



Welcome Speech
Health and Environment in the Arab Countries

Arab Forum for Development and Environment (AFED)

Beirut 2020

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As usual, in the month of November of every year, we have a randevu with Najib Saab, the Secretary General of the Arab Forum for Development and Environment, to present the annual report to AFED, this year is entitled: "Health and Environment in Arab Countries."

Nature in our planet has the upper hand in the ecological balance between its components, for maintaining a sustainable and renewable ecosystem. Any defect that nature resorts to, is dealt with geologically or biologically, for restoring the ecosystem and biological diversity.

The ecosystem of the earth, including its oceans, seas, lakes, rivers, land and their components of a geological and biological stock, constitutes one system, regardless of the geography and demography of political boundaries. Therefore, the world should deal with it as a single human mass, belonging to all of us, where humans, animals and the environment appear in paradigm with nature. Loss of biodiversity and air and water pollution of threatens healthy agricultural and food production systems. This epidemic COVID-19, has imposed a difficult economic and social reality on us, as a result of our silence and severe fingerprint on nature, which led to a radical change in the transmission and spread of diseases, turning it into epidemics and a global pandemic, at a frightening speed.

This calls on us, to cooperate in a single, integrated health approach to preserve the health of humanity in an interconnected ecosystem between plants, animals, humans and livelihood as a whole, to build

capacities to deal with these epidemics and their repercussions and reduce their economic and social risks.

In this regard, we must go back in history of the epidemics that swept humanity, as the plague bacterial one that swept the Roman Empire between AD 165 - 262 AD and wiped out a third of the empire population, it invaded Europe again in 1347 and killed half of its population of 80 million.

Here is "Corona Virus Disease 19" and according to the World Health Organization (WHO), has infected 46 million, and 492 thousand cases, and has caused the death of one million and 201 thousand people in the world until 1/11/2020, with its vast economic and social repercussions; it has caused an almost complete closure of cities and human complexes, even though the planet has partly benefited from closure in term of higher quality of air and water, low carbon dioxide emissions, which are responsible for 72% of global warming, reduced consumption of coal, fossil fuels, and an unprecedented release of birds and wildlife.

The relationship between health and the environment is still weak in the Arab region, although the Arab Strategy for Health and the Environment was issued in a framework for the period 2017-2030 in its concerted endeavor to reduce the burden of disease, disability and early death caused by environmental hazards, as well as in coordinating the activities of the League of Arab States, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Program (UNEP) for united environmental front to support these efforts.

With the Coronavirus pandemic, AFED's thirteenth annual report entitled "Health and Environment in the Arab Countries" came out in seven chapters, which show the relationship between health on the one hand, and water, air, waste, climate change and ocean pollution on the other hand, for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in achieving the theme "Health for All".

In their meeting in Bahrain in August 2020, at the invitation of ESCWA, the Arab Environment Ministers indicated that the **“Coronavirus pandemic has contributed to an increase in the production of medical and plastic waste in the Arab region, and that “the pandemic, despite its positive effects on the environment that is temporary, environmental challenges remain a priority when returning to normal life, and with the adoption of plans by governments to stimulate the economy, which require the formulation and implementation of policy and strategic plans to rebuild better social and economic development with innovative, comprehensive, and more environmentally sustainable”**. Perhaps we should grasp this opportunity for the Arab world to launch the green economy, to regain what we lost due to the pandemic, as it has impacted a cost on Arab countries of \$ 42 billion and 1.7 million jobs, according to initial estimates.

In conclusion, I wish to thank and show my appreciation to the staff of the "AFED" General Secretariat for their remarkable efforts in issuing the annual report "Health and Environment in Arab Countries", to researchers and research centers, international organizations and participating universities, and special thanks to the American University of Beirut for hosting the conference, AFED 2020.