



UN HABITAT

THE STATE OF ARAB CITIES 2012

CHALLENGES OF URBAN TRANSITION

ARAB STATES SHOULD ADDRESS URBAN CHALLENGES TOGETHER

Kuwait, 6 May 2012: Ministers from the Arab States come together at the launch, in Kuwait City, of UN-Habitat's new report, *The State of Arab Cities 2012: Challenges of Urban Transition* to jointly address the urban challenges of the Arab World.

The publication, the first ever to comprehensively analyse the conditions and trends in Arab cities, offers a timely account of the progress and problems in the rapidly urbanizing Arab region. The report presents a collective picture of prevailing housing conditions and urban trends in each of four Arab sub-regions - Maghreb, Mashreq, Gulf States and the countries of the Southern Tier (Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen) - and provides a discussion on the similarities, differences and linkages between these countries in the Arab context.

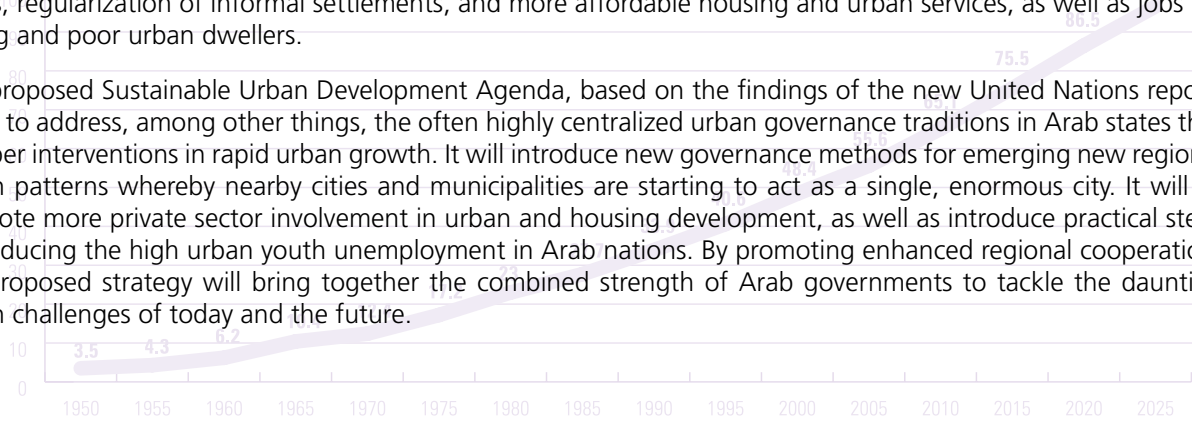
The report recognises that the Arab states have made significant progress. Urban slums are decreasing in large parts of the Arab World as many urban innovations are introduced with astounding speed. The report particularly highlights the importance of young people that make up the majority of the Arab population today.

"According to UN-Habitat's report, many Arab countries have improved urban management, access to housing, infrastructure and mobility and have recorded social progress" says Dr Joan Clos, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Habitat. "Nevertheless, all Arab nations, and the poorest Arab states in particular, still need deep political, socio-economic and urban management reforms, not only because Arab States' urban populations are projected to double from 200 million today to about 438 million by 2050 but also because Arab societies continue to suffer under conflict, extreme poverty and under-development."

The new report highlights the need for greater cooperation among Arab nations to improve their cities and prepare for the huge urban growth over the years to come. Therefore, UN-Habitat, in cooperation with Arab countries and cities, is now developing a regional strategy to join all Arab countries in the promotion of sustainable urban development.

Arab states have recently seen social unrest and demands for more representative governance, social equity and improved economic conditions. From the perspective of sustainable urbanization, the most relevant demands are those for affordable housing, better quality of life, efficient urban governance and transparency in urban decision making. The response to these demands necessitates better urban governance, eradication of urban slums, regularization of informal settlements, and more affordable housing and urban services, as well as jobs for young and poor urban dwellers.

The proposed Sustainable Urban Development Agenda, based on the findings of the new United Nations report, seeks to address, among other things, the often highly centralized urban governance traditions in Arab states that hamper interventions in rapid urban growth. It will introduce new governance methods for emerging new regional urban patterns whereby nearby cities and municipalities are starting to act as a single, enormous city. It will so promote more private sector involvement in urban and housing development, as well as introduce practical steps for reducing the high urban youth unemployment in Arab nations. By promoting enhanced regional cooperation, the proposed strategy will bring together the combined strength of Arab governments to tackle the daunting urban challenges of today and the future.



Source: UN-DESA, 2009

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