

# The Report in Brief

## Arab Human Development Report 2009

Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries



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for Arab States

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# The report in brief

*This Report is  
an independent  
publication*

This is the fifth volume in the series of Arab Human Development Reports sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and independently authored by intellectuals and scholars from Arab countries.

Like its predecessors, this Report provides eminent Arab thinkers a platform from which to articulate a comprehensive analysis of their own contemporary milieu. It is not a conventional report produced by the United Nations. Rather, it is an independent publication that gives a voice to a representative group of Arab intellectuals whose sober and self-critical appraisals might not otherwise be heard in the particular circumstances of the region. The views of the authors are supplemented by an opinion poll conducted in four Arab countries—Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco and the Occupied Palestinian Territory—that represent a range of political and cultural contexts for the Report’s analyses. A special Youth Forum convened for the Report also provides insights from young Arabs.

Inspired by UNDP’s 1994 global Human Development Report on human security, the present study takes up that subject as it concerns the Arab countries.<sup>1</sup> Its starting point is that, seven years after the publication of the first Arab Human Development Report, the region’s fault lines as traced in that analysis may have deepened.<sup>2</sup> The question thus arises: why have obstacles to human development in the region proved so stubborn?

This new Report proposes that the answers lie in the fragility of the region’s political, social, economic and environmental structures, in its lack of people-centred development policies and in its vulnerability to outside intervention. Together, these characteristics undermine human security—the kind of material and moral foundation that secures lives, livelihoods and an acceptable quality of life for the majority. Human security is a prerequisite for human development, and its widespread absence in Arab countries has held back their progress.

## Human insecurity at the global and regional levels

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The world order that followed the end of the Cold War has proved to be tumultuous. External and internal challenges to the integrity of states have multiplied. From without, environmental pollution, international terrorism, large population movements, a melting global financial system and the rise of other cross-border

threats such as pandemics, the drug trade and human trafficking have all laid siege to traditional notions of security. Within countries, spreading poverty, unemployment, civil wars, sectarian and ethnic conflicts and authoritarian repression have exposed the limits of many states in guaranteeing their citizens’ rights and

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freedoms. While preserving the integrity of states remains the highest consideration of national security, a newer concern with protecting the lives of the people who reside in them has overtaken that preoccupation. The concept of human security, which complements that of national security, brings this change in perspective into focus.

In the Arab region, human insecurity—pervasive, often intense and with consequences affecting large numbers of people—inhibits human development. It is revealed in the impacts of military occupation and armed conflict in Iraq, Sudan, Somalia and Occupied Palestinian Territory. It is found in countries that enjoy relative stability where the authoritarian state, buttressed by flawed constitutions and unjust laws, often denies citizens their rights. Human insecurity is heightened by swift climatic changes, which threaten the livelihoods, income and access to food and water of millions of Arabs in future. It is reflected in the economic vulnerability of one-fifth of the people in some Arab states, and more than half in others, whose lives are impoverished and cut short by hunger and want. Human insecurity is palpable and present in the alienation of the region's rising cohort of unemployed youth and in the predicaments of its subordinated women, and dispossessed refugees.

## The concept

Human security is the “rearguard of human development”. Whereas human development is concerned with expanding the individual’s capabilities and opportunities, human security focuses on enabling peoples to contain or avert threats to their lives, livelihoods and human dignity. The two concepts look at the human condition from different ends of a continuum, summarized by Amartya Sen as “expansion with equity” (human development) and “downturn with security” (human security). The intellectual frameworks they provide are co-extensive and mutually reinforcing. Moreover, human security is related to human rights inasmuch as respect for people’s basic rights creates conditions favourable to human security.

Beginning with these insights, the Report adopts the comprehensive cat-

egorization of threats to human security originally posited by UNDP and defines human security as “*the liberation of human beings from those intense, extensive, prolonged, and comprehensive threats to which their lives and freedom are vulnerable*”. Its chapters focus on:

- Pressures on environmental resources
- The performance of the state in guaranteeing or undermining human security
- The personal insecurity of vulnerable groups
- Economic vulnerability, poverty and unemployment
- Food security and nutrition
- Health and human security
- The systemic insecurity of occupation and foreign military intervention

Human security can be measured on both an objective and subjective level, and in quantitative and qualitative terms. The Report takes the view that no single composite index of human security would be valid, reliable or sufficiently sensitive to varying levels of human security and to different circumstances in the region. Rather, it affirms the relevance of discrete quantitative indicators and opinion surveys at the level of the region, its sub-regions and country groups.

## Seven dimensions of threat

### 1. People and their insecure environment

The Arab region faces growing challenges to the security of its population from environmental stresses. Potential conflicts originating in competition for dwindling natural resources may heavily strain relations among communities, populations and states, Arab or non-Arab. These challenges will result from population and demographic pressures, the overexploitation of land, water shortages, desertification, pollution, and climate change.

**Population pressures:** according to UN estimates, the Arab countries will be home to some 395 million people by 2015 (compared to about 317 million in 2007, and 150 million in 1980). In a region where water and arable land are shrinking, population growth at these rates while

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falling, will still put intense pressures on the carrying capacity of Arab countries' lands and further threaten environmental sustainability.

**Urban growth** poses particular challenges. An accelerating drift to cities and towns is straining already-overstretched infrastructure and creating overcrowded, unhealthy and insecure living conditions in many Arab centres. In 1970, 38 per cent of the Arab population was urban. By 2005 this had grown to 55 per cent, and it is likely to surpass 60 per cent by 2020.

**Demographic pressures:** the most evident and challenging aspect of the region's demographic profile is its 'youth bulge'. Young people are the fastest growing segment of Arab countries' populations. Some 60 per cent of the population is under 25 years old, making this one of the most youthful regions in the world, with a median age of 22 years compared to a global average of 28.

**Water scarcity:** Total available surface water resources in the Arab countries are estimated at 277 billion cubic meters per year<sup>3</sup>, only 43 per cent of which originates within the Arab countries. Surface water resources shared with neighbouring countries outside the region account for approximately 57 per cent of its total water requirements. Years of effort have yielded the establishment of formal agreements (such as the Nile Basin Initiative) on the management of shared water resources. However, most are partial, ineffective and inequitable in terms of the full spectrum of riparian rights. At the regional and interregional levels, cooperation on water usage and management is heavily affected by prevailing political tensions and ongoing conflicts.

**Stressed groundwater systems** are often the only source of fresh water in the region, yet reserves in renewable aquifers are being withdrawn faster than they can be replenished. Transboundary conflicts, poor distribution and heavy use, especially of ground resources, characterize water use in much of the Arab countries. This leads to a lack of clean water for much of the population and the waste of significant

amounts in the agriculture, industry and tourism sectors.

**Desertification** is a peril in the region. It is formally defined under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) as "land degradation in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities." A UN Environment Programme study estimates that desert has swallowed up more than two-thirds of total land area of the region (9.76 million square kilometres of desert, or 68.4 per cent of the total land area). The highest ratio of desert to total land area is in the Arabian Peninsula (nine-tenths or 89.6 per cent). This is followed by North Africa (over three-fourths of the land or 77.7 per cent), the Nile Valley and the Horn of Africa (less than a half or 44.5 per cent) and the Mashreq (35.6 per cent). Ongoing desertification threatens about 2.87 million square kilometres or a fifth of the total area of the Arab countries.

**Water pollution** in Arab countries has grown into a serious challenge. It is mainly attributed to the increasing use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and horticultural and veterinary medical treatments whose long-lasting traces find their way into the water. The lack of access to sufficient clean water threatens human security in many ways. It can lead to the spread of disease among children, such as dysentery, and affect school attendance and academic achievement. It deprives women of long hours of the day which they could devote to personal and income-generating activities rather than fetching water for their families. In addition, water scarcity and pollution threaten agricultural and food production and precipitate domestic rivalries over scarce water resources.

On the other hand, levels of **air pollution** in Arab countries, in general, are among the lowest in the world. In 2004, carbon dioxide emissions did not exceed 1,348.4 metric tons, compared to 12,162.9 metric tons in middle-income countries and 13,318.6 metric tons in the OECD countries. However, Arab countries have relatively low carbon dioxide emission rates mainly because most have not progressed very far with industrialisation.

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*Large and frequent shortfalls can turn the state into a threat to human security*

*Most states failed to introduce institutions of representation*

Even so, carbon dioxide emissions in North Africa and the Middle East are increasing at a faster rate than any other region in the world, except for South Asia (driven by India) and East Asia (driven by China). From 1990 to 2004 the average annual rate of growth was 4.5 per cent, which means that carbon dioxide emissions had nearly doubled over that period.

**Climate change:** the Arab region is one of those least responsible for the direct creation of the greenhouse effect. According to the global Human Development Report (HDR) 2008 and world development indices for 2007, the region's share of carbon dioxide emissions, which contribute to this phenomenon, was no more than 4.7 per cent—lower than any other region except Sub-Saharan Africa. However, the region is also the nearest to becoming a direct victim of climate change, which will affect it in the following ways: a) water shortages; b) reduced agricultural production; c) large population transfers to foreign countries (environmental refugees); d) lower levels of economic activity; e) threats to national security.

**Global warming:** according to the UNDP Global Human Development Report 2007/2008, Egypt, Lebanon, Sudan, and the countries of North Africa could be those in the region most affected by climate change.<sup>4</sup> An increase in the Earth's temperature by three or four degrees would raise the sea level by approximately one metre, creating 6 million refugees in Egypt, with 4,500 square kilometres of agricultural land in the Delta flooded. Even if the sea level rises by only one-half metre, it could create two million refugees and cause more than \$35 billion in economic losses. In the Kordofan region of Sudan, an increase in temperature of 1.5 degrees centigrade between 2030 and 2060 would reduce average rainfall by 5 per cent, leading to a general drop in agricultural production and a decrease in the production of maize by 70 per cent of current levels. An increase of 1.2 degrees centigrade by 2020 would reduce available water in Lebanon by 15 per cent and in some areas of Morocco by over 10 per cent.

## 2. The State and its insecure people

In terms of levels of human security among citizens, is the Arab State part of the solution or problem? To answer that question, the Report compares the performance of the Arab states with the norms associated with good governance. It analyzes whether the former win the acceptance of their citizens, uphold and guarantee their rights to life and freedom and protect them from aggression. Its analysis is based on four criteria: 1) the acceptability of the state to its own citizens; 2) state compliance with international charters pertaining to human rights; 3) how the state utilizes its monopoly of the means of force and coercion; 4) how far institutional checks and balances prevent abuses of power. The Report concludes that large and frequent shortfalls in these areas often combine to turn the state into a threat to human security, instead of its chief support.

### **Identity, diversity and citizenship**

States are artificial creations. The borders of many Arab states reflect this fact, often enclosing diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic groups that were incorporated as minorities in the post-colonial era. Few Arab states saw a smooth transition towards inclusion in their post-independence phases. Rather, a strong nationalistic trend developed with the objective of masking the diversity of the population and subduing its cultural, linguistic and religious heterogeneity under command structures. The majority of states failed to introduce democratic governance and institutions of representation that ensure inclusion, the equal distribution of wealth among various groups, and respect for cultural diversity.

One result of this is that identity-based groups in some Arab countries have sought to free themselves from the captivity of the nation-state in whose shadow they live. This rejection of the legitimacy of the kind of state which the modern Arab countries inherited and perpetuated has been accompanied by conflicts that threaten human security and to which some states have responded by imposing authoritarian controls.

In western political history, the normative concept that has contributed most to the management of ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity is that of citizenship. Arab states are undergoing a similar political evolution rather slowly and, consequently, few sustain a level of civic consciousness that makes it possible for citizens themselves to resolve their differences peacefully without state action.

Observation confirms that, in the Arab countries, ethnic, religious, sectarian, and linguistic differences can be associated with persistent group struggles, especially in countries where the population is not homogenous. In countries such as Somalia, Sudan, Lebanon, and Iraq, ethnic, religious and tribal loyalties have become the axis along which communities have been mobilized to press for inclusion or separation. This mobilization has been destructive and destabilizing, undercutting both human security and the integrity of states. Tragically, these conflicts have engendered the largest volume of human casualties in the Arab countries.

The Report argues that identity, *per se*, is not necessarily the cause of a conflict or even the main source of tension between different groups in the region. Clashes that appear on the surface to stem from identity in fact often originate in skewed access to political power or wealth, in a lack of channels for representative political participation, and in the suppression of cultural and linguistic diversity. Most commonly, such conflicts start with the exploitation by political leaders, for their own ideological ends, of loyalty ties among groups who share feelings of exclusion, deprivation and discrimination.

#### ***Adherence to international charters***

Most Arab states have acceded to the major international charters pertaining to human rights which stipulate both the right to life and the right to freedom. Accession and ratification entail an obligation on the concerned Arab states to bring national legislation and practices in line with these conventions, an obligation that is however more honoured in the breach than the observance. At the regional level, the norms on human rights adopted by states and reflected in the *Arab Charter on Human Rights* (2004) are inconsistent with international standards. Indeed, the

death penalty, which more than half the countries of the world have abolished and which the United Nations condemns, is applied liberally in several Arab countries, which do not limit it to the most serious crimes or exclude its imposition in cases of political crime.

#### ***Constitutional failings***

State constitutions do not adhere in several key respects to the international norms implicit in the charters to which Arab countries have acceded. This gravely compromises levels of human security in the countries concerned. Many Arab countries' constitutions adopt ideological or doctrinal formulas that empty stipulations of general rights and freedoms of any content and which allow individual rights to be violated in the name of the official ideology or faith. Others deal ambiguously with freedom of opinion and of expression, tending to restrict rather than to permit. Arab countries' constitutions also routinely delegate the definition of rights to state regulation. In doing so, they allow freedoms and individual rights to be violated at the point when the latter are translated into ordinary law. While Arab laws and constitutions generally do not mandate discrimination between citizens on the basis of language, religion, doctrine, or confession, discrimination against women is quite evident on the law books of several states.

#### ***Legal restrictions***

Across the Arab region, six countries continue to prohibit the formation of political parties. In many other cases, varying degrees of repression and restrictions on the establishment and functioning of political parties, particularly opposition parties, effectively amount to their prohibition. With one exception, all Arab countries support the right to form civil associations. However, most legal systems and regulations governing and regulating the civil society sector involve a wide and escalating array of restrictive measures that hinder the exercise of that right. Civil society groups face restrictions on their formation and ability to operate. The groups themselves, or their boards, can be summarily dissolved by the state. And their affiliations and sources of funding are subject to tight controls.

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*Anti-terror laws have given government security agencies sweeping powers*

### ***National security measures***

Many Arab states have undergone extraordinarily long periods of martial law or emergency rule, transforming interim measures into a permanent way of conducting political life. Declarations of emergency are often simply a pretext to suspend basic rights and exempt rulers from any constitutional limitations, however weak. Post-9-11, most Arab countries passed anti-terror laws based on a wide and unspecific definition of “terrorism”. These moves have given government security agencies sweeping powers which, although effective in some contexts, can form a threat to basic freedoms in others. Such laws allow undefined periods of pre-trial detention and multiply instances where the death penalty may be applied. They also curb freedom of expression and increase police powers of search, eavesdropping and arrest. In some cases, these laws increase the use of military courts. In general, these laws have failed to find the required balance between the security of society and that of the individual.

State-sponsored violations of citizens’ rights to life and freedom are committed through the practices of torture and illegal detention. Between 2006 and 2008, the Arab Organization for Human Rights (AOHR) found examples of the official practice of torture in eight Arab states. In the same period, the AOHR reported on the more widespread practice of illegal detention in eleven countries of the region.

### ***Obstructions of justice***

Independent judiciaries form a major part of any state system of checks and balances. Threats to judicial independence in the Arab states come not from constitutions, which generally uphold the principle, but from the executive branch. All Arab justice systems suffer in one form or another from blows to their independence that stem from executive domination of both the legislative and judicial branches. In addition, judicial independence is being undermined by the spread of state security courts and military courts, which represent a negation of the principles of natural justice and detract from guarantees of a fair trial. The result is a considerable gap between constitutional texts and actual legal practice in protecting the personal security of the Arab citizen. Judges in

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some Arab countries have struggled in order to give some substance to judicial independence, but their efforts are undertaken in a very challenging environment.

### ***State-enforced security***

Human security is reinforced when the state is the sole wielder of the instruments of coercion and uses them to carry out its commitment to respect people’s rights, those of citizens and non-citizens alike. When other groups gain control of instruments of force, the outcomes seldom favour security for citizens. The state authorities in some Arab countries have proved unable to impose security while confronting armed groups and others have suffered from the armed violence in which some of their citizens, or those of other Arab states, have been caught.

On the other hand, while many Arabs live under various ‘un-freedoms’ which effectively deny them voice and representation, and while the threat of state-initiated violence against them is ever-present, the region offers a degree of protection from crime not found in other developing regions. Barring the cases of foreign occupation and civil war, a relatively low incidence of conventional violent crime remains the norm for the Arab countries. Statistics from 2002 indicate that, at that time, the region had the lowest police-recorded homicide and assault rate, not only among all regions of the South, but also in both the developing and developed worlds.

Executive branches and security and armed forces that are not subject to public oversight present grave potential threats to human security. All Arab heads of state wield absolute authority, answering to none. They maintain their hold on power by leaving the state’s security apparatus an extremely wide margin for manoeuvre, at the expense of citizens’ freedoms and fundamental rights. Arab security agencies operate with impunity because they are instrumental to the head of state and account to him alone. Their powers are buttressed by executive interference with the independence of the judiciary, by the dominance (in most states) of an unchanging ruling party over the legislature, and by the muzzling of the media.

Going by the preceding criteria, the relationship between the state and human

security in the region is not straightforward. While the state is expected to guarantee human security, it has been, in several Arab countries, a source of threat undermining both international charters and national constitutional provisions. The Report holds up the nature and extent of state failures behind the crisis in Darfur, which provide an archetypal illustration of how state performance impacts human security. Establishing the rule of law and good governance in the Arab countries remains a precondition for the foundation of the legitimate state and the protection of human security.

### ***Calls for state reform***

Recent state-sponsored reform initiatives aimed at enhancing citizens' rights have been welcomed yet found to be ineffectual in changing the dictated nature of the Arab social contract or the structural basis of power in the region. The path to reform in the region has been laid out most clearly by its increasingly active and vocal civil society. The latter's demands focus on:

- Respect for the right to self-determination of all people.
- Adherence to the principles of human rights, and rejection of all prevarication based on cultural particularism and the manipulation of national sentiment.
- Public tolerance of different religions and schools of thought.
- Sound parliamentary systems.
- The incorporation in Arab constitutions of guarantees of political, intellectual, and party political pluralism, with political parties based on the principle of citizenship

Specific calls by citizens for change include: an end to martial law; the abolition of emergency laws and courts; a halt to the practice of torture; the reform of Arab countries' legislations that is incompatible with freedom of thought and expression; and the full establishment and practice of the rule of law.

### **3. The vulnerability of those lost from sight**

The personal security of citizens in Arab countries is compromised by legal loopholes, overseen and regulated by coercive

institutions and based on the forfeiture of freedoms. But for some groups of people beyond mainstream society—abused and subordinated women, the victims of human trafficking, child soldiers, refugees and internally displaced persons—no personal security exists at all.

### ***Violence against women***

Many Arab women are still bound by patriarchal patterns of kinship, legalised discrimination, social subordination and ingrained male dominance. Because women find themselves in a lowly position in relation to decision-making within the family, their situation continuously exposes them to forms of family and institutionalised violence. Arab women, like many of their peers in other regions, sustain both direct and indirect violence. In the first category, they suffer forms of physical assault, from beating to rape and murder. In the second, they are victims of cultural and social practices that cause material harm to women, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. Although some states have banned the practice of FGM, it continues to be widespread in many countries because traditional beliefs favour it. Influential figures aligned with conservative political or social forces also speak out in its defence.

Arab countries have yet to adopt laws prohibiting child marriage before the age of majority, namely, eighteen years of age. Yet studies indicate that early marriage and teenage pregnancies threaten the health of mothers and children, and increase female vulnerability to violence. Early marriages often lead to divorce, family breakdown and poor child-rearing. They commonly encourage early childbearing and high fertility, which carry marked health risks for very young mothers and their infants. Although early marriage is on the decline in the Arab countries, the numbers of teenage girls who are married remains significant in some countries. Based on the most recent available data in the period 1987-2006, UNICEF estimates that the proportions of women aged 20-24 that were married by the age of 18 were 45 per cent in Somalia, 37 per cent in Yemen and Mauritania, 30 per cent in Comoros, and 27 per cent in Sudan. These proportions were 10 per cent in Tunisia, 5 per cent in Djibouti, and 2 per cent in Algeria.

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It is difficult to gauge the prevalence of violence against women in Arab societies. The subject is taboo in a male-oriented culture of denial. Much of this violence is inflicted unseen in the home, on wives, sisters and mothers. The under-reporting of offences is widespread. Marriage laws contribute to the problem since most of them confirm a husband's custodial rights over a wife. The consecration of male supremacy within the family culminates in Personal Status laws since, under these laws, most women in Arab countries do not have the right to ask for divorce or to oppose polygamy. Steps to reform personal status laws have been taken, especially in the Maghreb countries, and more are required.

So-called 'honour crimes' are the most notorious form of violence against women in several Arab societies. Here too, under-reporting makes the prevalence of such crimes difficult to establish, but the practice is known to continue. The punishment for women can be as severe as death, especially if the prohibited act results in pregnancy. In some Arab countries the law stands on the side of those who perpetrate such crimes by reducing penalties.

Rape is considered to be a more common form of violence against women than incidents reported to the police, or covered by the press, may suggest. In Arab countries, where laws on rape are either equivocal or actively biased against women, and where family and society join to deny occurrences, preserve the image of virginity and downplay the crime, few cases come before the courts. Thus, one of the most violent, intrusive and traumatic threats to women's personal safety continues while society averts its eyes.

War-time assaults on women take place in a context of lawlessness, displacement and armed clashes such as those in Iraq, Sudan (Darfur) and Somalia where gender roles are polarized. In these theatres of conflict, men often compensate for their own insecurities and loss of dominance through intensified aggression against women. In June 2008, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1820 demanding the "immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians". The resolution noted that women and girls are particularly

targeted by the use of sexual violence as "a tactic of war".

### ***Human trafficking***

Human trafficking is a multi-billion dollar transnational industry that is spreading across the Arab countries. In the region, this underground business has certain clear traits. One is that the Arab states play various roles and sometimes multiple roles. They can be destinations for the trade, they may act as a transit point for such commerce, or they may be a source of persons being trafficked. As destinations, they receive trafficked persons from various regions of the world: Southeast Asia, South Asia, Eastern Europe, Asia Minor, Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

For men, the trade entails forced labour under dehumanizing conditions and without respect for labour rights. For women, it usually means domestic service often indistinguishable from slavery, or sexual exploitation; and, for children, it leads to employment as beggars, itinerant vendors or camel jockeys, or to sexual abuse. For all victims, bondage through trafficking spells a life of permanent abject insecurity.

Children are easy prey to practices ruinous to their security. Not only do such practices impair their liberty, they expose them to extreme harm, ranging from psychological stunting and physical injury, to death. The cruellest of such practices is the recruitment of children for war. Two different forms of children's involvement in military activities are found in the Arab countries. The first is that in Sudan and Somalia, where the recruitment of child soldiers is widely reported. The second is that in the region's other conflict zones—the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Iraq—where children, voluntarily or under coercion, play support roles, while suffering disproportionately under the armed conflicts in these areas.

### ***The plight of refugees and internally displaced persons***

The Arab countries are the site of both the world's longest-standing refugee question, that of the Palestinians, and its latest such problem, in Darfur. Propelled to flee by conditions of grave insecurity—at a minimum, loss of work and income, and at worst loss of life at the hands of occupying armies or rival militias—refugees continue

to live with the insecurities associated with their status. They are at the mercy of conditions in camps or political and economic events in their host countries, which could suddenly turn against them. The refugee experience may never end, for a person may die a refugee and pass this status on to a second generation.

While statistics on refugees are often difficult to verify, it is estimated that the Arab countries contain approximately 7.5 million refugees, in the form of those registered by the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), for the year 2008. This share represents 46.8 per cent of the 16 million global refugees registered under UNHCR and UNRWA for 2008. The largest number of these refugees, mostly Palestinians and Iraqis, is found in Jordan, Syria, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the region are more widespread geographically than refugees, whom they outnumber at an estimated total of about 9.8 million. Most are to be found in six Arab states—Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen—with Sudan alone accounting for up to 5.8 million. IDPs share many of the insecurities of refugees: loss of livelihoods, status, families, roots and, sometimes, life itself.

The Report concludes that what the state and society do not see, they cannot protect. Alleviating the insecurity of the region's most vulnerable groups starts with recognition of the fact and extent of the injustices they suffer, and of the political, social and developmental roots of their exclusion.

#### **4. Volatile growth, high unemployment and persisting poverty**

The fabled oil wealth of the Arab countries presents a misleading picture of their economic situation, one that masks the structural weaknesses of many Arab economies and the resulting insecurity of countries and citizens alike. The Report discusses economic security in terms of the dimensions originally identified by UNDP's 1994 Human Development Report on human security: real per capita

income levels and their growth patterns; employment options; poverty; and social protection. It underlines the erratic course of oil-led growth in the Arab countries, the fragility of the economic model associated with it, and changing trends in intraregional spillovers from oil producing countries. It also identifies policy gaps that have consequences for the economic security of millions of people: acute unemployment and persisting income poverty.

#### ***Economic vulnerability***

One clear sign of the vulnerability of Arab economic growth is its high volatility. Tied to capricious oil markets, the region's economic security has been—and remains—hostage to exogenous trends. Rocky ups-and-downs in the Arab countries, from high growth in the 1970s to economic stagnation through the 1980s and back to extraordinary growth in the early 2000s, directly reflect the turbulent cycles of the oil market. Steep drops in oil income during the 1980s had major impacts on oil producing countries (Saudi Arabia, for example, saw its GDP halved between 1981 and 1987 in current prices). A number of other countries experienced negative economic growth, of which the hardest hit was Kuwait, where GDP declined by around 18 per cent in 1981 and 1982. The shocks were transmitted to non-oil Arab economies whose receipts from remittances fell away. Jordan and Yemen both had negative growth in some years.

For nearly two and half decades after 1980, the region witnessed hardly any economic growth. World Bank data show that real GDP per capita in the Arab countries grew by a mere 6.4 per cent over the entire 24 year period from 1980 to 2004 (i.e. by less than 0.5 per cent annually).

Oil-led growth has created weak structural foundations in Arab economies. Many Arab countries are turning into increasingly import oriented and service-based economies. The types of services found in most Arab countries fall at the low end of the value adding chain, contribute little to local knowledge development and lock countries into inferior positions in global markets. This trend has grown at the expense of Arab agriculture, manufacturing and industrial production. The structural fragility of Arab economies as

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*Arab countries will need about 51 million new jobs by 2020*

a result of oil-led growth is reflected in a conspicuous decline in the share of non-oil productive sectors (agriculture and manufacturing) to GDP in all Arab countries except the high-income countries. Overall, the Arab countries were less industrialized in 2007 than in 1970, almost four decades previously.

In the region's most recent episode of prosperity, fluctuation in growth rates has abated somewhat across all country groups. While this development is comforting, it offers no grounds for complacency, since the current plunge in oil prices is bound to undo growth prospects and once again cause volatility.

Arab oil producing countries have opted to put much of their latest windfall into foreign investments, external reserves and oil stabilization funds, and to pay down debts. They have also embarked on major domestic investments in real estate, construction, oil refining, transport and communication and social services. This approach clearly differs from patterns of the past, which emphasized imports and consumption. Some Arab oil exporting countries have also been in a position to direct large streams of revenue towards their military and security forces.

However, their new patterns of investment also expose Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries more widely than in the past to global economic downturns, the latest of which poses severe challenges to their capital-intensive growth model. New external shocks for the Arab countries are associated with the current global recession. All of the major oil producers have substantial holdings in the US and elsewhere abroad, and are not able to decouple their economies from the spreading international crisis. The knock-on effects on the rest of the Arab countries of a protracted slow-down in investment financing and remittances from GCC countries would be considerable.

In fact, other Arab countries may have gained less from the short-lived third boom than they did from the first two. Although oil wealth still crosses borders, and while several rich countries switched a number of foreign investments to regional markets in the aftermath of 9-11, intraregional flows are becoming less copious and are having less impact than in the past. First, population increases in non-oil countries

offset much of these flows. Second, worker remittances from the oil states have been hit by the practice of 'job nationalization'; and third, non-oil countries are incurring higher energy costs through rising oil import bills and expensive fuel subsidies.

### ***The spectre of unemployment***

Unemployment is a major source of economic insecurity in most Arab countries. Data from the Arab Labour Organization (ALO) show that in 2005 the overall average unemployment rate for the Arab countries was about 14.4 per cent of the labour force compared to 6.3 per cent for the world at large. The weighted average growth rate in unemployment in the Arab countries (using the number of unemployed in 2005) was about 1.8 per cent annually. While national unemployment rates vary considerably, ranging from about 2 per cent in Qatar and Kuwait to about 22 per cent in Mauritania, youth unemployment is a serious challenge common to many Arab countries.

These trends in unemployment, coupled with population growth rates, indicate that Arab countries will need about 51 million new jobs by 2020. Most of those jobs will be essential to absorb young entrants to the labour force who will otherwise face an empty future. ALO estimates for the year 2005/6 show that youth unemployment rates in the region vary from a high of about 46 per cent in Algeria to a low of 6.3 per cent in the United Arab Emirates. With the exception of the latter, high income Arab countries suffer from double digit youth unemployment rates. Relatively high youth unemployment rates are also recorded for the middle and low income Arab countries. Overall, the unemployment rate among the young in the Arab countries is nearly double that in the world at large.

Unemployment also often wears a female face. Unemployment rates for Arab women are higher than those for Arab men, and among the highest in the world. This reflects more than the failure of Arab economies to generate sufficient jobs; it points as well to entrenched social biases against women.

Three primary factors account for the region's slumping employment trends: first, the contraction under structural reforms of the large public sector, which employs more than a third of the workforce; second,

the limited size, hobbled performance and weak job-generating capacity of the private sector, which has not taken up the slack; and third, the quality and type of education generally provided, which does not stress technical or vocational skills in demand.

Arab policies will have to focus on revamping education to close skills gaps, respond to labour market signals and stimulate knowledge-based capabilities matching opportunities in the global, as well as regional economy. National savings will need to be converted efficiently into sizeable investments for expanding health, housing and labour markets in order to cater for the needs of this young workforce and provide it with the facilities to increase productivity. A special effort is required to remove entrenched social barriers to women's entrance to high-productivity jobs. In many of these policy shifts, private-public partnerships offer the best option for mobilizing resources, transferring skills and creating new jobs.

### ***The backlog of poverty***

The Report considers economic insecurity associated with poverty from two perspectives: income poverty (defined in terms of people's enjoyment of goods and services, represented in real per capita consumption expenditure); and human poverty (defined by income as well as by other valued dimensions of life, such as education, health, and political freedom). Its analysis of income poverty, in turn, takes into account both the international poverty line at two-dollars-a-day and national poverty lines.

Arab countries are generally regarded as having a relatively low incidence of income poverty. In 2005, about 20.3 per cent of the Arab population was living below the two-dollars-a-day international poverty line. This estimate is based on seven Arab middle and low income groups, whose population represents about 63 per cent of the total population of the Arab countries not in conflict. Using the international line indicates that, in 2005, about 34.6 million Arabs were living in extreme poverty.

However, the two-dollars-a-day threshold may not be the most illuminating metric for looking at poverty in the Arab countries. Applying the upper national poverty line shows that the overall

poverty rate ranges from a low of 28.6 – 30 per cent in Lebanon and Syria to a high of 59.5 per cent in Yemen, with that for Egypt being about 41 per cent. Extrapolating from a sample of countries representing 65 per cent of the region's population, the Report projects that the overall headcount poverty ratio at the upper poverty line is 39.9% and that the estimated number of Arabs living in poverty could be as high as 65 million.

Extreme poverty is especially acute in the low-income Arab countries, where some 36.2 per cent of the population are living in extreme poverty. Expectably, income poverty, and the insecurity associated with it, is more widespread among rural populations.

Another lens for the analysis of impoverishment is human poverty, which refers to the deprivation of capabilities and opportunities, and can be measured through the Human Poverty Index (HPI), a composite index built on three components: a) longevity, b) knowledge and c) standard of living. Applying that index, low income Arab countries exhibit the highest incidence of human poverty in the region, with an average HPI of 35 per cent compared to a 12 per cent average in high income countries. This metric shows that insecurity undercuts health, education and standards of living, all of which puts in question the effectiveness of the state in providing, and ensuring access to the basic necessities of life. In particular, human poverty affects children's attendance at elementary school and their levels of continuation at post-elementary stages. Low school completion rates perpetuate the insecurity of the poor.

Arab countries scoring an HPI of 30 per cent or more include three low income countries and a lower middle income country: Sudan (with an HPI of 34.3 per cent), Yemen (36.6 per cent), Mauritania (35.9 per cent), and Morocco (31.8 per cent). In almost all of these countries, significant insecurity (i.e. a value of more than 30 per cent) is recorded for the education component, represented by the adult illiteracy rate. In addition, in Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen insecurity from lack of access to safe water and child nutrition is also significant.

Despite moderate levels of income inequality, in most Arab countries social

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*Inequality in wealth has worsened significantly more than the deterioration in income*

exclusion has increased over the past two decades. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that the inequality in wealth has worsened significantly more than the deterioration in income. In many Arab countries, for example, land and asset concentration is conspicuous and provokes a sense of exclusion among other groups, even if absolute poverty has not increased.

The patterns of economic insecurity illustrated in the Report are the result of several policy gaps. First, the increased structural fragility of Arab economies is an evident consequence of continuing to rely on volatile, oil-led growth. Economic growth itself has been, for the most part, erratic and low. Correspondingly, the performance of productive sectors (and manufacturing in particular) has been weak and uncompetitive. Second, this growth model has negatively impacted the labour market, and Arab countries now suffer the highest unemployment rates in the world. Third, overall poverty, defined as the share of the population under the national upper poverty line, is significantly higher than the underestimate yielded by using the international poverty line of two dollars a day. Hence, poverty in the Arab countries is a more conspicuous phenomenon than commonly assumed.

## **5. Hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity**

*Patterns of economic insecurity are the result of several policy gaps*

Despite its ample resources, and low incidence of hunger relative to other regions, the Arab countries are seeing hunger and malnutrition among their people rise. Although prevalence rates and absolute numbers in individual countries vary quite markedly, *the region, as a whole, is falling behind in achieving the hunger-reduction target of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*. In addition, the backlog from hunger and malnutrition in the past continues.

According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) figures, among developing country regions, the Arab countries have a low ratio of undernourished people to the total population. It is only surpassed in this regard by transition countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. *Yet it is one of two world regions—the other being sub-Saharan Africa—where the*

*number of undernourished has risen since the beginning of the 1990s—from about 19.8 million in 1990-1992 to 25.5 million in 2002-2004.*

Considerable disparities exist among individual Arab countries in their fight against hunger. The countries that have made the greatest progress towards lowering the prevalence of undernourishment between 1990 and 2004 are Djibouti, Kuwait and Mauritania. Sudan has also made strides, but still experiences serious hunger prevalence. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco and Yemen, on the other hand, recorded increases in both the absolute numbers and prevalence of undernourishment, while Syria and Algeria achieved very small reductions in prevalence but none in numbers.

The direct causes of hunger in the region are related to insufficient daily nutritional intake, which is attributable to limited supplies of different foods and the resulting imbalance in diets. Food availability, in turn, is connected with the forces of supply—which is contingent upon such factors as agricultural production, access to global markets, the growth of food industries, and the size of foreign aid—and demand, which is connected, in particular, to per capita income levels. In terms of local food production, some Arab countries have the lowest cereal yields in the world and, moreover, between 1990 and 2005, production in 7 countries declined. The Report illustrates that Arab countries are altogether more self-sufficient in food commodities that are favoured by the rich (meats, fish and vegetables) than in those likely to be consumed by the poor (cereals, fats and sugar).

In a seeming paradox, while malnutrition is on the rise in both absolute and relative terms in some Arab countries, obesity is also an increasing health risk in the region. In fact, the two are linked by their common origins in poor diet. Obesity and overweight are more common among women than men in Arab countries, contrary to the situation in the US, for example, where these problems are more prevalent among men. In the region, obesity is generally attributed to over-consumption of high-fat foods combined with little physical activity, which may partly explain its prevalence among Arab women, who are often prevented by

custom from pursuing sports and other physical exercise. Obesity contributes to such non-contagious chronic illnesses as diabetes, high blood pressure, coronary arterial diseases, degenerative joint diseases, psychological illnesses, and some types of cancer. Such ailments are steadily increasing in Arab countries.

The main indirect causes of hunger in the region are poverty, foreign occupation and domestic conflict and economic policies for dealing with globalization. The Report shows that, while poverty and malnutrition often co-exist in Arab countries, poverty is not necessarily associated with undernourishment when the consumption pattern of the poor tends towards inexpensive but nutrient-rich foods, and when such foods are readily accessible under targeted government programmes. Conversely, when conditions of conflict disrupt food supplies, as in Iraq, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Somalia and Sudan, a high degree of malnutrition and food insecurity follows.

Food accessibility is strongly influenced by government economic policies and openness to world markets. Subsidising food commodities to make them more affordable to the public is one such policy; lifting subsidies is another. Most Arab governments have adopted food supply policies as part of a social contract based on state provision of essential needs in exchange for the people's loyalty. But since the 1980s, economic and market deregulation policies adopted by governments have rendered domestic food prices vulnerable to fluctuations in international prices.

Arab countries as much as any others, have recently suffered from spiralling food prices traceable to various causes. Among these are the climate changes that have affected production in grain exporting countries, the extensive depletion of grain stocks, and the rising consumption of meat and dairy products in emerging economies, especially in China. Another major cause is the growing demand in the US and Europe for biofuels derived from grain, in response to the rising costs of oil and transportation. The Report contrasts how Arab economic policies have fared in coping with these pressures with the relative successes of countries such as Brazil and Mexico, which have simultaneously

followed liberal economic policies and ensured a minimum level of food for the poor.

The Report discusses the feasibility of achieving food sovereignty and food security in Arab countries. It concludes that food security needs to be pursued, not in terms of absolute sovereignty in food production, a goal impractical in light of regional water scarcities, but rather in terms of sufficiency for all members of society in essential commodities. In this context, the region's low self sufficiency rate in staple foods is one of its most serious development gaps.

## 6. Health security challenges

Health is both a vital goal of human security that is influenced by non-health factors, and an instrumental capability that significantly impacts other aspects of human security. In the last 40 years, Arab countries have made striking progress in forestalling death and extending life, as evidenced by falling infant mortality rates and rising life expectancy. Yet health is by no means assured for all citizens of Arab countries, with women suffering the most from neglect and gender biased traditions. Health systems are often shackled by bureaucratic inefficiency, poor professional capabilities and underfunding; and health risks from new infectious diseases are on the rise.

### General status

Despite improvements in health across the region,

- The health status of Arabs, in general, is lower than that enjoyed by citizens of industrialized countries.
- While life expectancy increased and child mortality declined between 2000 and 2005, other health indicators stagnated.
- Disparities are apparent between countries and within countries
- Health data are insufficient, incomplete and often unreliable, making it difficult to frame effective health policies or reach those in need
- Harmful health practices, deeply rooted in culture, continue to lower health levels, especially among women

*The region's low self sufficiency rate in staple foods is one of its most serious development gaps*

*Health is by no means assured for all citizens of Arab countries*

*HIV/AIDS represents a stubborn, proximate and misunderstood danger*

### **Limits of health systems**

Health care systems in the region are let down by:

- A narrow biomedical model based on hospital and curative care, and focused on the treatment of diseases
- The absence of inter-sectoral linkages that would help to bring vital indirect health determinants into the equation. Arab health systems do not recognize the role of such factors as the quality and coverage of education, women's empowerment, and social and economic justice. Neither do they evince the mindset required to address key factors such as gender, social class, identity and ethnicity, all of which have obvious effects on health and human security
- Disparities in health care provision and financing
- Profitable high technology hospitals that provide expensive state-of-the-art treatment for only a small minority of wealthy citizens
- Over-stretched public health services, frequently low in quality

### **Health financing**

Health system financing is challenged by:

- The rising costs of health care
- Inadequate government expenditure on health in low and middle income countries
- Inefficient systems in the high income countries where ample funding does not translate into health gains
- Increasing out-of pocket expenditures on health that burden individuals and families
- A general lack of social health insurance and employer-provided benefits

### **Emerging health threats**

HIV/AIDS represents a stubborn, proximate and misunderstood danger in the region. In 2007, more than 31,600 adults and children died from AIDS in the Arab countries (80 per cent of which are in Sudan). Between 2001 and 2007, there were 90,500 estimated new cases of HIV infections in the Arab countries, 50,000 of which in Sudan alone.

According to WHO and UNAIDS estimates, the number of those living with HIV in Arab countries was 435,000 in 2007, 73.5 per cent of which were in

Sudan. A significant observation about Sudan concerns the relatively high percentage of HIV-positive women. Compared to a world average of 48 per cent in 2007, 53 per cent of adults living with HIV in Sudan were women. This percentage stood at 30.4 in the other Arab countries, for the same year, which is comparable to the situation in Western Europe. It is estimated that about 80 per cent of female infections in the region occur within the bonds of marriage where the subservient position and weak negotiating capacity of many women leave them exposed to their husbands' high risk behaviours.

The destructive power of the disease lies not solely in the power of the virus which causes it, but also in the social stigma that comes with it. Those living with the virus are often deprived of their livelihoods and, with their families, denied access to social opportunities in a climate of shame.

While malaria has been almost eliminated in the majority of Arab countries, it remains highly endemic in the Arab LDCs where on average 3,313 cases per 100,000 were reported in 2005. Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen accounted for 98 per cent of notified cases in the region; Sudan alone bore about 76 per cent of the regional burden. Achievement of the MDG target of halting and beginning to reverse malaria in the sub-region, and in the region as a whole, is therefore heavily dependent on progress in Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

## **7. Occupation and military intervention**

Many of the threats to human security discussed in the Report coalesce in situations of occupation, conflict and military intervention. In Iraq, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Somalia, people's basic rights to self-determination and peace have been forcibly annulled. They face threats to their lives, freedom, livelihoods, education, nutrition, health and physical environment from outside forces whose presence wreaks institutional, structural and material violence on them every day.

The Report assesses in detail the damage to human security that ensues from such travesties of human rights, focusing on the impacts of the US intervention in Iraq, Israel's continuing hold on Occupied

*Many of the threats to human security coalesce in situations of occupation, conflict and military intervention*

Palestinian Territory, including its recent campaign against Gaza, and on the special circumstances of the beleaguered people of Somalia.

Military intervention and occupation not only contravene international law and abrogate the rights of peoples in the affected countries. They spark both resistance and a cycle of violence and counter-violence that engulfs occupied and occupier alike. Occupation and military intervention undercut human security in other Arab and neighbouring countries in several ways. First, they displace peoples across borders, creating humanitarian challenges for affected states and seeding tensions in them. Second, as a *cause célèbre* of extremist groups that resort to violence, they strengthen the militant appeal of those who perpetuate the cycle of destruction in the region and whose acts provoke a backlash against citizens' rights and freedoms. Finally, as a threat to sovereignty, occupation and military intervention allow Arab governments to cite national security as a pretext for halting or postponing democratization and for prolonging oppressive rule. Occupation and military intervention are thus responsible for creating conditions of systemic insecurity in the region.

The Report observes that the fact that occupation and intervention have plagued the region so long indicates its vulnerability to the policies of external parties. Prospects for settling major conflicts in the affected countries are very largely governed by the will of non-Arab parties. This throws into strong relief the responsibility of the UN as the sole impartial guarantor of human and national security in occupied countries, a role however which the world body has been kept from playing effectively by the powers that have marginalized it.

## Seven building blocks of Arab human security

The Report's analysis illustrates that the concept of human security provides a framework for re-centring the Arab social contract on those vital yet neglected priorities that most affect the wellbeing of citizens of Arab countries. While the state of human security is not uniform throughout the Arab countries, no country can

claim to be free from fear or free from want, and many are affected by spillovers from insecurity in neighbouring countries. The Report's individual chapters outline various policy orientations that the state, civil society, individual citizens and international actors could adopt within their respective spheres of action, suggesting specific steps that can be taken to reduce threats across all dimensions of the concept. In doing so, the Report underlines the central importance of:

1. The preservation and enhancement of the land, water, air and ecology that sustain the Arab peoples' very existence under rising national, regional and global environmental, population and demographic pressures;
2. The guarantees of essential rights, freedoms and opportunities without discrimination, that only a well governed, accountable and responsive state ruled by just laws can provide; and the diffusion of identity conflicts rooted in competition for power and wealth that becomes possible when such a state wins the trust of all citizens;
3. The recognition by the state and society of the abuse and injustice that vulnerable women, children and refugees across the region encounter each day, and the resolve to change their legal, economic, social and personal conditions for the better;
4. The will to address the weak structural underpinnings of the Arab oil economy, reduce income poverty and move towards knowledge-based, equitable and diversified economies that will create the jobs and protect the livelihoods on which coming generations will depend in the post-oil era;
5. Ending persisting hunger and malnutrition in all sub-regions, but especially the poorest, which continue to erode human capabilities, cut short millions of lives and set back human development. The economics of food security in the global economy may call for a new realism in defining food security less in terms of absolute food sovereignty and more in terms of sufficiency

*Occupation and military intervention spark a cycle of violence and counter-violence that engulfs occupied and occupier alike*

*The concept of human security provides a framework for re-centring the Arab social contract on vital yet neglected priorities*

*Occupation  
and military  
intervention  
undermine the  
fragile progress  
of political reform  
in the region*

for all members of society in essential commodities.

6. The promotion of health for all as a human right, a prerequisite for human security and an instrumental enabler across the gamut of human functioning. The significant progress that Arab countries have made in this field is being undercut by policy and institutional failures that produce disparities in access, affordability and quality, and by the growing health threats from serious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.
7. Policy recognition abroad that longstanding human rights violations against

the Arab peoples and the continuing violation of Arab sovereignty and lives by regional and global powers through occupation and military intervention are self-defeating and unacceptable to the international and regional public. Such violations have inflicted enormous damage through the disproportionate use of force and a total disregard for civilian lives, as highlighted in Israel's recent campaign on Gaza. These violations have caused untold human suffering and chaos, stained the image of the powers implicated in them and undermined the fragile progress of political reform in the region by bolstering extremist forces and driving moderate voices out of the public arena.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> UNDP 1994.

<sup>2</sup> UNDP 2002.

<sup>3</sup> UNDP/AHDR calculations based on FAO's AQUASTAT database.

<sup>4</sup> UNDP 2007.

