed in a bottom-up manner that is inclusive and sensitive to the priorities of those who are most affected;
 - e. And, support the Iraqi Resolution on pollution control in areas affected by terrorist operations, occupation and armed conflicts and call for a wider investigation on the impact of conflicts on pollution.

