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**Video Message to The Arab Forum for Sustainable
Development 2021: Accelerating Progress on the
2030 Agenda post-COVID**

**Virtual Event, 29-31 March 2021
Opening: 29 March at 10 am Beirut time/3 am
NYT**

Excellencies,

It is an honor to address the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development.

I thank his Excellency Mr. Al-Ibrahim, for chairing the Forum.

And I commend Executive Secretary Rola Dashti for ESCWA's support to its organization.

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the lives of people, upended economies, threatened societies and dealt a major setback to our efforts to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

In the Arab Region, it has combined with long-standing conflict and instability and the impacts of climate change to create a perfect storm in countries trajectory towards sustainable development.

Close to 80,000 people have died across the region from the COVID-19 virus.

Food insecurity has increased dramatically, affecting 52 million people.

Women and girls are at an increased risk of violence – a shadow pandemic in its own right.

And COVID-19 vaccines have not yet been secured on the scale required to end the epidemic in this region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite the scale of these challenges, we must not lose sight of our ultimate goal – the 2030 Agenda – and of the enormous potential across the region.

We have seen many governments in the region take decisive action in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

These efforts have saved lives and prevented many from falling into poverty.

We can turn this into a watershed moment to recover better, together.

In the Arab region, this means restructuring economies to be more sustainable and inclusive.

It means capitalizing on its young population and guarantee their right to education and employment.

It means advancing gender equality and women's participation in all aspects of society.

It requires ensuring that social protection systems are inclusive of the region's most vulnerable and minimize the burden on refugees and IDPs.

And it means doing all we can to expand the fiscal space and leverage the financing required to leave no one behind in implementing the SDGs.

To succeed, we must rally around peaceful solutions to end conflict *where they exist*; enhance governance and civic space, *everywhere*; always with the 2030 agenda as our North Star.

The United Nations is working to support you on every step of this journey.

The Secretary-General continues to be a strong advocate for COVID-19 vaccines to be a global public good, available to everyone, everywhere.

He is lending his voice and push for ambition on the financing front.

Our Resident Coordinators and country teams are stepping up to provide the support countries need.

Our reconfigured UN development system at the regional level is supporting country teams to better address cross-border challenges.

At all levels, we continue to advocate for a recovery that is anchored in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Together, we can leverage the opportunities that will be offered in landmark summits and conferences in 2021 --- on food systems, energy, biodiversity, climate and sustainable transport and the September's SDG moment offer.

Excellencies,

For those already at risk of being left behind in the Arab Region - COVID-19 is one more challenge among many.

It is our responsibility as a community of nations - *a human family* - to be bold and determined in our efforts to advance a future of peace, prosperity and opportunities for all.

That is the promise of the 2030 Agenda.

Ambition, urgency, scale – we count on the leadership of members of this regional Forum, and on our continued partnership in the region, to help get us there.

Thank you, and I wish you a productive forum.