



AFED deliberates Its Recommendations

A Call for Arab Governments to Reduce Ecological Footprint

Beirut, 30 November 2012

The Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED) concluded its fifth annual conference on the ecological footprint of Arab countries and the options for sustainability. The meeting brought together 500 delegates from 48 countries, representing governments, corporations, international and regional organizations, academia, research institutions, NGOs and media. AFED secretary general Najib Saab asked the attendees for a standing ovation as Palestine was given the status of observer member in the United Nations, congratulating the Palestinian environment minister Dr. Yousef Abu Safiyyeh who was among the panelists in AFED conference.

A draft of the conference recommendations endorsed AFED report *Surviving Options: Ecological Footprint in Arab Countries*, which advocates regional cooperation and sound management of resources as the main options for survival in a region characterized by high ecological deficits. The report asserts that in this era of globalization and socio-economic insecurity, tracking the demand for natural capital is essential to meeting the basic needs of food and water security, and ultimately to ensuring economic competitiveness while strengthening ecological health.

The conference called upon Arab governments to promote the concept of ecological accounting in economic planning and reduce the ecological footprint, by restoration of degraded land, depleted aquifers and diminished fisheries and reducing pollution and waste generation. It urged governments to invest a significant part of the income from the region's oil resources in building human capacity and supporting research on green development. It emphasized the need to commit to achieving the highest levels of sustainable rural and urban development and transiting to a green knowledge-intensive economy.

Arab governments were urged to adopt strategies to improve energy efficiency in the building, transport and industrial sectors, increase the share of renewable energy in the energy mix, and introduce incentives and standards to overcome market barriers to energy efficiency. Coherence should be generated among water, energy, agriculture and climate, especially by improving irrigation efficiency, promoting organic and conservation farming, and developing high-yielding, salt-resistant and drought-tolerant crops. Sustainable trade relationships should be built with other countries to facilitate trade in food commodities and virtual water, based on equitable and mutual benefits.

The conference called upon development funds and banking institutions to incorporate ecological accounting principles when evaluating grants and loan programs. It urged AFED to provide technical assistance to various sectors in Arab countries to increase understanding of ecological footprint accounting in their operations, and to motivate behavioral changes in consuming, purchasing and investment patterns, especially among youth.

Second day sessions

A debate was held with the theme “beyond Rio+20, towards COP18,” discussing the need for a strong and wise Arab position in the Doha climate summit.

A special session debated the role of business in reducing ecological footprint, highlighting success stories of green corporate initiatives. A panel discussion dealt with green economy and incorporation ecological Footprint in national budgets. IUCN organized its regional partners platform for a better resource management in Arab countries.

AFED launched its energy efficiency and environmental education handbooks, and AFED’s secretary general Najib Saab presented the organization’s 2013 work program.

The conference closed with an open discussion of recommendations.