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AFED Conference Deliberates Its Recommendations: Transition to a Sustainable Arab Energy Sector

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The Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED) concluded its sixth annual conference on sustainable energy in Arab countries. The meeting, held under the patronage of HH Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, member of the UAE Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, was attended by 600 delegates coming from 52 countries, representing governments, corporations, international and regional organizations, academic, research institutions, NGOs and media.

AFED Secretary General Najib Saab cited a draft of the conference recommendations which endorsed AFED report on *Sustainable Energy*, advocating that Arab countries can foster the sustainability of their energy sectors by making crucial strategic choices, which entail high economic potential while at the same time securing balanced resource management. These choices include improving energy efficiency, exploiting the huge potential of untapped renewable energy resources, and harnessing oil and gas reserves in cleaner ways. Revenues from oil exports need to be utilized to build regional capacity in developing and acquiring clean energy technologies.

The conference called upon policymakers in Arab countries to diversify the region's economics away from continued reliance on one type of fuel, and to reform natural gas pricing mechanisms so it can play a greater role in the Arab energy transition. It also emphasized the need to establish the appropriate enablers for private sector participation in energy supply infrastructure investments, to facilitate the mobilization of local equity and debt financing, and develop more flexible legal instruments.

Policymakers were urged to address energy subsidies and reform pricing policies in order to incentivize the rapid deployment of efficiency and cleaner energy technologies. The conference urged for the effective implementation of the Arab Energy Efficiency Guidelines, adopted in 2010, calling upon governments to provide public awareness and incentives for adoption of energy efficient technologies and practices.

The conference also emphasized the need to mainstream climate impact assessment into environmental impact assessment for new energy systems' expansion plans, and to develop a new holistic approach to deal with the energy-water-climate nexus in the Arab region. Governments were urged to embrace cutting-edge sustainable energy technologies business innovation, and manufacturing of hardware and software, geared towards widespread deployment. The conference called for addressing energy poverty which affects 50 million Arabs, by providing them with secure access to energy.

Second day sessions

A session was held about the future of oil and gas in a changing global outlook. Another session discussed financing the transition to sustainable energy and the role of the private sector.

Sustainability initiatives in the context of efficient resource management were presented, namely Saudi Efficiency Center, Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, GIZ projects, ACWA Power and Cristal.

A special session organized in cooperation with ESCWA debated sustainable energy, with GCC countries as example. In a parallel session, Future Environment Leaders Forum (FELF) gathered students from 26 Arab universities to discuss the right of future generations to sustainable energy and resources.

The conference closed with an open discussion for recommendations.