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 ARAB FUND FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
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ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2004

Towards Freedom in the Arab World

The Arab world finds itself at a historical crossroads. Caught between oppression at home and violation from abroad, Arabs are increasingly excluded from determining their own future.

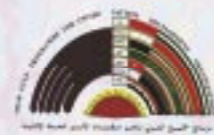
Freedom in its comprehensive sense, incorporates not only civil and political freedoms (in other words, liberation from oppression), but also the liberation from all factors that are inconsistent with human dignity. To be sustained and guaranteed, freedom requires a system of good governance that rests upon effective popular representation and is accountable to the people, and that upholds the rule of law and ensures that an independent judiciary applies the law impartially.

The report describes free societies, in their normative dimension, as fundamental contrasts with present-day Arab countries. The enormous gap that separates today's reality and what many in the region hope for, is a source of widespread frustration and despair among Arabs about their countries' prospects for a peaceful transition to societies enjoying freedom and good governance. Moreover, persisting tendencies in Arab social structures could well lead to spiralling social, economic, and political crises. Each further stage of crisis would impose itself as a new reality, producing injustices eventually beyond control.

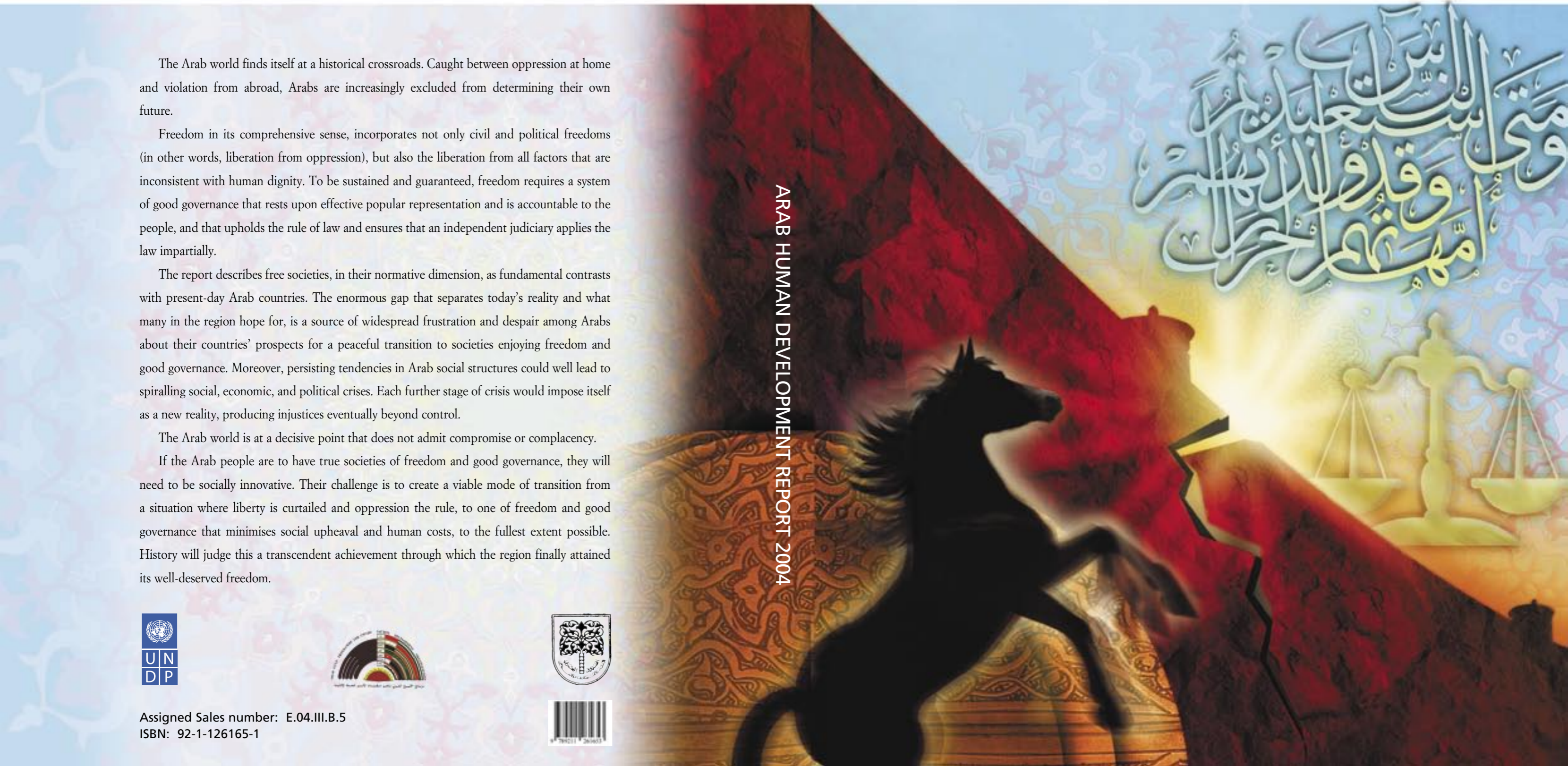
The Arab world is at a decisive point that does not admit compromise or complacency.

If the Arab people are to have true societies of freedom and good governance, they will need to be socially innovative. Their challenge is to create a viable mode of transition from a situation where liberty is curtailed and oppression the rule, to one of freedom and good governance that minimises social upheaval and human costs, to the fullest extent possible. History will judge this a transcendent achievement through which the region finally attained its well-deserved freedom.

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THE ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2004

Towards Freedom in the Arab World



REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ARAB STATES

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This work was originally published in Arabic. In any cases of discrepancies, the original language shall govern.

Foreword by the Administrator, UNDP

The first two Arab Human Development Reports published by the United Nations Development Programme and written by an independent group of Arab scholars, policymakers and practitioners have, rightly, become landmarks in the broader debate and discussion over the future of the region. The key diagnosis of the first report that the Arab world is suffering three fundamental deficits – in political rights, in women’s rights and in knowledge – that have, together, held back human development across the region has now become widely accepted. The second report then spelled out in compelling detail the first of these deficits, analyzing where Arab knowledge production and dissemination systems were falling short and articulating why Arab states need to turn outwards and engage with the outside world to make learning and research key drivers of social and economic innovation in the future.

Those two reports succeeded more spectacularly than we could have imagined in the scale of their impact. They were the talk of coffee shops and cabinets, boardrooms and world TV talk shows. More broadly, they were a media and publishing phenomenon, stimulating formal debate from the G8 summit at Sea Island, Georgia, to civil society meetings in Sana’a and Alexandria among many other gatherings. Above all, in a region where disagreement, sometimes violent, has been too often the norm of political discourse, longtime opponents found a lot to agree about in them. And that has been the real power of the Reports: starting to build a consensus around reform.

This report, the third in the series, seeks to focus on the thorny issues of freedom, good governance and political reform. Drawing on a mixture of survey data and other research it seeks to map out the challenges and constraints to moving forward on a path of demo-

cratic progress. In two key ways, however, the report has been more difficult to prepare than its predecessors. First has been the limitation of the data. One of the central sources of information was a specially designed survey to map out public attitudes to key aspects of reform. Regrettably several countries declined permission for the survey to be carried out, resulting in only a partial snapshot. Though most of the analysis in the report is not dependent on the survey this shortcoming inevitably hampered analysis of public attitudes and perceptions in the region.

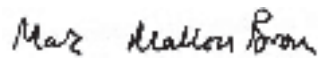
A second problem has been the exceptionally rapid pace of events in the region itself. This is not in itself new – the first two reports were prepared in the shadow of continued violence in the occupied Palestinian Territory and then the invasion of Iraq, both of which have had broad repercussions throughout the Arab world. However, given the central conviction of the authors across all the reports that lasting and sustainable reform in the Arab world needs to come from within, the intensification of both conflicts over the past year and the fierce reactions they have provoked across the region have led to a deep concern on the part of the authors that the broad agenda of reform, and enhanced human development, was being retarded rather than accelerated.

At the same time, as a result of the high visibility of the reports, the very process of writing this AHDR has been a source of significant public, and, unfortunately, highly politicized and often inaccurate speculation. While reflecting the tremendous difficulty of writing a neutral, fact-based report in such an environment, this has inevitably created some tensions for UNDP given its fundamental character as a development rather than political institution. As a result, while the process has clearly demonstrated the need for a neutral, international platform of the kind UNDP

is able to provide, it has also shown the limitations of such an approach and the need for a longer-term formula that would, in time, allow for wider ownership and institutionalization of the Reports as a representative voice of Arab civil society - a report written in the region and owned by the region.

In this context, as we have made clear since launching this initiative and other discussions of this kind, the AHDRs are, deliberately, not formal UN or UNDP documents and do not reflect the official views of either organization. Rather, they have been intended to stimulate and inform a dynamic, new public discourse across the Arab world and beyond. In the case

of this year's report, however, I feel it necessary to state that some of the views expressed by the authors are not shared by UNDP or the UN. Nevertheless, the very strength of this report and the success of its predecessors has depended on their being seen as an authentic reflection of views and analysis of many of the most thoughtful, reform-minded intellectual figures in the Arab region. In that sense, this report clearly reflects a very real anger and concern felt across the region that needs to be urgently addressed if we are to reach our shared goal of helping to build a peaceful, democratic region able to meet the needs and aspirations of its citizens.



Mark Malloch Brown.
Administrator, UNDP

Foreword by the Regional Director, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States

The Arab Human Development Reports continue to examine the factors that prevent an Arab renaissance from taking off, and to search for those that could empower it to advance and progress. In this third installment in the series, the Report focuses on the issue of freedom in the Arab world and its relationship to good governance and human development.

The road to AHDR 3 has been long, eventful and lined with several obstacles. No subject excites stronger feelings in the region than that of freedom, whether among those denied it or among those who violate and confiscate it. No public discourse on any issue is more watchfully invigilated by the authorities, or more tightly encircled by penalties that push some to exercise self-censorship, in speech and thought, wherever the discussion relates to freedom. The difficulties are magnified when the definition of freedom is expanded, as in the case of this Report, to include the freedom of society and nations where liberty is confronted by powers intolerant of dissent, diversity and independent thinking.

Those in our region who demand freedom, and who struggle for it, may be in the majority; however, those who stifle it are stronger, more powerful and have better means. They not only possess the means to oppress, marginalize and impoverish, but they also control key forums and are able to recruit those adept at twisting various texts to perpetuate their interests and at bending intellectual norms and theories in order to prohibit freedom and permit its confiscation.

There were those who genuinely feared that the Report might be used to serve the interests of powers willing to transform causes honourable in their intent, design and aims into goods in political bargains. The Report team, however, felt that the best way forward was not to turn a blind eye to reality, but to

show that Arabs can recognize and overcome their own weaknesses. Self-reform originating in balanced self-criticism is the only viable path towards a robust and independent region.

Despite such difficulties, or perhaps because of them, the authors remained convinced that their vision of this Report, in all essentials, was correct. They studied the scene of freedom in different theatres in the Arab world, and found them deficient in some areas and seriously deficient in others, such as political and civil liberties. Generalized violations, moreover, become harsher when they concern those religious or ethnic groups that are excluded from citizenship or rights. While some foreign factors including occupation which usurps the roots of freedom, helped to establish a climate of oppression in some Arab countries, there are legal, economic and political structures within Arab societies that continue to prevent Arabs from enjoying rights and freedoms that were enshrined in their values, culture and religion well before the promulgation of the International Declaration of Human Rights. Sadly, what Arab constitutions grant, Arab laws frequently curtail. And what laws render legal, actual practice often violates. People are thus besieged in their own country, their takeoff is held back, their development is blocked, and their nation is weakened.

There are, however, enlightened contemporary movements working for a transformation to societies where human rights reign supreme, freedoms flourish and the rule of law strikes deep roots. In the past year the Arab world witnessed unprecedented initiatives aimed at changing the status quo. Some, such as the resolutions of the Arab Summit, were formal while many others came from civil and political society. The report also notes a number of positive developments particularly in

the field of education and the empowerment of women.

As part of its now-customary method, the Report does not stop at diagnosing obstacles to rights and freedoms. It outlines a broad-based strategic vision of how to rationalize efforts to strengthen freedom in the Arab world and to reinforce the pillars of good governance.

This vision focuses on widening the political space in order to move societies towards the peaceful alternation of power and on creating a strong legal and institutional structure in support of freedom. The first step in this direction is to launch the key freedoms of opinion, expression and organization, to put an end to all forms of discrimination against social groups, to abolish emergency rules and to ensure the independence and fairness of the justice system.

No matter how hard I try, I will not be able to do justice to the collective effort that this Report represents. But like any human endeavour, however true and worthwhile, this effort remains open to refinement and correction. The authors do not claim to have arrived at any form of final truth about the state of freedom and governance in the region. Their goal has been to promote, within the limitations of this sensitive arena, as thorough and objective a discussion on the challenges facing Arab societies and the means to overcome them.

It is especially important to make the issue of freedom the subject of a constructive debate in our societies. Important and urgent, for freedom is not only the most instrumental of enabling human rights anywhere in the world, but in our region, it is also, increasingly, the most fragile.

Lastly, I hope that readers will excuse us if, because of the delay in issuing this Report, they find that some events reported in Part I have been outpaced by fast-moving developments in the region. Hopefully, the next report in the series, on the empowerment of Arab women, will be an opportunity to make amends.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to those Arab states that allowed the Report team to carry out our field survey on freedom, which raised the standard of this aspect of our research: I salute here Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine.

I am especially grateful to all who participated in the preparation, review, translation and editing of AHDR3. I would like also to express my sincere thanks to a number of Arab intellectuals, whose joint concern for Arab advancement prompted them to make enriching contributions to the Report. My gratitude also goes to the Core Team for its innovative efforts and to its leader, Dr. Nader Fergany for his distinctive work and persistent follow-up through all its stages. I owe a sincere vote of thanks to the Advisory Board for its expert direction and informed advice, which - as usual - added depth and originality to the Report.

I am particularly grateful to Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for his courageous decision to allow a publication attended by obvious political risks to appear bearing the emblem of the organization. In upholding the authors' right to an uncensored international platform while reserving his right to disagree with them on some matters, he has provided an immaculate example of what free expression truly means. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Regional Bureau for Arab States, and in particular Mr. Zahir Jamal, Chief of the Regional Programme Division, for their dedication, hard work, and untiring support to the production of the Report series. Finally, I would like to express my great appreciation of our enduring partnership with the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development. It is also a great pleasure to welcome to the series our new regional partner, AGFUND, and to extend my warm appreciation to its President, His Royal Highness, Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz, for his vision in electing to co-sponsor these efforts on behalf of the Arab peoples.



Rima Khalaf Hunaidi

Assistant Secretary General and Assistant Administrator, Regional Director,
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Foreword by the Director General and Chairman The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development

The first Arab Human Development Report diagnosed the crisis facing human development in the Arab world and highlighted key deficits in the fields of knowledge acquisition, freedom and women's empowerment. The Second Report elaborated in details the issues of knowledge and the establishment of a strategic vision to develop it. Both reports were highly appreciated at the Arab and international levels, for their contribution to the revival of a deep and constructive dialogue with a vision to develop and advance our Arab society.

The Report at hand is the third in this series of Human Development Reports. It addresses the issue of freedom from several perspectives, its dimensions, intellectual foundations, legal and political structures, its regional and international and the future vision.

Effective participation and positive action at all economic and social spheres is known to increase people's capabilities and potentials. Exercising freedom within institutional frameworks and good governance is the most catalytic factor for achieving these capabilities and potentials. Therefore, the goal of this report, in our opinion, is to review elements of Governance, as one of the pillars of reform that will result in achieving progress in every respect.

The basis and programs of reforming the institutional structure and good governance must come from within and in harmony with the history and heritage of each country. These reforms must affect all social structures starting from the individual, the family to the social groups that constitute the whole national society. Several country level experiences demonstrate that success was achieved only when commitments to the principles of

development extend to include the whole of society.

Emphasizing the rule of law, enhancement of freedom, independence of the judiciary, equal opportunities, at all levels, will enhance the prospects of successful development in the Arab states. This will be an essential factor to accelerate the regions integration in the global trends of political, economic, human and cultural development.

Although this report may not necessarily represent the views of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, it decided to participate with the United Nations Development Program in issuing this report out of a sense of conviction in the importance of free dialogue in building societies, and towards achieving economic and social advancement.

Despite the serious obstacles and challenges that are facing Arab development at the present time, this air of pessimism should not dominate our minds and visions for the future. The Arab states nonetheless have made important economic and social achievements during the past few decades. In this regard, one should also recall the dark periods of colonialism, poor economic, financial and social situations in which the countries of the region were at the eve of independence.

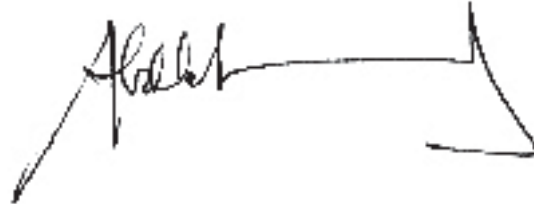
We have great confidence in the ability of the Arab states to enhance their progress in confronting the major challenges facing their citizens. We may differ in the methodologies and visions, but we should never differ over the fact that serious efforts towards more openness, freedom and physical and human development is the key to progress in all societies.

Finally, I extend my sincere thanks and

appreciation to all those who participated in the preparation, discussion, revision and issuance of this report in the form that we see it today. I would like also to express my highest appreciation and consideration to the United Nations Development Programme for sponsoring this distinguished effort and

to the Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) for its contribution to this serious work.

We pray to Allah to guide to the right actions and lead us greater success.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abdel Latif Youseff El Hamed', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Abdel Latif Youseff El Hamed
Director General / Chairman of the Board of Directors
Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development

Foreword by HRH The President of the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND)

The transparency we believe in and subscribe to prompts me to admit a sense of tension when we agreed to contribute to the funding of this edition of the Arab Human Development Report. This conflict was in no way personal in nature. For the content of the Report and its pivotal theme – Freedom and Good Governance – are core issues that have been of great interest to us for decades at the personal, institutional and public levels. The positive momentum caused by the First and the Second reports led us to contribute to the launch of the third, which gives an in-depth analysis of the call for freedom and the indispensable governance institutions and strengthens their significance in our societies.

The conflict stems mainly from differences between longtime convictions on the one hand, and the attitudes, whether favorable or guarded, toward the Report's content, its rigorous scientific methodology and statistical data on the other. What we and all sincere people hope for is that such conflict be resolved in a manner consistent with the spirit of transparency and self-criticism. Since we have rejected all the pressures exercised from all directions to obstruct the launch of this Report, we should at least avoid making similar mistakes. As the conventional wisdom says, "it is greatly disgraceful and discreditable if you advise against a particular conduct and allow yourself to do it all the same!" Although we do not agree with some of the items in this Report and have our own views about them, we would still support its launch in order not to lock away the other point of view.

The comprehensive first Arab Human development Report came to the conclusion that three fundamental deficits stand in the way of Arab development in the Arab countries; in the areas of knowledge, freedom and good

governance, and enabling women. The second report dealt in some detail with the various dimensions of the first issue, i. e. the acquisition, reproduction and dissemination of knowledge. The third report comes in the same scientific context, taking the question of consolidating freedom and safeguarding it by good government as a pivotal theme for thoughtful investigation and prudent and perceptive analysis. The Report examines the status of freedom and rights in our Arab homeland, and scrutinizes its institutional structures in the legislative, legal and political areas in their national, regional and international frameworks. It also suggests guidelines for a strategic vision for desired and possible alternative prospects for freedom and governance in the Arab states.

Freedom, and its various facets and manifestations, and the ways in which it could be protected and strengthened by good governance, represents one of the motives that encouraged us, decades ago, to put in our modest share and contribution to bring about reform in the Arab World. Our mission has centered on providing support to sustainable human development efforts, targeting the neediest groups in the developing countries, including the Arab region. Our support efforts have covered a wide range of deprived communities, particularly women and children, in cooperation with the international development organizations, local associations and other institutions active in the field of human development. These efforts, we hope, have left their impact on the quality of life of tens of thousands of people in disadvantaged segments of society, and helped save them from dire need, severe disease and dismal ignorance.

One of our prime concerns has been the promotion of serious studies that shore up the development process and examine both the

incentives and the obstacles in its way. We therefore believe that the successful launching of the third issue of the Arab Human Development Report series tones with and complements our call for bridging the gaps in strategic studies in the Arab region. Sustaining this venture poses great challenges and requires resolute determination and unshakable will.

We have often stated and on various occasions that human rights go hand in hand with human dignity, and that citizenship remains incomplete unless it is enhanced by human rights. We have furthermore stressed that democracy is an essential component of the human heritage, and an indispensable mechanism for reform. No serious dialogue could be initiated and maintained and brought to fruition outside an environment of political, economic and social reform, and without democratic practices and cultural open-mindedness. We have also emphasized that rational dialogue and debate inside and amongst us is an essential prerequisite for a credible dialogue with the outside world.

The authors of this Report who represent a team of competent scholars and intellectuals from all over the Arab World, recognize that the way out of the grim status quo towards a peaceful entry into the gates of freedom and good governance is an arduous, protracted process that cannot be accomplished overnight. However, we are fully aware of the consequences of any delay or obstruction of the desired reform,

and any attempt to substitute this process by cosmetic touches that do not touch upon the essence of the pressing issues, and do not respond to the grave challenges at hand. The result will extend yet another invitation to foreign forces and schemes bent on exercising further control of the resources and destinies of people in the Arab World.

Much like its predecessors, this Report will perhaps stimulate debate with a view to evolving development and reform visions. The need for such strategy is all the more pressing now if the Arab World wishes to join the development-oriented efforts and, specifically, move closer to the Millennium Development Goals in order to fulfill the aspirations of our societies. The first step is to draw up strategies based on a rigorous analysis of the situation and guided by science, knowledge and good governance, through support generated by local, regional and international partnerships. The Arab world must also embark on bold reforms in the main pillars of the state on the basis of transparency, accountability and sound and proper policies.

We have great expectations of the growing, confident and forward-moving forces of change in Arab life. High hopes for a better future are also pinned on the enlightened initiatives and trends that are unfolding and emerging among officials and reformers in government institutions in our contemporary societies, and among civil society activist alike.



Talal Bin Abdul Aziz
President

The Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations
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Contents

Foreword by the Administrator, UNDP	I
Foreword by the Regional Director, UNDP/Regional Bureau for Arab States	III
Foreword by the Director General and Chairman, Board of Directors, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development	V
Foreword by HRH The President of the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND)	VII
<hr/>	
PREFACE	1
THIS REPORT	1
Introduction	1
Freedom and Human Development	1
The Main Conclusions of the First and Second Arab Human Development Reports	3
Contents of this Report	3
<hr/>	
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
Introduction	5
Changes In Human Development Since The Launch Of AHDR 2003	5
Calls For Reform Intensify	5
A Constraining Regional and International Environment	6
Israeli occupation of Palestine continues to impede human development and freedom	6
The impact of the occupation of Iraq on human development	7
Addressing The Three Deficits: Progress and Reversals	7
The State Of Freedom And Good Governance	8
The State Of Freedoms and Rights	8
Civil and Political Freedoms: From Deficient to Seriously Deficient	9
The denial of individuals' fundamental freedoms	9
Exclusion from citizenship	10
Abusing minority rights	10
Women doubly excluded	10
Unmet Economic and Social Rights	10
How Far Do Arabs Believe That They Enjoy Freedom?	11
Structures Impeding Freedom	11
Region-Specific Problematic Issues	12
The contradiction between freedom in Arab countries and narrow global interests	12
Freedom shorn of effective advocates	12
Appropriating religion to perpetuate tyranny	12
"The trap of the one-off election"	12
Specificity as a pretext for slighting human rights	13
The Legal Architecture	13
Constitutions granting rights and laws confiscating them	13
And constitutions flatly violating rights	14
The Political Architecture	15
The "black-hole" State	15
The crisis of legitimacy	16

Repression and political impoverishment	16
The vicious circle of repression and corruption	17
Societal Structures	17
The chain that stifles individual freedom	17
A mode of production that strengthens authoritarian governance	18
A longing for freedom and justice in popular culture	18
An Inhospitable Global and Regional Environment For Freedom	18
A Strategic Vision: Alternative Futures For Freedom And Governance In Arab Countries	19
Alternative Scenarios	19
The impending disaster scenario	19
The “Izdihar” alternative	19
The “Half Way House” scenario: the accommodation of external reform	20
Reforming Arab Societal Structures to Guarantee Freedom	20
Internal reform	20
Changes at the pan-Arab level	21
Governance at the global level	21
Achieving Peaceful Political Alternation in Arab Countries	22
Epilogue: the furthest lotus tree	22
<hr/>	
PART I	
CHANGES IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT SINCE THE LAUNCH OF AHDR 2003	25
Introduction	25
Arab Initiatives To Promote Region-wide Reform	25
Official Arab Reform Efforts	25
Formal initiatives	25
Civil Society Reform Initiatives	26
The Struggle Waged By Civil and Political Forces in The Arab World	26
Freedom and respect for human rights	26
Stronger grass-roots participation	27
Towards political reform	27
Towards peace	28
External Attempts At Change: The Broader Middle East Initiative	29
The Regional and International Context	29
Israeli Occupation of Palestine Continues to Constrain Human Development and Freedom	30
Violations of the right to life	30
Violations of human rights and individual and collective freedoms	31
Social and economic losses	31
The separation wall undermines human development	32
Looking to the Future	33
The Impact of the occupation of Iraq on Human Development	33
Absence of security and violations of the right to life	33
The right to freedom	34
Mis-treatment of prisoners of war and detainees	34
Dismantling the Iraqi State structure	35
Looking to the future	35

The escalation of terrorism	35
Addressing the Three Deficits: Gains and Setbacks	36
Knowledge Acquisition	36
Freedom and Governance	38
Signs of political openness	38
Indications of a regression in popular participation	39
Freedoms constrained	39
Freedom of civil society organizations	40
Restrictions on the media	40
Rights of subgroups: Darfur	41
Protest by intellectuals	41
The Empowerment of Women	41
Conclusion	43
<hr/>	
PART II - REINFORCING FREEDOM AND ESTABLISHING GOOD GOVERNANCE	45
Section 1: Analytical Framework: Freedom, Good Governance and Human Development	45
CHAPTER ONE	
THE INTELLECTUAL BASIS AND CONCEPT OF FREEDOM AND GOOD GOVERNANCE	47
Introduction	47
Freedom in Western Liberal Thought: From Individual Freedom to Human Development	47
The Primacy of Individual Liberties	47
Individual Freedom and Societal Regulation	48
The essence of democracy and democratic transition	48
Problematic Issues of Freedom: Liberalism and Democracy, Attributes of Majority Rule	49
The danger of tyranny of the majority	49
Tension between Freedom and Democracy? Or Democracy without Freedom?	50
Freedom and the Other Ultimate Human Goals	50
Freedom as Human Development: Reconciling Individual Freedom with Institutional Arrangements	51
Corporate governance and human development	52
Freedom in Arab Culture	53
Freedom in Arab History	53
Religious Freedom	53
Political Freedom	54
Social Freedom	54
Economic Freedom	54
Freedom in the Modern Context	54
From Freedom to Emancipation	55
Freedom From an Islamic Perspective	56
Freedom and Liberation	58
The Rights of Freedom	59
The Arab Renaissance and the Challenge of Freedom	60
The concept of freedom and good governance in this Report	61

CHAPTER TWO**FREEDOM AND GOVERNANCE IN ARAB COUNTRIES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM:
SOME PROBLEMATIC ISSUES.**

Introduction	65
The Tension Between Freedom and Democratic Institutions in the Arab World	65
The Contradiction Between Freedom in Arab Countries and the Interests of Dominant Global Powers	65
The Crisis of Democracy After September 11	67
Freedom Bereft of Organized Support	67
“Oriental Despotism” and the Arab Societal Context	68
Democracy and Religion	68
Democracy and Islam: Potential for Harmony	69
Democracy and the Arab Region: The Trap of the One-off Election	71
Freedom and Human Rights	71
The Importance of the Human Rights System	71
International Human Rights Law	72
The Applicability of International Human Rights Law to Arab Countries	74
The Challenge of Peaceful Transition to a Society of Freedom and Good Governance in the Arab Countries	77

PART II, Section 2: The State of Freedom and Governance in Arab Countries 79**CHAPTER THREE****THE STATE OF FREEDOMS AND RIGHTS**

Introduction	81
Freedoms and Human Rights	81
Structural Constraints on Freedom	82
Flawed structure of Arab nation-states	82
Political constraints on the authority of the human rights system	82
The crisis of citizenship	83
National Freedom	83
Civil and Political Freedoms in Arab States	84
Freedom of opinion, expression and creativity	84
Stifling creativity	85
Freedom of association: civil society institutions	87
Freedom to form political parties	87
Freedom to form associations and surveillance of their activities	87
Trade unions and professional associations	88
The right to participation:	88
Individual Freedoms	89
Freedom of opinion and belief	89
Freedom of privacy and personal life	89

Denial of Fundamental Individual Freedoms	90
Violation of basic rights	90
The right to life	90
The right to liberty and personal safety	90
The right to a fair and impartial trial	91
Exclusion from citizenship	91
Deprivation of citizenship	91
Abusing the rights of minority groups.	91
Women doubly excluded	92
Social and Economic Rights	93
The Right to Lead a Long, Healthy Life	94
The right to food and adequate nutrition:	94
The right to a healthy life	95
Physical health	95
Psychological health	96
The right to acquire knowledge	96
The quality of education and health services in Arab countries	96
Perceived Enjoyment of Freedom in Contemporary Arab Opinion, Freedom Survey 2003	97
The Perception of Freedom Among Contemporary Arabs	97
Extent of Enjoyment of Freedom at the Time of the Survey (2003)	100
Perceived Change in the Enjoyment of Freedom in Contemporary Arab Opinion	100
<hr/>	
PART II, Section 3: The Societal Context Of Freedom And Governance	105
CHAPTER FOUR	
THE LEGAL ARCHITECTURE	107
Introduction	107
The Institutional Architecture of Freedom and Governance	107
Arab States and International Human Rights Standards	107
Legislative Regulation of Freedoms in Arab Constitutions	109
Law and Justice, Public Order and National Security as Excuses to Limit Freedom	109
Overview of Arab Constitutions	109
Freedom of Opinion and Expression	109
Freedom to Form Associations and Freedom of Peaceful Assembly	110
Freedom to Form Political Parties	110
The Human Right to Litigation and the Principle of the Independence of the Judiciary	111
The international perspective and the Arab constitutional reality	111
The legal profession and public freedoms	113
Right of Nationality	114
Personal Rights	114
Constitutional Violations of Human Rights	115
Legislative Restrictions on Human Rights in Arab Legislation	116
Legislative Restrictions on the Right of Peaceful Assembly	116

Legislative Restrictions on the Right of Political Organization	117
Legislative Restrictions on Freedom to form Associations	118
Restrictions on Freedom of Opinion, Expression and the Press in Arab Legislation	118
Pre-censorship and suspension by administrative decision	119
Curtailment of freedom on the pretext of security	119
Denying the right to obtain information	119
Harsher conditions for newspaper publication	120
Legal Restrictions on Public Freedoms During a State of Emergency	120
Legislative Regulation of the Role of the Judiciary in Protecting Human Rights and Freedoms	121
Independence of the judiciary (legislative regulation and practice)	121
Exceptional courts	123
The Impact of Authoritarian Power Relations on Freedom and Human Rights	123
<hr/>	
CHAPTER FIVE	
THE POLITICAL ARCHITECTURE	125
Introduction	125
The Crisis of Governance in Arab Countries	125
Characteristics of Authoritarian Governance	125
The “black-hole” State	126
Extra-judicial Controls	127
Tracing the Flaw	128
The Crisis of Legitimacy	129
Repression and Political Impoverishment	131
Weakening of Political Parties	131
The Marginalization of Civil Society	132
The status of Arab civil society	132
The State of Corporate Governance in the Arab World	133
Transparency	133
Accountability	134
Inclusiveness	134
Corporate governance and Arab stock markets	135
The vicious Circle of Repression and Corruption	135
Contours of Corruption in Arab Countries	137
Petty Corruption	137
The Arab Countries in the Global Context of Governance, 2002	138
The Debate on How to Reform	140
The Discourse on Reform	141
Change from the top or at grass-roots?	141
External versus internal	141
The Optimum Choice	142
Bridging the gap between political forces	143

CHAPTER SIX**ARAB SOCIETAL STRUCTURES AND THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS**

Introduction	145
Societal Structures	145
The Chain that Stifles Individual Freedom	145
Clannism (al-'asabiya) in Arab Society—the Authoritarian Paternalist System and the Family	145
Education	147
Freedom in the content of education in three Maghreb countries	148
The World of Work	149
The Political Realm	150
Poverty and the class structure	150
Is this stranglehold eternal?	151
A Mode Of Production that Reinforces Authoritarianism	151
The Longing For Freedom and Justice in Popular Culture	153
The Global and Regional Context	154
Globalization and Freedom	154
Governance at the Global Level	155
The Impact of the “War on Terror” on Freedom	156
Governance at the Regional Level	157
PART II, Section 4: Towards Reinforcing Freedom and Establishing Good Governance in the Arab Countries	161

CHAPTER SEVEN**A STRATEGIC VISION OF FREEDOM AND GOVERNANCE IN ARAB COUNTRIES - ALTERNATIVE FUTURES**

Introduction	163
Grounds for Peaceful and Deep Political Alteration, Alternative Futures	163
Reasons for Change	163
Alternative Arab Futures	164
The impending disaster scenario: maintaining the ‘Status Quo’	164
The ideal scenario: the “Izdihar” alternative	164
The “Half Way House” scenario: the accommodation of external reform	165
How to Deal with Reform Initiatives from Outside?	165
Universal Features and Aims of the Desired System of Governance	166
Reforming Arab Societal Structures to Guarantee Freedom:	166
The Internal Challenge	166
Enhancing the legal and institutional foundations that underpin freedom	166
Adherence to international human rights law	167
Binding the ruling authority to the rule of law	167
Guaranteeing freedoms and rights at the heart of the constitution	167
Strengthening civil and political rights in law	168
Guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary	169
Abolishing the state of emergency.	169
Guarantees for personal freedom	169
Ending discrimination against societal groups	170

The Political Architecture	170
Problematic issues in guaranteeing sound democratic arrangements	170
Code of Conduct for Societal Forces on the Path to Reform	171
Obligations of the State:	171
Obligations of the political élites:	171
Obligations of civil society:	171
Parliamentary representation:	172
Reforming Arab Institutional Performance	172
Correcting the Arab Development Trajectory	173
The Reform of Corporate Governance	173
At the Pan-Arab level	174
Liberation from Occupation	175
Governance at the Global Level	176
A Role for the UN and Other International Agencies	177
Achieving Peaceful Political Alternation in Arab Countries in Order to Build Freedom and Good Governance: the ‘Izdihar’ Scenario.	177
Act 1: Liberation of Civil Society, Laying the Foundation for Comprehensive Legal and Political Reform	178
Epilogue: the Furthest Lotus Tree	179
<hr/>	
REFERENCES	181
<hr/>	
ANNEX 1: MEASUREMENT OF FREEDOM IN ARAB COUNTRIES	191
ANNEX 2: SELECTED DOCUMENTS	215
ANNEX 3: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS	233
ANNEX 4: STATISTICAL TABLES ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB COUNTRIES	234
<hr/>	
LIST OF BOXES	
P1 Freedom and good governance: an historical legacy	2
1 Declaration on the Process of Reform and Modernisation in the Arab World (excerpts)	26
2 The Arab people’s views on the importance of the Palestinian question	30
3 Unnoticed Losses	31
4 World Bank President Finds Israel’s Conduct Shameful	31
5 By Law, This Wall Should Come Down - Findings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).	32
6 Israel’s Restrictions on Churches in the Holy Land	33
7 Conclusion of the Taguba Report	35
8 Quality Assessment of Primary and Middle Education in Mathematics and Science (TIMSS 2003) in the Arab World RAB01/005/A/01/31	36
9 “Development” of the University of the United Arab Emirates	36
10 An Assessment of Business Administration Programmes in Arab Universities	37
11 The Moroccan Family Code	42
1-1 Natural Human Rights	47
1-2 Freedom of opinion as a sacred right	48

1-3	Ahmed Kamal Aboulmagd: The principle of equality	51
1-4	Al Kawakibi: Freedom and Dignity	55
1-5	Naseef Nassar: The Reconstruction of Liberalism	60
1-6	Freedom for its own sake	61
1-7	The Charter of Medina	62
1-8	Setting the deviant ruler straight	63
1-9	Al-Kawakibi: Importance of holding the ruling authority accountable	63
1-10	Corporate governance	63
1-11	Taha Hussein: Freedom and Independence	64
2-1	The Reasons behind the Failure of Democracy in Arab Countries: Perceptions of a Western Scholar	66
2-2	Abdallah al-Arawy: Freedom and Liberalism in the Arab Context	67
2-3	Ibn al-Qayim al-Jawziya: On welfare	69
2-4	Imam Muhammad Abdu: The Legitimacy of Elections	70
2-5	Ayatollah al-Mohaqiq al-Naeny: An Opinion Concerning Conditionality or Constitutionality	70
2-6	Boasting about human rights while destroying them	71
2-7	Declaration on the Right to Development Adopted by General Assembly Resolution 41/128 of 4 December 1986(excerpts)	71
2-8	Muhammad Shahrouf: A Word About Freedom	73
2-9	The Pact of the Virtuous (Hilf al-fudul)	74
2-10	Human rights: universality and specificity	74
2-11	The Contribution of Arab States to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Two International Covenants	75
2-12	Haytham Manna'a: The Books of Tribulations	76
2-13	Freedom and Emancipation	77
2-14	Timing the call for freedom	77
3-1	Ali Ibn Al Hussein: The Epistle on Rights	81
3-2	Marwan al-Barghouti (from his prison cell): I will overcome the cell and the occupiers	84
3-3	Al-Manfaluti: The value of freedom that has been stolen	86
3-4	Khalida Said: Creativity - Between Consciousness and Dreams	87
3-5	Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1999 (excerpts)	89
3-6	Freedom Survey, Arab Human Development Report	98
4-1	The right to form political parties	110
4-2	Constitutional restrictions on rights	115
4-3	Restrictions on the rights to assembly and association	117
5-1	Muhammad Al-Charfi: Arab democracy - form without substance	130
5-2	Capital market legal reforms	135
5-3	Moncef Al-Marzouqi: Giving democracy every chance	142
6-1	Education and Human Rights in Arab Countries	147
6-2	Educational Development in Tunisia	150
6-3	Omar ibn Abd al-Aziz: Justice and the law, not the sword and the whip	150
6-4	Counsellor Yahya al-Rifai: Justice Above Might	156
6-5	The UN Special Rapporteur on Terrorism and Human Rights: The Root Causes of Terrorism	157
6-6	Adib al-Jadir: Hussein Jamil, An Iraqi Arab Activist Who Pursued Freedom	160
7-1	Mahdi Bunduq, Post-Bourgeois Society	166
7-2	Perpetuating power in the name of democracy and the people	167
7-3	Ten Principles for a Constitution of Freedom and Good Governance	168
7-4	The Supreme Constitutional Court in Egypt	168
7-5	Recommended Good Governance Institutions at the Pan-Arab Level	175
7-6	Excerpts from the Address by the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, at the Opening Session of the General Assembly, New York, 21 September 2004.	176
7-7	Guaranteeing freedom for civil society	178

LIST OF FIGURES

3-1	Percentage agreeing that women should have equal rights, five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	93
3-2	Estimate of the extent of deprivation of human capabilities, five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	94
3-3	Years of life expectancy lost to disease, by gender, Arab countries and comparator countries, 2002	95
3-4	Extent of satisfaction with the level and cost of education and health services by sector (public/private), five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	97
3-5a	Percentage of interviewees considering the elements of freedom part of their concept of freedom (%) Average of five Arab countries (weighted by population), Freedom Survey, 2003	98
3-5b	Percentage of interviewees considering the elements of freedom constituents of their concept of freedom Five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	99
3-6a	Extent of enjoyment of the elements of freedom (%), average of five Arab countries (weighted by population), Freedom Survey, 2003	100
3-6b	Extent of enjoyment of the elements of freedom (%), average of five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	101
3-7a	Perceived change in the enjoyment of elements of freedom (net %) during the five years preceding the survey, average of five Arab countries (weighted by population), Freedom Survey, 2003	102
3-7b	Perceived change in the enjoyment of elements of freedom (net %) during the five years preceding the survey, average of five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	103
4-1	Extent of willingness to go to court, Five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	122
5-1	Perceived absence of government accountability and lack of freedom of opinion and expression, five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	128
5-2	Extent of confidence in political institutions, five Arab countries	132
5-3	Corruption Perception Index, World and Arab Countries, 2003	136
5-4	Areas in which corruption is perceived to be widespread, five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	137
5-5	Extent to which different societal groups are believed to be involved in the spread of corruption, five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	137
5-6	Knowledge of acts of bribery or "favouritism" (wasta*) during the 12 months preceding the survey, five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	138
5-7	Reason for paying a bribe or using wasta during the 12 months preceding the survey, five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	139
5-8	The best way to obtain a favour or to avoid a penalty, five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	139
5-9	Voice and accountability, the Arab region compared to other world regions, 2002	140
5-10	Political stability, the Arab region compared to other world regions, 2002	140
5-11	Government effectiveness, the Arab region compared to other world regions, 2002	140
5-12	The rule of law, the Arab region compared to other world regions, 2002	141
5-13	Control of corruption, the Arab region compared to other world regions, 2002	141
6-1	The share of taxes in public revenues and the share of income taxes in total tax revenues (%), Arab countries, 1992-2002	153
6-2	Credibility of the Arab League and the United Nations: Estimates by five Arab states and comparator countries	158
6-3	Extent of satisfaction with the current level of Arab cooperation, five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	160
7-1	Extent of dissatisfaction over the presence of foreign military bases, five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	164
7-2	Preferred forms of stronger Arab cooperation, five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	174
7-3	Perception of just solutions to the Palestinian question, five Arab countries, Freedom Survey, 2003	175

LIST OF TABLES

4-1	Status of Ratifications of the Principal International Human Rights Treaties, January 2005	108
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This Report

Introduction

The first Arab Human Development Report (AHDR 2002) provided a comprehensive, first hand overview of the situation in the Arab region from the perspective of human development. Its goal was to provide an objective analysis based on serious self-criticism and aimed at assuring freedom and dignity for all Arabs¹. The Report diagnosed three cardinal deficits impeding human development in Arab countries: in knowledge acquisition, freedom and good governance, and women's empowerment. As a broad overview, that first Report did not explore these deficits in depth. Rather, it made the case for an extended analysis of each in order to promote a discussion about how to overcome them.

Accordingly, the second Report analysed the knowledge acquisition deficit in the Arab world in some depth, ending with a strategic vision for establishing a knowledge society in the region.

Continuing such extended treatment, this third Report provides a thorough examination of the deficit of freedom and good governance, a topic that dominates current discourse within the region and abroad. It is hoped that this detailed analysis will stimulate a dialogue in Arab societies on how to expand freedom and establish good governance. A serious and objective debate around the substance of this Report would pave the way for a process of social innovation leading to a genuine project for an Arab renaissance.

The first two Reports prompted a wide public response, for and against their findings, both inside and outside the Arab world, which underlined the sharp relevance of the

issues raised, and the importance of addressing them at this critical period in the course of the region.

Unfortunately, as with other Arab reform initiatives, some forces outside the Arab world have used these Reports for their own purposes. This has led some Arabs to call for a halt to self-criticism in order to avoid giving others a pretext for interfering in Arab affairs. This call, however, rests on flawed logic. It assumes that others have sought to interfere in the region's affairs in response to such self-criticism by Arabs and not because of their own interests.

These interests and ambitions have turned into interventions for two reasons. The first is active: it reflects the considerable capabilities that foreign powers can muster to pursue their own ends. The second is passive: it relates to the weakness of the region, which makes it an easy target for outside intervention.

The only way for Arabs to deal with the ambitions of others is to recognize and overcome their own weaknesses and thus grow strong enough to prevent foreign objectives from taking hold. Self-reform originating in balanced self-criticism is the only viable way forward towards a robust and independent region. All committed actors in Arab societies should be able to rise to the occasion of their historic mission, which is to stimulate a renaissance movement. They can best do so by diagnosing the present regional situation in human development terms and proposing ways forward.

FREEDOM AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Human development is most profoundly seen as a process of expanding "the range of human

A serious and objective debate around the substance of this Report would pave the way for a process of social innovation.

Self-reform originating in balanced self-criticism is the only viable way forward towards a robust and independent region.

¹ The term "Arab" is used in this report to denote all citizens of Arab countries inclusively.

Freedom is pivotal in human development.

choice”. If human development means increasing people’s choices, then people must have the freedom to choose among alternatives. This becomes an absolute priority. Freedom is pivotal in human development. Indeed, recent theoretical writings on this subject see development as synonymous with freedom (Sen 1999).

BOX P1

Freedom and good governance: an historical legacy

“Since when have you compelled people to enslavement, when their mothers birthed them free?²”

Omar bin al-Khattab

“If the king has treated the people unjustly
We refuse to condone humiliation among us”

Amr bin Kulthum

“The tyrant is the enemy of rights and of freedom; indeed their executioner. Right is the father of humanity and freedom their mother.”

Abdel-Rahman al-Kawakibi

The effective development and use of human capabilities enlarges people’s choices and enables them to enjoy freedom in its comprehensive sense.

Thus, in human development terms, simply by virtue of belonging to humankind, people have an *a priori* right to a dignified life, materially and morally or spiritually, in body, self and soul. From this starting point two key conclusions follow:

- First: Human development is incompatible with any type of discrimination against any groups of human beings whether defined by gender, social origin, creed or colour.
- Second: In human development, the concept of well-being is not limited to material comfort. It includes the non-physical, non-material aspects of a dignified human life: freedom, knowledge, aesthetic pleasure, human dignity and self-fulfilment. These broader aims can only be achieved through the individual’s effective participation in all endeavours of society.

Human entitlements, in principle, are infinite, and they develop and change continuously in accord with human advancement. At any level of development, though, the three basic human entitlements, according to the global Human Development Report, are: “to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowl-

edge, and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living”. Yet, human development does not end at this minimal level of entitlements. Rather, it goes beyond this minimum to encompass other additional entitlements, ranging from “political, economic, and social freedom to opportunities for being creative and productive, and enjoying self-respect and guaranteed human rights” (Human Development Report 1990).

The process of human development is founded on two principal axes. The first relates to building those human capabilities that make it possible to achieve a higher level of human welfare. These capabilities comprise, first and foremost, the ability of all people to enjoy a long and healthy life and to acquire knowledge and freedom without discrimination. The second axis relates to the efficient and appropriate utilization of human capabilities in all spheres of human endeavour, including production, and through people’s active participation in civil society and politics. The effective development and use of human capabilities enlarges people’s choices and enables them to enjoy freedom in its comprehensive sense.

Thus, human development in the full sense that we have adopted, is not merely about developing “human resources,” neither is it a “development,” *tout court*, of human beings, nor is it a matter solely of striving to fulfil the basic needs of people. It is much more a humanist and humanitarian blueprint for the comprehensive, total, and mutually reinforcing development, of people and social institutions, that aims to realize higher human goals and aspirations: freedom, justice, and human dignity.

Narrower definitions of development, whether limited to ‘economic development’ or to a restricted sense of human development, lack the rich possibilities of this fuller concept. In human development thinking, a wealthy person is not considered to enjoy an advanced state of well-being so long as that person is prevented from exercising freedom. Likewise, history, ancient and contemporary, teaches us that societies barred from experiencing free-

² In this saying, Khalifat Omar is addressing the son of his Wali (representative ruler) in Egypt. Of particular note is that the adversary referred to in the text had a different religion from the Khalifat himself...the adversary was a Christian Coptic. This conflict ended with the Khalifat Omar inflicting severe punishment on the son of his Wali in Egypt.

dom are unable to preserve whatever economic and other gains they may make in a more narrow definition of development; and thus, they cannot attain the higher rungs on the ladder of human advancement.

THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THE FIRST AND SECOND ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORTS

The first AHDR (2002) concluded that “although Arab countries have made significant strides in more than one area of human development in the last three decades...the predominant characteristic of the current Arab reality seems to be the existence of deeply rooted shortcomings in the Arab institutional structure [which] are an obstacle to building human development.” As noted earlier, the Report summarized these shortcomings as three deficits relating to knowledge acquisition, freedom and good governance and the empowerment of women. Taking into account these deficit areas in an alternative human development index, reduces the ranking of the Arab countries on the standard index. This new view underlined that the challenge of building human development, for most Arabs, is still very serious.

The first AHDR also affirmed that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is one of the most significant impediments to human development in Arab countries, in that it constitutes an obvious threat to security and peace across the region. Occupation has also given Arab regimes a pretext for postponing internal reform and has embarrassed Arab reformists by making the confrontation of external threats to the region a higher priority than internal reforms.

The second AHDR (2003) reviewed the most important global, regional and country-level developments after the completion of the first Report. It concluded that challenges to Arab human development remained grave. Indeed, it saw unfavourable developments at the regional and global levels as intensifying the challenge - or the threat - to human development notably in the realm of freedoms. These developments included the deteriorating state of civil and political freedoms for Arabs and Muslims in the West following the events of

September 11 and the consequent clampdown on freedoms in Arab countries; Israel’s re-invasion of Palestinian cities, causing destruction and human suffering; and the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the US-led Coalition.

Looking into the state of knowledge acquisition at the beginning of the 21st century, the second Report concluded that the dissemination and production of knowledge in Arab countries remain weak despite the presence of significant Arab human capital. It noted that, under different circumstances, such capital would constitute a strong foundation for a knowledge renaissance.

The Report culminated in a strategic vision for establishing a knowledge society in Arab countries organized around five pillars:

1. Guaranteeing the key freedoms of opinion, expression and association, safeguarded by good governance.
2. Disseminating high quality education for all, particularly through higher education, learning in early childhood, continuous education and life-long learning.
3. Embedding and ingraining science in society, building and broadening the capacity for research and development across societal activities and catching up with the “information age”.
4. Shifting Arab socio-economic structures rapidly towards knowledge-based production.
5. Developing an authentic, broadminded and enlightened Arab knowledge model based on:

Returning to pure religion, free from political exploitation, and centred on ijthad (independent interpretive scholarship); advancing the Arabic language; reclaiming the positive achievements of Arab heritage; enriching, supporting and celebrating cultural diversity in the region; and opening up to other cultures.

CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT

The Arab development crisis has widened, deepened and grown more complex to a degree that demands the full engagement of all Arab citizens in true reform in order to spearhead a human renaissance in the region. The strategic vision for establishing the “knowl-

The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is one of the most significant impediments to human development in Arab countries.

Occupation has also given Arab regimes a pretext for postponing internal reform.

Of all the impediments to an Arab renaissance, political restrictions on human development are the most stubborn.

External events have increasing and palpable impacts on freedom in the region.

edge society” in the Arab states clearly showed that required reforms extend to the current socio-economic structure and, critically, to the political context at the national, regional and international levels. It indicated that partial reforms can not work in the absence of an appropriately positive social environment; however, in the present situation, this kind of reform is no longer effective or even possible. Vested interests can no longer be allowed to delay or slow down comprehensive societal reform in Arab countries.

Of all the impediments to an Arab renaissance, political restrictions on human development are the most stubborn. For that reason, this Report focuses on the acute deficit of freedom and good governance in the Arab world.

As is now the practice in this series, the Report opens by recounting events at the national, regional and global levels that have affected the overall course of human development in the Arab world during the period in review. This opening section (Part I) is followed by an in-depth analysis (Part II) of the main subject.

The Report complements the first two in the series and does not aim to go over ground previously covered.

Part II commences with an analytical framework that sets forth the concept and definition of freedom and good governance, focusing on both Western and Arab culture (Chapter 1). It then discusses some key problematic issues undermining freedom and governance in Arab countries at the start of the third millennium (Chapter 2).

Applying its analytical framework and its definition of freedom, the Report next looks at the state of freedoms and economic and social rights in Arab countries and evaluates how far they are enjoyed in practice (Chapter 3). It continues by analysing the factors that determine the extent to which Arabs enjoy freedoms and rights starting with the impact of institutional, legal and political structures (Chapters 4 and 5).

The Report then examines the impact of societal structures on freedom and governance in Arab countries. Since external events have increasing and palpable impacts on freedom in the region, the Report subsequently discusses

the global and regional environment and its relationship to the main theme (Chapter 6).

Drawing on previous chapters, the Report concludes by offering an analytical overview of alternative prospects for freedom and good governance in Arab countries. The objective is to stimulate a broad discussion on action for enhancing and protecting freedom in the region through good governance (Chapter 7).