المجلس القومي لحقوق الإنسان

الشبكة العربية للمؤسسات الوطنية لحقوق الإنسان
The Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions

International Conference on "Role of NHRIs in the follow-up and implementation of SDGs: Harmonization of laws and policies in relation to SDGs"

26-27 June 2019
Sharm El Sheikh- Egypt

The Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions (ANNHRI), in collaboration with the National Council for Human Rights in Egypt, organized the International Conference on the Role of National Human Rights Institutions in the follow-up and Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals: Harmonization of Laws and Policies in relation to SDGs", during the period from 26-27 June 2019, with the participation of more than 20 NHRIs from the Arab region, Africa, Europe and Asia, as well as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), The Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI), the League of Arab States, a number of civil society organizations, international organizations, Arab and foreign embassies and related government agencies.

The agenda of the conference included the following topics:

- Enhancing the role of NHRIs and enabling them to pursue the implementation of sustainable development goals.
- Identifying the most important challenges facing NHRIs (national and international).
- Identifying priorities and needs and strengthening the role of international and regional networks and organizations in support of NHRIs.
- Identifying the role of governments in harmonizing laws and policies to implement sustainable development goals.

- Making recommendations, developing a vision and plan of action to overcome challenges, meet needs, and build capacities, and collaborating with stakeholders in the implementation of sustainable development goals.

1. The conference was opened by Mr. Mohamed Fayeq, President of the Arab Network for National Institutions and Chairman of the National Council for Human Rights. He reviewed the achievements of the Network and its member institutions in promoting the 2030 goals of sustainable development and the extraordinary efforts that have been exerted in their elaboration, hoping for achieving new pace promoting the realization of renaissance of all nations. Mr. Fayeq recalled the years that have passed since the elaboration of the 2030 agenda and the magnitude of the challenges facing its implementation on local, regional and international dimensions, especially that the Middle East and Africa suffer most from its consequences. The most important of which are the challenges of terrorism, armed conflict, trade wars, climate change, and foreign occupation.

Mr. Fayeq also addressed the paradox of the Palestinian cause since the launching of the 2030 Sustainable Development agenda and the commitment of leaving no one behind, including the occupation and military aggression and violations of all the norms of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, while ignoring the relevant United Nations resolutions in a manner that leaves no horizon for the Palestinian people to regain their legitimate and inalienable rights. Mr. Fayeq also reviewed Egypt's achievements on the path of sustainable development and presentation of its comprehensive national voluntary report to the high-level political forum.

2. The opening session was attended by Mr. Alaa Aabed, Chairman of the Human Rights Committee of the Egyptian Parliament. Mr. Alaa addressed the links between goals of sustainable development and human rights. He also outlined some indicators of progress in the human rights situation in Egypt, with reference to the goals of sustainable development.

Mr. Alaa presented several models for the political participation of women and youth, and addressed the freezing order of Law No. 70 of 2017 on the organization of civil work and opening up space for a social dialogue to reach a balanced law that enhances civil liberties.

Mr. Alaa also addressed the efforts of the Human Rights Committee in the development of several laws, where a draft law was introduced to compensate defendants placed in precautionary detention in the case they are proved innocent, and replace the precautionary detention with alternative precautionary measures with a duration clearly specified.

The Human Rights Committee of the Egyptian Parliament also put forward a legislative proposal to combat all forms of violence against women, and another on female debtors. Mr. Alaa also explained that the presidential Pardon committee reviews the lists of prisoners serving their sentences and works with the Presidency of the Republic to issue pardon orders for thousands of them. He also explained that the Human Rights Committee conducts field visits to places of detention, prisons, police stations and shelters in different governorates of Egypt to monitor the situation of prisoners and detainees and to guarantee their rights. The Committee also followed all trials to ensure the enactment of justice standards.

3. Ms. Rowaida Al-Haj, Regional Representative of the office of the United Nations high commissioner for Human Rights, Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa, on behalf of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, stressed that activating the synergistic relationship between human rights and sustainable development goals is essential to strengthen each other.

On the one hand, human rights influence the guidance and the binding legal framework for addressing the multidimensional SDGs of the 2030 agenda. On the other hand, the goals of sustainable development can serve as a roadmap for achieving results that aimed at the realization of human rights.

Ms. Rowaida explained that the recommendations of the "Merida Conference" and its emphasis on capacity-building and knowledge exchange, and the use of national, regional and international human rights mechanisms to assess and guide the implementation of the Agenda, and how to activate the Paris Principles to support and implement the 2030 agenda.

Ms. Rowaida also emphasized the importance of the formation of national human rights action plans as another mechanism that national institutions can use to contribute to monitoring national progress towards sustainable development goals. It also emphasized the role of the Universal Periodic Review, treaty bodies and special procedures as well as the supervisory bodies of the ILO, and national institutions in developing global and national indicators

4. Mr. Mounir El-Fassi, Minister Plenipotentiary and Director of the Human Rights Department at the League of Arab States, delivered a speech on behalf of the League of Arab States, stressing that human rights and sustainable development support each other. The deepening of understanding of the United Nations sustainable development agenda promotes awareness of the human rights culture.

To that end, the League of Arab States seeks to strengthen partnerships, particularly with specialized United Nations agencies, the private sector and civil society organizations, with special attention to the role of women and youth in the development process, social justice and the environment. The continued existence of armed conflicts and areas of tension, and the spread of terrorism and extremism hamper development, and concerted efforts at the regional and international levels to bring peace and find radical solutions to the successive crises, and the number of suffering to the rights of the Palestinian people.

Dr. Mohamed Ezz El Din Abdel Monem, member of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, added:

- Goals of sustainable development are a reflection of the aspirations of the peoples everywhere in a safe and dignified life.

- The peoples still need to realize the reality of these goals and hence national human rights institutions are more able to reach these masses and mobilize their support in support of these goals.

- National human rights institutions have extensive experience of national realities and accurate knowledge of the facts, which enable them to ensure that the goals of sustainable development are put into practice.

- NHRIs are able to make intensive efforts at all levels to mobilize the resources needed to achieve and meet the goals of sustainable development in all their aspects. However, it is interesting to note that while The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) says achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will take between US$5 to $7 trillion, other reports indicate that Global trade in fake goods worth nearly half a trillion dollars a year.

Recommendations

The deliberations of the conference reached several important recommendations to achieve goals of sustainable development, which can be classified according to the concerned authorities as follows:

First: Recommendations addressed to Governments:

1. Calling upon governments to cooperate with national institutions, civil society organizations, international bodies and the private sector in implementing the goals of sustainable development and facilitating their access to the necessary information, data and statistics.

2- Devote more attention to scientific research and technical and industrial education in accordance with the desired development needs.

3. Increase resources allocated to national institutions to enable them to promote activities to implement and follow up the implementation of sustainable development goals.

4. To conduct an extensive dialogue with civil society organizations on ways to achieve the common objectives of sustainable development programmes and to integrate civil society in achieving these goals.

5. To establish Independent Body for Protection against Discrimination in line with the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

6. Exchange of experiences among the relevant ministerial or parliamentary committees on best practices.

7 - Strengthening partnerships with regional mechanisms such as the Arab League and ESCWA to achieve SDGs.

8. Engage effectively in the voluntary transparent review of SDGs before the year 2030 and adopt a participatory and consultative approach involving all stakeholders, including national human rights institutions, to prepare voluntary reports submitted by governments in this context.

9. Develop and implement legislative, judicial and institutional measures to combat corruption.

10. To establish a government department for inter-ministerial coordination on human rights, and appoint interlocutors in various ministries, especially those directly related to human rights.

11. Intensify efforts to develop administrative reform, especially in countries with a long history of bureaucracy.

12. Establishing specific and clear criteria for measuring progress in the implementation of sustainable development goals, with NHRIs playing a policy advisory/technical role.

Second: Recommendations addressed to NHRIs

1. To contribute to the activation of the development objectives and advocating their incorporation into national plans and public policies, and to express opinions and provide advice to governments and parliaments to review national laws and their compliance with sustainable development goals and targets.

2. National human rights institutions that have not been able to include or work on sustainable development goals should implement and follow up the implementation of SDGs as an initial stage by incorporating them into their existing programs and activities, and in advanced stage, developing new programs and activities related to the 2030 sustainable development agenda, particularly with regard to the rights to health and education, and gender equality, anti-discrimination, combating human trafficking, environmental rights, justice, peace and institutional building.

3. Enhancing the role of national institutions in empowering target groups, especially those marginalized in the use of legal remedies at the national and international levels and providing legal assistance to achieve this.

4. Implementing the role of NHRIs, as adopted in the Merida Declaration, in terms of the sustainable development plan, and making efforts to obtain status "A", as only 39% of national institutions in the world are accredited this status.

5. Reaffirmation of the report of the Special high-level meeting established by RES/37/24 of March 2015 on Coherence, coordination and cooperation in the context of financing for sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda and emphasizing the unified vision of SDGs from a human rights perspective.

6. Emphasizing the consensus on the importance of the objectives desired to push countries to comply and secure the budgets necessary to achieve SDGs.

7. Recommendations of the treaty bodies, special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review should be implemented considering their links to the implementation of SDGs

8. Promoting engagement with stakeholders including involvement of marginalized groups, people with disabilities, youth and minorities.

9. Strengthening the capacity of national human rights institutions in using human rights and SDG indicators, and measuring the extent of States' commitments and efforts to implement sustainable development goals in accordance with human rights standards, and concrete improvement to the situation of rights holders.

10. Ensuring the independent participation of national institutions in the high-level political forum as the platform through which the progress achieved in achieving SDGs, in line with the practice in Human Rights Council.

11. The need for national human rights institutions to use their reporting mechanisms to include in their reports the results of the follow up and implementation of SDGs.

12. Establishing a unit or committee to follow up the implementation of sustainable development goals within national human rights institutions.

13. Strengthening cooperation between national human rights institutions and building international and regional partnerships to implement SDGs.

Third: Recommendations addressed to the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions

1. Adopt events and activities in its programs to support institutions in implementing and following up the goals of sustainable development.

2. Working on issuing a guidebook to assist national institutions in drawing up practical plans and programs to promote SDGS.

3. Formulation of indicators specific to the Arab countries and other indicators for each region according to the circumstances, possibilities and characteristics enjoyed by each country, in cooperation with OHCHR, international and regional statistical agencies, national statistical offices, development partners, and other stakeholders and the operationalization of the UN Guidance Note on the Human Rights Based Approach to Data (HRBAD) to ensure that no one is left behind in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

4. Working to raise the efficiency of the stakeholders and the concerned statistics, and develop the tools and methodologies used to access accurate figures and periodically.

5. Work to raise the efficiency and capabilities of staff of national institutions in terms of preparing reports and plans and developing indicators to achieve SDGs.

6. Enhancing technical support from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, within the framework of MoU signed with OHCHR in 2017.

7. Working to produce a guidebook on best practices in implementing sustainable development goals from a human rights perspective, focusing on the challenges to sustainable development.

Fourth: recommendations to the international community

Dr. Ammar Dweik, representative of the Palestinian National Human Rights Foundation, recalled the tragedy of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories over fifty years, its impact on the human rights of the Palestinian people and their right to development, the unprecedented deterioration of the occupied Palestinian territories and the pressures exerted by the occupation authorities and US support for the occupation despite the international consensus on the criminalization of these actions expressed through voting by members of the Security Council against the unfair decisions involving the US administration to root the occupation. The representative of the Palestinian Foundation also noted the measures taken by Israel and the United States to undermine the rights of the Palestinian people, including the US's recognition of the city of Jerusalem as the capital of the Israeli State, abolish or restrict the right of return, as well as the racist vote by the Israeli Knesset on the "Nation State Law" which aims to consider Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people, excluding 1948 Arabs who represent more than one and a quarter million Palestinian citizens who have not migrated from Palestine despite the oppression and racial discrimination they suffer.

Recommendations:

1. To consider sustainable development goals as part of the work of national human rights institutions, this in turn places an obligation on States, to cooperate with NHRIs in the monitoring and implementation of SDG

2. To provide international financial support to national institutions in countries experiencing economic difficulties.

3. Building and supporting partnerships between States and national human rights institutions and national, regional and international organizations concerned with human trafficking, especially in women and children, as a human rights challenge in the context of the follow up of the implementation of SDGs.

4. To work towards an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, as there cannot be overall development under foreign occupation.

At the conclusion of the conference, organizers and participants extended thanks to the Arab Republic of Egypt and the National Council for Human Rights in Egypt for hosting and facilitating the work of this conference.

Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt
June 27th, 2019