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AFED 10th Annual Conference Arab Environment in 10 Years Beirut, 2-3 November 2017

Recommendations

The Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED) held its tenth annual conference on 2-3 November 2017, in Beirut, Lebanon, to discuss the changes that have shaped the Arab environment in the past 10 years. The conference convened at the iconic Le Bristol Hotel, the venue where AFED was born in 2006.

About 400 delegates representing public agencies, corporations, civil society organizations, academic institutions, student members of AFED Future Environment Leaders Forum (FELF) from 14 universities, and the media participated in the conference. Discussions focused on changes in the management of natural resources and in environmental policy making in Arab countries over the past 10 years, taking AFED's 2008 annual report as a baseline. While taking note of the sustainability transitions underway, the conference stressed the challenges that lie ahead for Arab countries.

The conference confirmed the findings of AFED report *Arab Environment in 10 years* on the need to more comprehensively integrate sound management of natural and environmental resources into government decision-making processes, building up on the progress achieved thus far. It also supported peoples' demand, as reflected in the AFED public opinion survey, for stronger and swifter government action to safeguard the environment and manage natural resources sustainably. All of this entail taking immediate steps to translate declarations and strategies into actions.

The Conference calls upon Arab governments to:

1. Reform the current institutional framework of the League of Arab States to foster inclusive development and to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) enshrined in the 2030 agenda. Boost coordination to act as a strong regional block capable to positively contribute to international endeavors.
2. Invest in human capital, as well as in environmental and natural resources, as pre-requisite for achieving sustainable development. Prioritize investing in education, innovation, and research and development.
3. Integrate environmental management into core planning and decision-making processes and government operations, including policy formulation, implementation, budgeting and evaluation.

4. Move beyond strategy declarations to implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, while ensuring national institutional coordination at the very early stages of planning to promote policy integration among sectors.
5. Expand public policy tools beyond command and control, to promote sustainable consumption and production and create incentives for green investments, in addition to creating enabling conditions that encourage private sector investments in sustainable projects.
6. Adopt participatory governance mechanisms that allow Arab civil society organizations to participate in the implementation of the 2030 sustainable development agenda. The conference equally calls upon civil society to expand its scope beyond executing isolated pilot-projects to influencing policy making.
7. Adopt a more participatory and decentralized form of governance in the water sector in order to ensure the participation of all water users in approving and implementing the necessary changes needed on the key issues of cost recovery, demand management, progressive tariffs, water re-allocation rules, conservation incentives, adaptation measures, and local management.
8. Attach priority to food security by adopting sustainable agricultural practices that boost efficiency and productivity. Introduce policies that attract additional investments and promote regional collaboration in food production. Minimize food losses and waste, and enhance food security and safety.
9. Capitalize on the current transition to sustainable energy options, by providing the necessary regulatory and institutional frameworks in order to promote the shift to low-carbon climate resilient economies, and promote access to efficient and renewable sources of energy, while eradicating disparity in access to modern energy services.
10. Adopt a nexus approach to managing the water, food, and energy sectors to reflect their interdependencies and to take advantage of synergies, particularly in anticipation of climate change risks.
11. Improve air quality by deploying cleaner and renewable sources of energy for power generation, implementing efficiency measures in buildings, investing in better public transport, and accelerating the switch to hybrid, plug-in, and electric vehicles.
12. Enhance basic and applied environmental research by committing to a regional environmental research strategy, strengthening existing research centers, encouraging joint research projects, allocating greater funding to research, modernizing publication mechanisms, digitizing the content of Arab journals, and bridging the current science-policy gaps.
13. Commit to regional cooperation where one country's surplus balances out another's deficit in water resources, food production, energy, research, and human capital. Governments should particularly adopt a collaborative approach to the management of shared watersheds, the development of regional climate change adaptation measures, and the building of a regional transport network.
14. Reestablish peace and security in the Arab countries affected by conflicts and war, as a critical factor for restoring conditions conducive to sustainable development.