# 14<sup>th</sup> Regional Coordination Mechanism Meeting Beirut, 11-12 November 2010

# Bakhtiar Amin Former Human Rights Minister in Iraq

Esteemed Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to first deeply thank ESCWA on its great efforts to prepare for and organize this 14<sup>th</sup> Regional Coordination Mechanism meeting and on its invitation to participate in it.

Youth development in Arab countries is a noble and urgent task that is facing varied obstacles and challenges. The main impediments to youth development in our region are:

- 1. Instability and the frequency of wars and conflicts.
- 2. The educational and cognitive deficit and the failure of the educational system.
- 3. Not applying the principles of good governance, democracy and human rights and the restriction of public and private freedoms.
- 4. Lack of equal opportunities due to the need for affiliations and patronage, the spread of financial and administrative corruption, and policies of exclusion and marginalization of the different segments in our communities, which include young women.
- 5. The dire economic situation, unemployment, low standard of living, homelessness and illiteracy.

It is well known that the Middle East is home to ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia, the Nile Valley and the Fertile Crescent, and other civilizations that existed in North Africa. In addition it is a home to multiple divine religions, as well as ancient religions and other varied ethnic and national communities. There are other aspects embraced the Middle East from schools of thought, scientific communities and religious references from the furthest left of the furthest right. In general it exemplifies the real meaning of an ancient and beautiful mosaic from its East to its West.

This diversity, however, did not reach a phase of coexistence, harmony and peace, but was rather a factor leading to conflict, phobia, hatred, blasphemy, skepticism, mistrust and mutual accusations of conspiracy between the different components of the community. These communities represent seven percent of the world's population and at the same time account for 40 percent of the violence in the world. 90 percent of the violence in the Middle East is due to internal wars and conflict which fill the region to an extent of making it a fertile ground for extremism and terrorism. The vast majority of victims of tyranny and violence and those that fuel these conflicts and wars are the youth, who in fact make up the majority of population in our region.

This situation indicates that the region has failed to:

- 1. Manage diversity and pluralism.
- 2. Resolve ethnic, religious, national and political conflicts within a peaceful democratic framework.
- 3. Establish a culture of dialogue, tolerance and integration of youth in their communities in order to divert their energies towards positive activities instead of negative and destructive ones and to prevent them from becoming victims of terrorism, extremism and darkness.

The options of military, martial law and chronic emergencies in our region and the subsequent practices of cancellation of others, erasing their identity and denying their existence in addition to the inhuman policies of national, cultural, religious and sectarian smelting, and the one-party system and the violation of conventions of international human, civil, cultural and political rights did not succeed in our region and will not succeed anywhere else in the world.

We have had past and present failed and disastrous experiences, at the same time we have successful models in the world and the region in managing diversity and pluralism that should be taken advantage from for founding a calm dialogue and building governments of law, justice and fundamental freedoms for the renaissance of our people and the advancement of our youth.

The good management of diversity and pluralism is the key to stability and internal and external security of the people of the region and to human, economic, political and cultural development of societies and their peaceful coexistence. The contrary would lead to bloody wars and to factional, political, sectarian, ethnic, religious and national conflicts. Our efforts and resources should not be wasted on disputes and conflicts but should rather be channeled towards the growth and development of our communities. Conflicts and disputes can only lead to the formation of extremist organizations and central autocratic abhorrent practices that are unfairly based on chauvinism racism and religious sectarianism, which in turn lead to the marginalization and exclusion of citizens and the blurring of their identities and becomes a stumbling block to building democratic civilian states and institutions that promote a sense of citizenship, identity and respect and accepts the privacy of diverse groups and individuals, and promotes positive interaction between the different components of the region.

#### Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen

The time has come for our region to progress towards projects, strategies, and consultative trans-regional, transnational and trans-ethnic programs that develop programs that promote human security and youth education and raise their awareness in order to reject hatred promoting mechanisms and boards of fear to enable the development of youth and their advancement.

We need strategies that can create an atmosphere of peace and stability in the region through:

- 1 Conserving natural and human resources (and not exhaust them).
- 2 The importance of investing in human security and dignity.
- 3 Building a concept of peace and the development of a regional vision based on a genuine policy for the future of the region.
- 4 Block attempts to politicize religion and move away from religious, sectarian and national fanaticism.
- 5 Distance our youth from and prevent them from falling in cycles of violence and extremism.
- 6 Give the civil society, youth and women a key role in economic, development and fundamental social issues and prevent their marginalization in our programs, activities and conferences.
- 7 More work is needed to support, encourage and strengthen dialogue between religions, civilizations and cultures. There is also a need for reconciliation between the different parts of our societies.

The Legal empowerment of the poor and fighting poverty, illiteracy, the empowerment of women and youth and addressing migration driving factors are fundamental pillars for the advancement, security and progress of any community. Regrettably 25% of university graduates in our region work in other countries due to the lack of opportunities.

The administrative and financial corruption, nepotism and patronage are as serious as terrorism as they have the potential to deteriorate our societies. These are also key issues resulting from the absence of social justice. We have to place the fight against corruption at the top of our priorities and resort to international standards of good governance as a prerequisite for development.

It is important to create an enabling environment for the talents, skills and experiences in the region and work on preserving the human capital which is constitutes the basis for the progress and development of our societies.

# Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen

The future of active youth participation in various political, economic and social sectors cannot be addressed prior to solving the intractable problems facing the region and that emanate from the lack of respect for public and private freedoms, including the establishment of associations, political parties and trade unions, engaging the youth, political participation in general elections and building confidence in the integrity of elections and their results and strengthening the role of free and independent media. All this requires the legislation of laws that are in line with international conventions and treaties. In addition Arab countries need to unblock intellectual, cultural, youth and political websites and respect the professional ethics of media. Moreover, governments need to ensure the freedom of the press and opinion and provide access to information. Any exception to this would have to be based on a public judicial decision.

It is important to strengthen and activate guided education, develop curricula and form educational cooperative committees between countries of the region and educational institutions such as schools, colleges, universities and professional institutes that would commensurate with the technological development and knowledge and teaching of the principles of human rights and civic education and the dissemination of a culture of peace, justice, good governance, democracy education and children and women rights, citizenship and environmental awareness and the fight against corruption. In addition to developing a culture of tolerance and acceptance of others and embrace the concept of inclusive education, which includes all categories. In addition we need to expand the programs for training teachers and the exchange of experiences between them, both locally and internationally and to improve the standard of living for them. The experience of Scandinavian countries and Member States of the ASEAN Organization in the area of education and scientific research could be useful in enriching the development of our educational system.

I find it necessary to work on serving youth issues through activating the role of regional and international institutions, including the Youth Council of the League of Arab States, in order to address poverty and unemployment, based on plans and programs that promote youth participation and reduce immigration.

Government ministries need to build a database to improve communication with the youth in their countries in order to increase their societal, political ad leadership participation. There is also a need to prepare and submit reports, in coordination with local civil society organizations, to international organizations and the United Nations on the existing conditions and needs in different fields.

I recommend revitalizing the partnership between governmental and non-governmental institutions on one hand and the private sector on the other hand and encourage them to contribute to financing youth targeted projects that secure small and medium loans.

I also encourage governments to ease restrictions on the movement of people in the Arab world and reduce administrative procedures on the movement of youth and facilitate the movement and the residency of students and young workers and the exchange of experiences between countries in the region and the establishment of regional networks of universities, companies and organizations such as the Erasmus and the European Credit Transfer System known as ECTS and Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 formerly known as Socrates Programme.

#### In conclusion,

As an Iraqi, and a Kurdish I suffered from wars, destruction, genocide and terrorism. The effects of such disasters have profoundly affected the lives of our youth and citizens and impacted development. I hope that ESCWA and other international and regional organizations and the representatives of participating Governments would support projects that promote our youth. Our youth do not aspire to carry weapons or live in conditions of disputes, conflicts, migration and displacement. They dream of living happily in their country where they would enjoy freedom, peace and human dignity. The international community has the moral responsibility of providing humanitarian and security assistance to Iraq and all Iraqis without discrimination.

Thank you, Chairman and Ladies and Gentlemen of your attentive listening

#### Recommendations:

I find it beneficial to show you the recommendations coming from the conferences of Beirut and Istanbul held in September and October 2010 for the civil society organizations in the middle east region and north Africa and these are the recommendations that came from the meetings held for the preparations of the future forum conference decided to be held in Doha with the presence of the regional foreign ministers and the foreign ministers of the eight industrial countries and a number of active figures in democratic development and representatives of the civil society organizations.

# **Recommendations:**

# Respect

# **Public freedoms:**

- Respect of the public freedoms including the freedom of establishing the
  associations and the engagement in youth work and the participation in public
  elections after strengthening the democracy and integrity of elections. It is also
  necessary to respect the independence of political, social and economical
  frameworks including the student council, calamities, political parties and civil
  society organizations.
- 2. Place a law in every arab country, that dedicates public freedom as an origin, controls are the exception and it has to come from a transparent and public judicial decision. This applies on the measures to stop broadcasting channels on arab satellites.
- 3. Lift the filtering off the cultural, intellectual and political youth sites, and exception is from public judicial decision, and the base is the freedom of publication, circulation and access to the informations.
- 4. Stop detaining and suppressing journalists and bloggers internet activists and not to violate their privacies.

#### Strengthen and activate aimed education:

- 5. Develop educational and pedagogical curriculums in ways that contributes to strengthen and empower youth in facing the different globalization challenges in its political economical social and cultural aspects.
- 6. Form a joint committee in cooperation with the eight countries to review the educational curriculums based on international and arab expertise that goes that fits the technological development and human rights principals and focus on citizenship an combating corruption and a culture that accept the other and builds integrated education understanding which includes all categories.
- 7. List the social service in school curriculums and work toward making the school environment a stimulating one for participation with the adoption of human rights approach in placing school decisions.
- 8. Increasing training programs for teachers, exchange of expertise, improve the living standards of the tutor and develop clear standards for recruiting teachers.

#### Regulations and institutional frameworks reform:

- 9. Activate the role of youth council in the league of Arab states that serves youth issues
- 10. Adopt the plans, programmes and national policies that solve the challenges of poverty, unemployment and social marginalization which strengthen youth participation and limit immigration.
- 11. Develop mechanisms to apply the existing laws related to youth politics, facilitates youth involvement, social mix, expand social work, and initiatives to stimulate youth participation toward rural regions with the stimulation of local authorities on adopting youth policies and opening ways for youth for social participation.
- 12. Work on the new technological means to improve communication with youth. In this framework, work on rules related to accessing information, electronic administration and building a database for all ministries
- 13. Prepare and present reports from civil society organizations for international organizations and the united nations to receive technical support from expertise. Implement internationally signed agreements, including the united nations charter against corruption. Activate the civil society role and working organizations to combat corruption through raising a law project that allows tocomplete their work.
- 14. Approach governments and political parties on the level of political programs and try to include these programmes priorities of social categories especially youth with adoption of public policies specialized to youth and work on the creation of a framework to launch youth capacities.
- 15. Improve and encourage the participation of youth in political parties by decreasing the intolerance of parties structure and combating political corruption that creates a climate of lack of interest in youth.
- 16. The re-evaluation of policies and economic legislation in countries of the region to follow economic developments.

# **Update traditional social impeding manifestations:**

- 17. Organize awareness campaigns that include social obstacles with the work on strengthening the trust of youth in civil society and engagement in social work.
- 18. On governments to work on placing a moral charter to religious men to stop incitement against sects and different religions.
- 19. The civil society to monitor and document religious incitement in media

#### The revitalization of partnership with the private sector:

20. Demanding the private sector for contributing in financing social projects placed by civil society and partnership in social advancement.

21. Stimulate banks in the region to support investments in productive sectors and small and medium enterprises.

# Activate regional and international cooperation

- 22. Decrease restrictions on the movements of individuals in the arab country with decreasing administrative procedures on the movements of youth activists in civil society with the necessity of supporting the governments for associations and not pressure social movements and youth activits.
- 23. Facilitate the transfer and residence of students and young workers, exchange expertise between the countries of the region and the countries of the G8, establish a regional network for universities, companies and organizations like ERASMUS and ECTS
- 24. Making a youth exchange program between arab youth for cultural exchange with the support from arab governments as partners, and it's possible here to make use of the euro-middle eastern youth programme
- 25. Create a database to exchange experience, projects and ideas among the organizations of the civil society in the arab world and among civil society organizations and international organizations and sponsors. Building a website to connect between the organizations in the region and acknowledge the violations on young activists.
- 26. Coordinate between the countries of the region and work toward guiding and re-evaluating international agreements from euro-mideastern partnership to secure its implementation on a right base that take into consideration the interest of all countries.
- 27. Develop regional frameworks in the partnership with G8 to solve public debt in the countries of the region and insuring re-guiding it toward sustainable economic development