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 ARAB FUND FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
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ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2004

Towards Freedom in the Arab World

The Arab world finds itself at a historical crossroads. Caught between oppression at home and violation from abroad, Arabs are increasingly excluded from determining their own future.

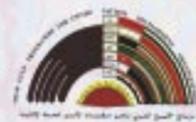
Freedom in its comprehensive sense, incorporates not only civil and political freedoms (in other words, liberation from oppression), but also the liberation from all factors that are inconsistent with human dignity. To be sustained and guaranteed, freedom requires a system of good governance that rests upon effective popular representation and is accountable to the people, and that upholds the rule of law and ensures that an independent judiciary applies the law impartially.

The report describes free societies, in their normative dimension, as fundamental contrasts with present-day Arab countries. The enormous gap that separates today's reality and what many in the region hope for, is a source of widespread frustration and despair among Arabs about their countries' prospects for a peaceful transition to societies enjoying freedom and good governance. Moreover, persisting tendencies in Arab social structures could well lead to spiralling social, economic, and political crises. Each further stage of crisis would impose itself as a new reality, producing injustices eventually beyond control.

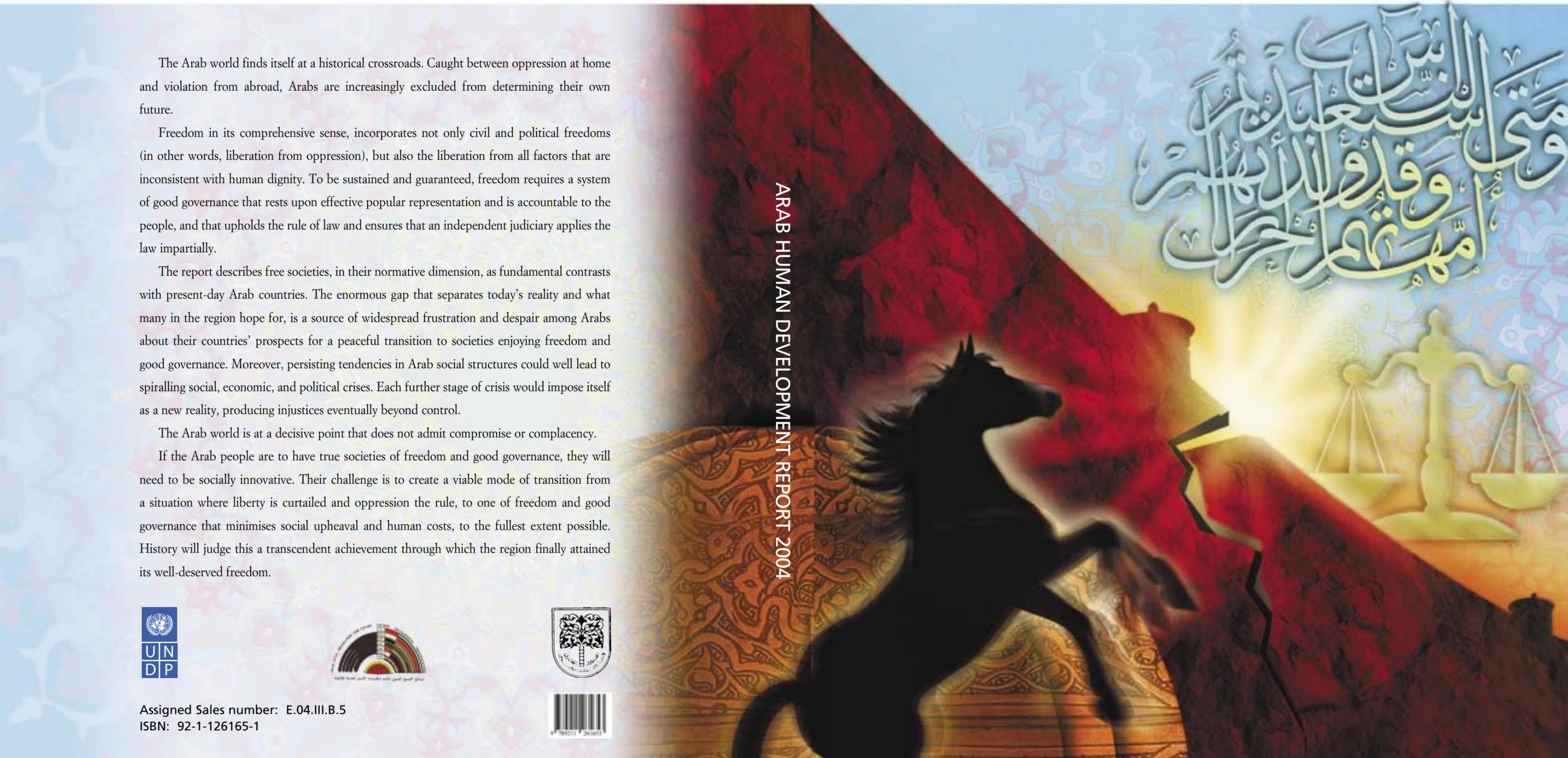
The Arab world is at a decisive point that does not admit compromise or complacency.

If the Arab people are to have true societies of freedom and good governance, they will need to be socially innovative. Their challenge is to create a viable mode of transition from a situation where liberty is curtailed and oppression the rule, to one of freedom and good governance that minimises social upheaval and human costs, to the fullest extent possible. History will judge this a transcendent achievement through which the region finally attained its well-deserved freedom.

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THE ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2004

Towards Freedom in the Arab World



REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ARAB STATES

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This work was originally published in Arabic. In any cases of discrepancies, the original language shall govern.

Foreword by the Administrator, UNDP

The first two Arab Human Development Reports published by the United Nations Development Programme and written by an independent group of Arab scholars, policymakers and practitioners have, rightly, become landmarks in the broader debate and discussion over the future of the region. The key diagnosis of the first report that the Arab world is suffering three fundamental deficits – in political rights, in women’s rights and in knowledge – that have, together, held back human development across the region has now become widely accepted. The second report then spelled out in compelling detail the first of these deficits, analyzing where Arab knowledge production and dissemination systems were falling short and articulating why Arab states need to turn outwards and engage with the outside world to make learning and research key drivers of social and economic innovation in the future.

Those two reports succeeded more spectacularly than we could have imagined in the scale of their impact. They were the talk of coffee shops and cabinets, boardrooms and world TV talk shows. More broadly, they were a media and publishing phenomenon, stimulating formal debate from the G8 summit at Sea Island, Georgia, to civil society meetings in Sana’a and Alexandria among many other gatherings. Above all, in a region where disagreement, sometimes violent, has been too often the norm of political discourse, longtime opponents found a lot to agree about in them. And that has been the real power of the Reports: starting to build a consensus around reform.

This report, the third in the series, seeks to focus on the thorny issues of freedom, good governance and political reform. Drawing on a mixture of survey data and other research it seeks to map out the challenges and constraints to moving forward on a path of demo-

cratic progress. In two key ways, however, the report has been more difficult to prepare than its predecessors. First has been the limitation of the data. One of the central sources of information was a specially designed survey to map out public attitudes to key aspects of reform. Regrettably several countries declined permission for the survey to be carried out, resulting in only a partial snapshot. Though most of the analysis in the report is not dependent on the survey this shortcoming inevitably hampered analysis of public attitudes and perceptions in the region.

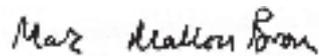
A second problem has been the exceptionally rapid pace of events in the region itself. This is not in itself new – the first two reports were prepared in the shadow of continued violence in the occupied Palestinian Territory and then the invasion of Iraq, both of which have had broad repercussions throughout the Arab world. However, given the central conviction of the authors across all the reports that lasting and sustainable reform in the Arab world needs to come from within, the intensification of both conflicts over the past year and the fierce reactions they have provoked across the region have led to a deep concern on the part of the authors that the broad agenda of reform, and enhanced human development, was being retarded rather than accelerated.

At the same time, as a result of the high visibility of the reports, the very process of writing this AHDR has been a source of significant public, and, unfortunately, highly politicized and often inaccurate speculation. While reflecting the tremendous difficulty of writing a neutral, fact-based report in such an environment, this has inevitably created some tensions for UNDP given its fundamental character as a development rather than political institution. As a result, while the process has clearly demonstrated the need for a neutral, international platform of the kind UNDP

is able to provide, it has also shown the limitations of such an approach and the need for a longer-term formula that would, in time, allow for wider ownership and institutionalization of the Reports as a representative voice of Arab civil society - a report written in the region and owned by the region.

In this context, as we have made clear since launching this initiative and other discussions of this kind, the AHDRs are, deliberately, not formal UN or UNDP documents and do not reflect the official views of either organization. Rather, they have been intended to stimulate and inform a dynamic, new public discourse across the Arab world and beyond. In the case

of this year's report, however, I feel it necessary to state that some of the views expressed by the authors are not shared by UNDP or the UN. Nevertheless, the very strength of this report and the success of its predecessors has depended on their being seen as an authentic reflection of views and analysis of many of the most thoughtful, reform-minded intellectual figures in the Arab region. In that sense, this report clearly reflects a very real anger and concern felt across the region that needs to be urgently addressed if we are to reach our shared goal of helping to build a peaceful, democratic region able to meet the needs and aspirations of its citizens.



Mark Malloch Brown.
Administrator, UNDP

Foreword by the Regional Director, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States

The Arab Human Development Reports continue to examine the factors that prevent an Arab renaissance from taking off, and to search for those that could empower it to advance and progress. In this third installment in the series, the Report focuses on the issue of freedom in the Arab world and its relationship to good governance and human development.

The road to AHDR 3 has been long, eventful and lined with several obstacles. No subject excites stronger feelings in the region than that of freedom, whether among those denied it or among those who violate and confiscate it. No public discourse on any issue is more watchfully invigilated by the authorities, or more tightly encircled by penalties that push some to exercise self-censorship, in speech and thought, wherever the discussion relates to freedom. The difficulties are magnified when the definition of freedom is expanded, as in the case of this Report, to include the freedom of society and nations where liberty is confronted by powers intolerant of dissent, diversity and independent thinking.

Those in our region who demand freedom, and who struggle for it, may be in the majority; however, those who stifle it are stronger, more powerful and have better means. They not only possess the means to oppress, marginalize and impoverish, but they also control key forums and are able to recruit those adept at twisting various texts to perpetuate their interests and at bending intellectual norms and theories in order to prohibit freedom and permit its confiscation.

There were those who genuinely feared that the Report might be used to serve the interests of powers willing to transform causes honourable in their intent, design and aims into goods in political bargains. The Report team, however, felt that the best way forward was not to turn a blind eye to reality, but to

show that Arabs can recognize and overcome their own weaknesses. Self-reform originating in balanced self-criticism is the only viable path towards a robust and independent region.

Despite such difficulties, or perhaps because of them, the authors remained convinced that their vision of this Report, in all essentials, was correct. They studied the scene of freedom in different theatres in the Arab world, and found them deficient in some areas and seriously deficient in others, such as political and civil liberties. Generalized violations, moreover, become harsher when they concern those religious or ethnic groups that are excluded from citizenship or rights. While some foreign factors including occupation which usurps the roots of freedom, helped to establish a climate of oppression in some Arab countries, there are legal, economic and political structures within Arab societies that continue to prevent Arabs from enjoying rights and freedoms that were enshrined in their values, culture and religion well before the promulgation of the International Declaration of Human Rights. Sadly, what Arab constitutions grant, Arab laws frequently curtail. And what laws render legal, actual practice often violates. People are thus besieged in their own country, their takeoff is held back, their development is blocked, and their nation is weakened.

There are, however, enlightened contemporary movements working for a transformation to societies where human rights reign supreme, freedoms flourish and the rule of law strikes deep roots. In the past year the Arab world witnessed unprecedented initiatives aimed at changing the status quo. Some, such as the resolutions of the Arab Summit, were formal while many others came from civil and political society. The report also notes a number of positive developments particularly in

the field of education and the empowerment of women.

As part of its now-customary method, the Report does not stop at diagnosing obstacles to rights and freedoms. It outlines a broad-based strategic vision of how to rationalize efforts to strengthen freedom in the Arab world and to reinforce the pillars of good governance.

This vision focuses on widening the political space in order to move societies towards the peaceful alternation of power and on creating a strong legal and institutional structure in support of freedom. The first step in this direction is to launch the key freedoms of opinion, expression and organization, to put an end to all forms of discrimination against social groups, to abolish emergency rules and to ensure the independence and fairness of the justice system.

No matter how hard I try, I will not be able to do justice to the collective effort that this Report represents. But like any human endeavour, however true and worthwhile, this effort remains open to refinement and correction. The authors do not claim to have arrived at any form of final truth about the state of freedom and governance in the region. Their goal has been to promote, within the limitations of this sensitive arena, as thorough and objective a discussion on the challenges facing Arab societies and the means to overcome them.

It is especially important to make the issue of freedom the subject of a constructive debate in our societies. Important and urgent, for freedom is not only the most instrumental of enabling human rights anywhere in the world, but in our region, it is also, increasingly, the most fragile.

Lastly, I hope that readers will excuse us if, because of the delay in issuing this Report, they find that some events reported in Part I have been outpaced by fast-moving developments in the region. Hopefully, the next report in the series, on the empowerment of Arab women, will be an opportunity to make amends.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to those Arab states that allowed the Report team to carry out our field survey on freedom, which raised the standard of this aspect of our research: I salute here Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine.

I am especially grateful to all who participated in the preparation, review, translation and editing of AHDR3. I would like also to express my sincere thanks to a number of Arab intellectuals, whose joint concern for Arab advancement prompted them to make enriching contributions to the Report. My gratitude also goes to the Core Team for its innovative efforts and to its leader, Dr. Nader Fergany for his distinctive work and persistent follow-up through all its stages. I owe a sincere vote of thanks to the Advisory Board for its expert direction and informed advice, which - as usual - added depth and originality to the Report.

I am particularly grateful to Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for his courageous decision to allow a publication attended by obvious political risks to appear bearing the emblem of the organization. In upholding the authors' right to an uncensored international platform while reserving his right to disagree with them on some matters, he has provided an immaculate example of what free expression truly means. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Regional Bureau for Arab States, and in particular Mr. Zahir Jamal, Chief of the Regional Programme Division, for their dedication, hard work, and untiring support to the production of the Report series. Finally, I would like to express my great appreciation of our enduring partnership with the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development. It is also a great pleasure to welcome to the series our new regional partner, AGFUND, and to extend my warm appreciation to its President, His Royal Highness, Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz, for his vision in electing to co-sponsor these efforts on behalf of the Arab peoples.



Rima Khalaf Hunaidi

Assistant Secretary General and Assistant Administrator, Regional Director,
Regional Bureau for Arab States, United Nations Development Programme

Foreword by the Director General and Chairman The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development

The first Arab Human Development Report diagnosed the crisis facing human development in the Arab world and highlighted key deficits in the fields of knowledge acquisition, freedom and women's empowerment. The Second Report elaborated in details the issues of knowledge and the establishment of a strategic vision to develop it. Both reports were highly appreciated at the Arab and international levels, for their contribution to the revival of a deep and constructive dialogue with a vision to develop and advance our Arab society.

The Report at hand is the third in this series of Human Development Reports. It addresses the issue of freedom from several perspectives, its dimensions, intellectual foundations, legal and political structures, its regional and international and the future vision.

Effective participation and positive action at all economic and social spheres is known to increase people's capabilities and potentials. Exercising freedom within institutional frameworks and good governance is the most catalytic factor for achieving these capabilities and potentials. Therefore, the goal of this report, in our opinion, is to review elements of Governance, as one of the pillars of reform that will result in achieving progress in every respect.

The basis and programs of reforming the institutional structure and good governance must come from within and in harmony with the history and heritage of each country. These reforms must affect all social structures starting from the individual, the family to the social groups that constitute the whole national society. Several country level experiences demonstrate that success was achieved only when commitments to the principles of

development extend to include the whole of society.

Emphasizing the rule of law, enhancement of freedom, independence of the judiciary, equal opportunities, at all levels, will enhance the prospects of successful development in the Arab states. This will be an essential factor to accelerate the regions integration in the global trends of political, economic, human and cultural development.

Although this report may not necessarily represent the views of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, it decided to participate with the United Nations Development Program in issuing this report out of a sense of conviction in the importance of free dialogue in building societies, and towards achieving economic and social advancement.

Despite the serious obstacles and challenges that are facing Arab development at the present time, this air of pessimism should not dominate our minds and visions for the future. The Arab states nonetheless have made important economic and social achievements during the past few decades. In this regard, one should also recall the dark periods of colonialism, poor economic, financial and social situations in which the countries of the region were at the eve of independence.

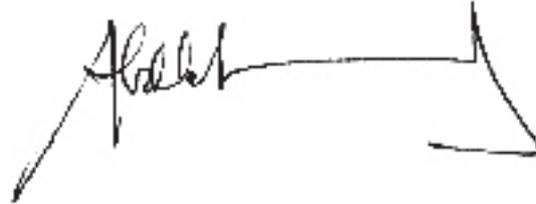
We have great confidence in the ability of the Arab states to enhance their progress in confronting the major challenges facing their citizens. We may differ in the methodologies and visions, but we should never differ over the fact that serious efforts towards more openness, freedom and physical and human development is the key to progress in all societies.

Finally, I extend my sincere thanks and

appreciation to all those who participated in the preparation, discussion, revision and issuance of this report in the form that we see it today. I would like also to express my highest appreciation and consideration to the United Nations Development Programme for sponsoring this distinguished effort and

to the Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) for its contribution to this serious work.

We pray to Allah to guide to the right actions and lead us greater success.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abdel Latif Youseff El Hamed'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Abdel Latif Youseff El Hamed
Director General / Chairman of the Board of Directors
Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development

Foreword by HRH The President of the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND)

The transparency we believe in and subscribe to prompts me to admit a sense of tension when we agreed to contribute to the funding of this edition of the Arab Human Development Report. This conflict was in no way personal in nature. For the content of the Report and its pivotal theme – Freedom and Good Governance – are core issues that have been of great interest to us for decades at the personal, institutional and public levels. The positive momentum caused by the First and the Second reports led us to contribute to the launch of the third, which gives an in-depth analysis of the call for freedom and the indispensable governance institutions and strengthens their significance in our societies.

The conflict stems mainly from differences between longtime convictions on the one hand, and the attitudes, whether favorable or guarded, toward the Report's content, its rigorous scientific methodology and statistical data on the other. What we and all sincere people hope for is that such conflict be resolved in a manner consistent with the spirit of transparency and self-criticism. Since we have rejected all the pressures exercised from all directions to obstruct the launch of this Report, we should at least avoid making similar mistakes. As the conventional wisdom says, "it is greatly disgraceful and discreditable if you advise against a particular conduct and allow yourself to do it all the same!" Although we do not agree with some of the items in this Report and have our own views about them, we would still support its launch in order not to lock away the other point of view.

The comprehensive first Arab Human development Report came to the conclusion that three fundamental deficits stand in the way of Arab development in the Arab countries; in the areas of knowledge, freedom and good

governance, and enabling women. The second report dealt in some detail with the various dimensions of the first issue, i. e. the acquisition, reproduction and dissemination of knowledge. The third report comes in the same scientific context, taking the question of consolidating freedom and safeguarding it by good government as a pivotal theme for thoughtful investigation and prudent and perceptive analysis. The Report examines the status of freedom and rights in our Arab homeland, and scrutinizes its institutional structures in the legislative, legal and political areas in their national, regional and international frameworks. It also suggests guidelines for a strategic vision for desired and possible alternative prospects for freedom and governance in the Arab states.

Freedom, and its various facets and manifestations, and the ways in which it could be protected and strengthened by good governance, represents one of the motives that encouraged us, decades ago, to put in our modest share and contribution to bring about reform in the Arab World. Our mission has centered on providing support to sustainable human development efforts, targeting the neediest groups in the developing countries, including the Arab region. Our support efforts have covered a wide range of deprived communities, particularly women and children, in cooperation with the international development organizations, local associations and other institutions active in the field of human development. These efforts, we hope, have left their impact on the quality of life of tens of thousands of people in disadvantaged segments of society, and helped save them from dire need, severe disease and dismal ignorance.

One of our prime concerns has been the promotion of serious studies that shore up the development process and examine both the

incentives and the obstacles in its way. We therefore believe that the successful launching of the third issue of the Arab Human Development Report series tones with and complements our call for bridging the gaps in strategic studies in the Arab region. Sustaining this venture poses great challenges and requires resolute determination and unshakable will.

We have often stated and on various occasions that human rights go hand in hand with human dignity, and that citizenship remains incomplete unless it is enhanced by human rights. We have furthermore stressed that democracy is an essential component of the human heritage, and an indispensable mechanism for reform. No serious dialogue could be initiated and maintained and brought to fruition outside an environment of political, economic and social reform, and without democratic practices and cultural open-mindedness. We have also emphasized that rational dialogue and debate inside and amongst us is an essential prerequisite for a credible dialogue with the outside world.

The authors of this Report who represent a team of competent scholars and intellectuals from all over the Arab World, recognize that the way out of the grim status quo towards a peaceful entry into the gates of freedom and good governance is an arduous, protracted process that cannot be accomplished overnight. However, we are fully aware of the consequences of any delay or obstruction of the desired reform,

and any attempt to substitute this process by cosmetic touches that do not touch upon the essence of the pressing issues, and do not respond to the grave challenges at hand. The result will extend yet another invitation to foreign forces and schemes bent on exercising further control of the resources and destinies of people in the Arab World.

Much like its predecessors, this Report will perhaps stimulate debate with a view to evolving development and reform visions. The need for such strategy is all the more pressing now if the Arab World wishes to join the development-oriented efforts and, specifically, move closer to the Millennium Development Goals in order to fulfill the aspirations of our societies. The first step is to draw up strategies based on a rigorous analysis of the situation and guided by science, knowledge and good governance, through support generated by local, regional and international partnerships. The Arab world must also embark on bold reforms in the main pillars of the state on the basis of transparency, accountability and sound and proper policies.

We have great expectations of the growing, confident and forward-moving forces of change in Arab life. High hopes for a better future are also pinned on the enlightened initiatives and trends that are unfolding and emerging among officials and reformers in government institutions in our contemporary societies, and among civil society activist alike.



Talal Bin Abdul Aziz
President

The Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations
Development Organizations AGFUND

Report Team

Advisory Board

Rima Khalaf Hunaidi (Chair), Ahmed Kamal Aboulmagd, Farida Allaghi, Nabil Alnawwab (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), Mustafa Omar Attir, (the late) Mervat Badawi* (Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development), Mustafa Barghouthi, Farida Bennani, Mohamed Cherfi, (the late) Mamdouh Edwan**, Munira Fakhro, Ziad Fariz, Mohammed Fayek, Burhan Ghalioun, Fahmy Howeid, Nasser Kahtani (Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations), Taher H. Kanaan, Atif Kubursi, Clovis Maksoud, Amin Medani, Abdelouahab Rezig, Ghassan Tuéni.

Core Team

Nader Fergany (Leader), Abdelwahab El-Affendi, Mohamed Nour Farahat, Marie Rose Zalzal.

Contributing Authors

Marie-Thérèse Abdel-Messih, Ali Abdel Gadir Ali, Mustapha K. Al Sayyid, Abdallah Al Ashaal, Amna Rashed Al-Hamdan, Habib Al-Jenhani, Majid A. Al-Moneef, Nabil Alnawwab, Siham Abdulrahman Alsuwaigh, Mohsen Awad, Azmi Bishara, Hafidha Chekir, Georges Corm, Abdelwahab El-Affendi, Jalila El Ati, Mohamed Mahmoud El-Imam, Khalida Sa'id Esber, Mohamed Nour Farahat, Rafia Obaid Ghubash, Abdelaziz Guessous, Salah El-Deen Hafez, Mustafa S. Hijazi, Fahmi Jadaan, Taher H. Kanaan, Abdalla Khalil, Mohammad Abdalla Khalil, Atif Kubursi, Jonathan Kuttub, Amina Lemrini, Maryam Sultan Lootah, Mohammed Malki, Khadija Marouazi, A.Hussain Shaban, Alla Eldin Shalaby, Marie Rose Zalzal.

Readers Group

(Arabic)

Khalid Abdalla, Farid Abdelkhalek, Kamal Abdellatif, Madawi Al-Rasheed, Abdulkarim El-Eryani, Haytham Manna, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, Naila Silini.

(English)

Ziad Hafez, Michael Hudson, Santosh Mehrotra, Omar Noman, Mary Rose Oakar, Marina Ottaway, John M. Page, Alan Richards, Ngaire Woods.

UNDP RBAS / UNOPS

Uzma Ahmed, Dena Assaf, Moez Doraid (Report Coordinator), Jacqueline Estevez-Camejo, Melissa Esteve, Ghaith Fariz (Report Coordinator), Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Jacqueline Ghazal, Randa Jamal, Zahir Jamal, Mary Jreidini, Azza M. Karam, Madi Musa, Maen Nsour, Win Min Nu, William Orme, Ahmad Ragab, Gillman Rebello, Nadine Shamounki, Amal Tillawi.

Editorial Team

Arabic Version: Fayiz Suyyagh

English Version: Barbara Brewka, Zahir Jamal

Implementation of the freedom survey

- Middle East Marketing and Research Consultants (MEMRC) / Amman, Jordan (Coordination + Questionnaire Design & Unifying Data Files).
- Societe D'etude De Realisation De Consultants (SEREC)/ Casablanca , Morocco.
- Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (JMCC) / East Jerusalem, Palestine.
- Statistics Lebanon Ltd. / Beirut, Lebanon.
- Cabinet Tiers – Consult / Alger.

Statistical tables on human development in Arab countries

Mohamad Baquer

Translation Team

June Ray (Coordinator), Sara Ansah, Marilyn Booth, Humphrey Davies, Shohrat el-A'alem, Bruce Inksetter, Nehad Salem.

Cover Design

Designer: Walid Gadaw,

Calligraphy and Graphics: Mamoun Sakkal.

Technical Consultant for Design and Printing

Hassan Shahin

* Mervat Badawi: Exceptional lady who bestowed profound knowledge and care on the Arab Human Development Report since its inception but departed our world when this report was about to appear.

** Mamdouh Edwan: Distinguished Arab poet who has not been deterred by terminal illness from actively participating in the deliberations of the AHDR 3 Advisory group.

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This Report

Introduction

The first Arab Human Development Report (AHDR 2002) provided a comprehensive, first hand overview of the situation in the Arab region from the perspective of human development. Its goal was to provide an objective analysis based on serious self-criticism and aimed at assuring freedom and dignity for all Arabs¹. The Report diagnosed three cardinal deficits impeding human development in Arab countries: in knowledge acquisition, freedom and good governance, and women's empowerment. As a broad overview, that first Report did not explore these deficits in depth. Rather, it made the case for an extended analysis of each in order to promote a discussion about how to overcome them.

Accordingly, the second Report analysed the knowledge acquisition deficit in the Arab world in some depth, ending with a strategic vision for establishing a knowledge society in the region.

Continuing such extended treatment, this third Report provides a thorough examination of the deficit of freedom and good governance, a topic that dominates current discourse within the region and abroad. It is hoped that this detailed analysis will stimulate a dialogue in Arab societies on how to expand freedom and establish good governance. A serious and objective debate around the substance of this Report would pave the way for a process of social innovation leading to a genuine project for an Arab renaissance.

The first two Reports prompted a wide public response, for and against their findings, both inside and outside the Arab world, which underlined the sharp relevance of the

issues raised, and the importance of addressing them at this critical period in the course of the region.

Unfortunately, as with other Arab reform initiatives, some forces outside the Arab world have used these Reports for their own purposes. This has led some Arabs to call for a halt to self-criticism in order to avoid giving others a pretext for interfering in Arab affairs. This call, however, rests on flawed logic. It assumes that others have sought to interfere in the region's affairs in response to such self-criticism by Arabs and not because of their own interests.

These interests and ambitions have turned into interventions for two reasons. The first is active: it reflects the considerable capabilities that foreign powers can muster to pursue their own ends. The second is passive: it relates to the weakness of the region, which makes it an easy target for outside intervention.

The only way for Arabs to deal with the ambitions of others is to recognize and overcome their own weaknesses and thus grow strong enough to prevent foreign objectives from taking hold. Self-reform originating in balanced self-criticism is the only viable way forward towards a robust and independent region. All committed actors in Arab societies should be able to rise to the occasion of their historic mission, which is to stimulate a renaissance movement. They can best do so by diagnosing the present regional situation in human development terms and proposing ways forward.

FREEDOM AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Human development is most profoundly seen as a process of expanding "the range of human

A serious and objective debate around the substance of this Report would pave the way for a process of social innovation.

Self-reform originating in balanced self-criticism is the only viable way forward towards a robust and independent region.

¹ The term "Arab" is used in this report to denote all citizens of Arab countries inclusively.

Freedom is pivotal in human development.

choice”. If human development means increasing people’s choices, then people must have the freedom to choose among alternatives. This becomes an absolute priority. Freedom is pivotal in human development. Indeed, recent theoretical writings on this subject see development as synonymous with freedom (Sen 1999).

BOX P1

Freedom and good governance: an historical legacy

“Since when have you compelled people to enslavement, when their mothers birthed them free?²”

Omar bin al-Khattab

“If the king has treated the people unjustly
We refuse to condone humiliation among us”

Amr bin Kulthum

“The tyrant is the enemy of rights and of freedom; indeed their executioner. Right is the father of humanity and freedom their mother.”

Abdel-Rahman al-Kawakibi

The effective development and use of human capabilities enlarges people’s choices and enables them to enjoy freedom in its comprehensive sense.

Thus, in human development terms, simply by virtue of belonging to humankind, people have an *a priori* right to a dignified life, materially and morally or spiritually, in body, self and soul. From this starting point two key conclusions follow:

- First: Human development is incompatible with any type of discrimination against any groups of human beings whether defined by gender, social origin, creed or colour.
- Second: In human development, the concept of well-being is not limited to material comfort. It includes the non-physical, non-material aspects of a dignified human life: freedom, knowledge, aesthetic pleasure, human dignity and self-fulfilment. These broader aims can only be achieved through the individual’s effective participation in all endeavours of society.

Human entitlements, in principle, are infinite, and they develop and change continuously in accord with human advancement. At any level of development, though, the three basic human entitlements, according to the global Human Development Report, are: “to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowl-

edge, and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living”. Yet, human development does not end at this minimal level of entitlements. Rather, it goes beyond this minimum to encompass other additional entitlements, ranging from “political, economic, and social freedom to opportunities for being creative and productive, and enjoying self-respect and guaranteed human rights” (Human Development Report 1990).

The process of human development is founded on two principal axes. The first relates to building those human capabilities that make it possible to achieve a higher level of human welfare. These capabilities comprise, first and foremost, the ability of all people to enjoy a long and healthy life and to acquire knowledge and freedom without discrimination. The second axis relates to the efficient and appropriate utilization of human capabilities in all spheres of human endeavour, including production, and through people’s active participation in civil society and politics. The effective development and use of human capabilities enlarges people’s choices and enables them to enjoy freedom in its comprehensive sense.

Thus, human development in the full sense that we have adopted, is not merely about developing “human resources,” neither is it a “development,” *tout court*, of human beings, nor is it a matter solely of striving to fulfil the basic needs of people. It is much more a humanist and humanitarian blueprint for the comprehensive, total, and mutually reinforcing development, of people and social institutions, that aims to realize higher human goals and aspirations: freedom, justice, and human dignity.

Narrower definitions of development, whether limited to ‘economic development’ or to a restricted sense of human development, lack the rich possibilities of this fuller concept. In human development thinking, a wealthy person is not considered to enjoy an advanced state of well-being so long as that person is prevented from exercising freedom. Likewise, history, ancient and contemporary, teaches us that societies barred from experiencing free-

² In this saying, Khalifat Omar is addressing the son of his Wali (representative ruler) in Egypt. Of particular note is that the adversary referred to in the text had a different religion from the Khalifat himself...the adversary was a Christian Coptic. This conflict ended with the Khalifat Omar inflicting severe punishment on the son of his Wali in Egypt.

dom are unable to preserve whatever economic and other gains they may make in a more narrow definition of development; and thus, they cannot attain the higher rungs on the ladder of human advancement.

THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THE FIRST AND SECOND ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORTS

The first AHDR (2002) concluded that “although Arab countries have made significant strides in more than one area of human development in the last three decades...the predominant characteristic of the current Arab reality seems to be the existence of deeply rooted shortcomings in the Arab institutional structure [which] are an obstacle to building human development.” As noted earlier, the Report summarized these shortcomings as three deficits relating to knowledge acquisition, freedom and good governance and the empowerment of women. Taking into account these deficit areas in an alternative human development index, reduces the ranking of the Arab countries on the standard index. This new view underlined that the challenge of building human development, for most Arabs, is still very serious.

The first AHDR also affirmed that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is one of the most significant impediments to human development in Arab countries, in that it constitutes an obvious threat to security and peace across the region. Occupation has also given Arab regimes a pretext for postponing internal reform and has embarrassed Arab reformists by making the confrontation of external threats to the region a higher priority than internal reforms.

The second AHDR (2003) reviewed the most important global, regional and country-level developments after the completion of the first Report. It concluded that challenges to Arab human development remained grave. Indeed, it saw unfavourable developments at the regional and global levels as intensifying the challenge - or the threat - to human development notably in the realm of freedoms. These developments included the deteriorating state of civil and political freedoms for Arabs and Muslims in the West following the events of

September 11 and the consequent clampdown on freedoms in Arab countries; Israel’s re-invasion of Palestinian cities, causing destruction and human suffering; and the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the US-led Coalition.

Looking into the state of knowledge acquisition at the beginning of the 21st century, the second Report concluded that the dissemination and production of knowledge in Arab countries remain weak despite the presence of significant Arab human capital. It noted that, under different circumstances, such capital would constitute a strong foundation for a knowledge renaissance.

The Report culminated in a strategic vision for establishing a knowledge society in Arab countries organized around five pillars:

1. Guaranteeing the key freedoms of opinion, expression and association, safeguarded by good governance.
2. Disseminating high quality education for all, particularly through higher education, learning in early childhood, continuous education and life-long learning.
3. Embedding and ingraining science in society, building and broadening the capacity for research and development across societal activities and catching up with the “information age”.
4. Shifting Arab socio-economic structures rapidly towards knowledge-based production.
5. Developing an authentic, broadminded and enlightened Arab knowledge model based on:

Returning to pure religion, free from political exploitation, and centred on ijthad (independent interpretive scholarship); advancing the Arabic language; reclaiming the positive achievements of Arab heritage; enriching, supporting and celebrating cultural diversity in the region; and opening up to other cultures.

CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT

The Arab development crisis has widened, deepened and grown more complex to a degree that demands the full engagement of all Arab citizens in true reform in order to spearhead a human renaissance in the region. The strategic vision for establishing the “knowl-

The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is one of the most significant impediments to human development in Arab countries.

Occupation has also given Arab regimes a pretext for postponing internal reform.

Of all the impediments to an Arab renaissance, political restrictions on human development are the most stubborn.

External events have increasing and palpable impacts on freedom in the region.

edge society” in the Arab states clearly showed that required reforms extend to the current socio-economic structure and, critically, to the political context at the national, regional and international levels. It indicated that partial reforms can not work in the absence of an appropriately positive social environment; however, in the present situation, this kind of reform is no longer effective or even possible. Vested interests can no longer be allowed to delay or slow down comprehensive societal reform in Arab countries.

Of all the impediments to an Arab renaissance, political restrictions on human development are the most stubborn. For that reason, this Report focuses on the acute deficit of freedom and good governance in the Arab world.

As is now the practice in this series, the Report opens by recounting events at the national, regional and global levels that have affected the overall course of human development in the Arab world during the period in review. This opening section (Part I) is followed by an in-depth analysis (Part II) of the main subject.

The Report complements the first two in the series and does not aim to go over ground previously covered.

Part II commences with an analytical framework that sets forth the concept and definition of freedom and good governance, focusing on both Western and Arab culture (Chapter 1). It then discusses some key problematic issues undermining freedom and governance in Arab countries at the start of the third millennium (Chapter 2).

Applying its analytical framework and its definition of freedom, the Report next looks at the state of freedoms and economic and social rights in Arab countries and evaluates how far they are enjoyed in practice (Chapter 3). It continues by analysing the factors that determine the extent to which Arabs enjoy freedoms and rights starting with the impact of institutional, legal and political structures (Chapters 4 and 5).

The Report then examines the impact of societal structures on freedom and governance in Arab countries. Since external events have increasing and palpable impacts on freedom in the region, the Report subsequently discusses

the global and regional environment and its relationship to the main theme (Chapter 6).

Drawing on previous chapters, the Report concludes by offering an analytical overview of alternative prospects for freedom and good governance in Arab countries. The objective is to stimulate a broad discussion on action for enhancing and protecting freedom in the region through good governance (Chapter 7).