

Peace and Security and the New Development Agenda Arab NGO Network for Development

*“Let us use sustainable development and human rights
to provide the foundations for lasting peace”
Ban Ki Moon¹*

Abstract: Wars and conflicts have long been in the history of the Arab region. The region witnesses the longest foreign occupation in the history and the deprivation of the people from their right to self-determination and consequently to development², internal conflicts³ and cross border conflicts and tensions⁴.

There are many reasons for these conflicts including the external factors such as geopolitical and strategic situation of the Mediterranean basin, struggle on natural resources (water, oil and gas), the continuous neocolonial conducive policies to divide the region, but also the internal factors such as, the social and economic conditions, the lack of democracy, justice and freedom and last but not least the cultural diversity-although also an enriching factor for the region for prosperity and creativity-.However, external and internal factors are interrelated particularly with the great impact of globalization and the global system. This mainly applies on the economic, social and cultural national policies.

There is an apparent interlink between these conflicts and the development level in the region as well. On the one hand poverty, exclusion weak level of education, unemployment especially among young people are root causes for social instability and thus direct threat to security. On the other hand, conflicts cause massive destructions, increase economic and Human losses and harms the social and cultural fabric within and across societies.

Yet, in the Arab region “one year of conflict is estimated to cost 3.5 percent of per capita gross domestic product (GDP) and between 5 and 10 years setback in social development, including life expectancy, immunization rate, and human development”⁵. In most of the Arab countries, continuous national insecurity and prioritization of defense measures result in lack of national development agendas. Due to high militarization there is an apparent lack of allocation of resources for development. As shown by the Trends in Military Expenditure 2013 report⁶, military expenditure in the region increased by 4 per cent in real terms in 2013 and 56 per cent between 2004 and 2013, to reach an estimated \$150 billion. Moreover, conflicts and wars of the region bring together severe socio-economic costs that further deepen violations and inequalities.

While significant, mere absence of conflict is not enough for the region. A broader approach to security and justice is a must and should be adopted by the new development agenda. Accordingly, “security” should be defined integrating as well the rights and safety of individuals,

¹ <http://papersmart.unmeetings.org/media2/2927275/sg.pdf>

² Foreign occupation by Israel: Palestine and other Arab countries including Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt

³ Internal conflicts: Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Sudan and Somalia

⁴ Cross Borders conflicts: Algeria, Morocco, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Iran, Bahrain, Yemen and Gulf Countries (UAE and Kuwait)

⁵ Quoted as Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2010. Food Security and Conflict in the ESCWA Region New York: United Nations at <http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/ifpridp01210.pdf>

⁶ <http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1404.pdf>

thus be broad to aim human security. The “justice” should ensure social justice and address inequalities.

Within the current debate on the new development agenda and the 17 listed sustainable development goals (SDGs) the inclusion of peace and security, with a dedicated goal to achieving peaceful and inclusive societies, rule of law, effective and capable institutions, under Goal 16 is positive, yet is not enough. Achieving peaceful societies should be a well-defined goal with specific indicators to measure progress and reflecting the commitment to achieve the goal. SDGs, if they serve to address inequalities can contribute to human security and social justice but should be enhanced with the adoption of a new development agenda that foster this.

This new development agenda must integrate transformative changes, incorporating peace and human security and understanding the root causes of the conflicts and addressing them properly. This would require addressing inequalities; social, economic, cultural and political, as a core challenge and adopting a new development framework that aims at ending disparities at multiple levels: geographic, political, gender, social, economic, cultural and environmental. Last but not least, the post-2015 development agenda should address foreign occupation as a main obstacle to development. A comprehensive development agenda must be based on the right to self-determination and respect for human rights.