BEIRUT WORKSHOP ON THE ECONOMIC REFORM AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE BMENA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL CRISIS

Background

Since 2004 the Forum for the Future represents a genuine effort to bring together all those parties, governments and civil society, involved in the reform process in the Middle East and North Africa region enhancing an inclusive and comprehensive environment for dialogue on issues relating to political reform, democracy and human rights.

Over the years the mechanisms and methods developed by the Forum for the Future’s Presidencies aimed at reinforcing the development of a peer-to-peer interaction between government representatives and democracy advocates aimed at strengthening the democratic discourse in the MENA region.

In 2009 the co-chairs of the Forum for the Future – the Governments of Italy and Morocco - in coordination with the Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD) partnership and in cooperation with civil society from the region elaborated a set of preparatory events leading to the 2009 Ministerial Meeting of the Forum with the aim to develop a more interactive and inclusive process.

The three sub-regional workshops aim at widening the space for discussion and reflection on the selected themes for this year’s Forum in order to produce joint government-civil society recommendations and proposals to feed the debate during the Ministerial Meeting. The Italian and Moroccan governments identified three themes for this year’s Forum, notably: A) Political Reforms; B) Economic Reforms; C) Human Development.

The Beirut Workshop

In the framework of the 2009 Forum for the Future, the Organization for Civil Activities (OPAC) and No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ), in partnership with the governments of Morocco and Italy, are convening a Workshop on the economic reform and the private sector in the BMENA Region in the context of the international financial crisis, to be held in Beirut, Lebanon, on 26-27 September 2009.

In keeping with the purposes of the Forum for the Future, this gathering aims at promoting productive dialogue between civil society and governments of the broader
Middle East and North Africa (bMENA), G8 and other democratic partners, on issues relating to the current financial and economic crisis and how this reflects on political development, democracy and human rights. The Beirut Workshop hopes to provide a setting for concrete exchanges between high level governmental and non-governmental actors from the region so as to encourage a habit of dialogue within which successful experiences can be discussed and eventually built upon.

The two-day discussion will focus on the challenges which the region have to face in the current systemic economic and financial crisis and the role of governments, civil society and the private sector in addressing them. The workshop aims at discussing those issues related to the role of the corporate social responsibility, transparency and private sector in addressing social justice, unemployment and poverty as well as at discussing strategies which could enable broader development in the region, in light of the outcomes of the UN conference on the world economic and financial crisis. The discussion will aims at elaborating and proposing new tools and instruments that can help in renewing the linkages between political, economic and social rights based reform strategies and reinforcing a democratic and open environment for the benefit of the whole society.

The Workshop aspires to provide the opportunity for BMENA, G8 and other democratic governments and civil society to reach mutual understanding about each other’s concerns through exchange and discussion. In this respect, the Beirut Workshop is an important component of the DAD partnership and builds upon the principles of partnership and cooperation between governments and civil society contained in the “Partnership document”, which has been acknowledged by the fifth Forum of the Future.

The results of the Workshop will be brought to the Ministerial Meeting of the Forum for the Future 2009, to provide a set of constructive proposals and recommendations that could fruitfully feed the discussion between government and civil society representatives.

In order to provide the best possible atmosphere in which experiences, problems and possible approaches to these issues of common interest can be discussed constructively and productively, three categories of participants will be invited to the Beirut Workshop on the impact of the international financial crisis on the BMENA Region:

- Government Delegations from the countries of the BMENA Region, G8 and other democratic partners, typically composed of a Senior Official-level Head of Delegation and 2 other members;
- Civil Society Delegations from the BMENA Region, G8 and other democratic partners, comprised of key democracy activists identified with the aim to reflect the variety of sub-regional realities of the Region and have a balanced representation of women, men and youth;
- Regional and International Institutions, who can contribute to the discussions by sharing their experiences and approaches relating to development.