

Resident Coordinator Report 2005 United Arab Emirates

I have the pleasure to submit my annual Resident Coordinator Report reflecting the United Nations operational activities for development undertaken in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during 2004.

As with previous reports, this year's report was prepared with full participation and contribution from other UN agencies, programmes, and funds, including UN project managers currently working in the country as well as contribution of non-resident UN entities.

Over 2004 the UN system continued to contribute significantly to the development of the UAE and to support the country's initiatives in taking a leading role among Arab countries in fostering governance reforms and achieving the MDGs. The contribution of the UN system is reflected in various successful activities implemented during the year. The emphasis of most of the activities was on national capacity building, institutional development and policy advisory services. More than 30 UN entities provided support to UAE during 2004, which continues to value and praise the role of the UN in the country. UN entities included; ESCWA, FAO, IAPSO, ICAO, ILO, IMF, IMO, ITC, OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNDESA, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHAS, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNITAR, UNMAS, UNOCHA, UNODC, UNV, UPU, WB, WFP, WHO, WMO, WTO.

UAE's Current Situation

The major political development in the country during 2004 was a change in leadership as a result of the demise of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahayan in November 2004. Sheikh Zayed was the ruler of Abu Dhabi Emirate since 1966 and the president of the UAE since its creation in 1971. Immediately after the death of Sheikh Zayed, his son Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al-Nahayan, was appointed by UAE Supreme Council as the new president of the country. Sheikh Khalifa previously was the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Emirate, Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, and Chairman of the Executive Council of Abu Dhabi Emirate. Another important political development at the time was a cabinet re-shuffle that was announced days before the death of Sheikh Zayed. The re-shuffle brought in new ministers, especially from the royal family, and merged some ministries, notably the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Planning, and the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The re-shuffle also resulted in the appointment, for the first time in the country history, of a woman minister for the new strategic Ministry of Economy and Planning. This was a breakthrough in terms of women's participation at high policy levels and thus counted as a boost for gender equality and women empowerment in the country. In the same connections, expectations are still high that

three women will join the National Federal Council in its new term expected in early 2005. It is worth to be noted that the change in leadership and the cabinet re-shuffle went very smoothly and the country continued to be politically stable.

Economically, UAE continued to enjoy a high rate of economic growth, which is supported by the continued high oil prices over recent years on one hand and the great efforts exerted in the diversification of the economy through attracting FDI inflows. Strong oil prices in 2003 have propelled the UAE economy to its highest levels with a GDP of US \$ 79.8 billion in 2003, representing a real GDP growth rate of 7%. The UAE is the third largest economy in the Arab region after Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and the country's per capita income of US \$ 19,700 in 2003, is the second highest in the Arab region. Currently UAE is striving to make itself the financial and commercial hub of the region, given its dynamic private sector, a vibrant and growing capital market, and economic and political stability.

The United Arab Emirates population is estimated to be 4.04 million, with a high population growth rate (7.8% in 2003) mainly attributable to the influx of the foreign workforce. UAE nationals constitute 23.4% of the population and less than 10% of the country's labor force. Of the UAE nationals in employment, 81% are employed by the government sector, whereas in the private sector UAE nationals account for less than 2% of the workforce (despite the fact that the majority of jobs are in the private sector). Women comprised 14.7% of the labor force in 2003, and in government 39.8% percent of government workers are female. Social changes and government support are encouraging women to seek jobs, and women are gradually taking up senior positions in the public and private sectors.

Full social insurance continues to be provided for UAE nationals, and in 2004 the Cabinet approved a Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs' proposal to enable the formation of trade unions aimed at ensuring better protection for all workers including expatriates. Men and women have the same opportunities for education in the UAE, and education is provided free to nationals at all levels. In 2000, 95% of high school graduates continued to higher education, and female students continue to outnumber their male counterparts at this level, comprising 72% of graduates in 2003.

UAE continued to place itself within the high human development category of the world countries as per the global Human Development Index, ranking 49 out of 177 countries in 2004.

Achieving MDGs and Reducing Human Poverty

UAE is a rich country with a population of relatively a small size enjoying a high living standard and per capital income. As such, the country has been generous in providing humanitarian and development assistance to developing and poor countries. In November 2004 UAE committed US \$ 478,000 to the United Nations development projects; US \$ 324,000 to UNICEF, US \$ 100,000 to UNDP and US \$ 54,000 to UNHCR.

Large amount of development funding is also channeled through a number of UAE based development funding organizations, such as Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, Sheik Zayed Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation, Sheikh Mohamed Bin Rashid Charitable Humanitarian Foundation and the UAE Red Crescent Association. The UN in the UAE strived to establish strategic partnerships with these funding institutions to mobilize resources for reducing poverty and achieving MDGs in other developing countries. Through a partnership between UNDP and the Zayed Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation US \$ 2 million were made available during 2004 to support the provision of clean water in Somalia. Similarly, with UNDP support resources were mobilized for the construction of 4000 houses in Raffah refugee camp in Palestine to be implemented through partnership between UAE Red Crescent Association (RCA) and UNRWA. Resources (US \$ 200,000) were also made available to UNHCR from the Zayed Foundation for supporting refugees in Darfur. Furthermore, UAE Dirham 2 million (approx. US \$ 545,000) were earmarked by UAE to UNHCR through a partnership with the UAE RCA for activities benefiting refugee women and children in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Horn of Africa.

UAE also hosted a Donor Committee Meeting for the reconstruction of Iraq in Abu Dhabi during the first quarter of 2004, which was attended by high-level officials from the Iraqi Governing Council, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF and other donor countries. The meeting created an International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq and worked out a mechanism through which funds will flow for urgent reconstruction projects in Iraq, estimated at US Dollar 4 billion.

In relation to this and with the support of UNDP, UAE produced its first MDG Report. The preparations of the report helped to raise awareness among state and non-state stakeholders about international, national and local development goals. The report also resulted in a stronger partnership between government entities, CSOs and UN Partners. According to the report great potentials exist within UAE to achieve the MDGs. Greater awareness about pressing regional and global human development issues and priorities was also created through the launching and wide dissemination of HDR 2004 and Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) 2003.

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

As noted in the Arab Human Development Report 2003, the issue of gender equality and women empowerment is of critical importance to UAE, as with other Arab countries. UAE is making steady progress on the advancement of women. As mentioned earlier, the first woman has been appointed at a ministerial level – Ministry of Economy and Planning – towards the end of 2004. The country is also moving ahead with the implementation of a National Strategy for the Advancement of Woman in UAE, which was launched in 2002. UNDP and UNIFEM are continuing to provide technical support to the General Women's Union for the implementation of the

strategy, with a special emphasis on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was then ratified by UAE in 2004. During the reporting period, UNIFEM in collaboration with Emirates Institute of Diplomacy and UAE General Women's Union organized a conference on the political participation of women in UAE. This resulted in the increase of Emirati women diplomats. Out of a recent recruit of 25 diplomats 8 of them were women. UNDP also supported study on the review of how women image and role is presented and depicted in the schools curriculum in UAE. Capacity building activities for women continued to be delivered. A Women in Media workshop and a Women and Leadership conference were organized with the support of UNDP.

In the area of education, the UAE government signed an agreement with UNESCO to establish and operate a regional office to plan the education in the country. In partnership with UNDP, UNESCO is currently in the process of providing technical support to UAE for developing its nation wide adult literacy programme.

Health Care and Responding to HIV/AIDS

World Health Organization (WHO) statistics show the UAE to be in twenty-seventh place in a major analysis of national healthcare systems in 191 countries. The parameters used for the survey included the overall health of the population, distribution of health care in the population, responsiveness of the healthcare system, including patient satisfaction, opinions of people belonging to different economic strata about the system and how the services were paid for by the population. During the reporting period, WHO support to UAE MOH of Education continued to improve maternal health and combat measles, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, malaria, polio and other diseases. Several activities were achieved including, among others, upgrading technical skills of national staff in screening breast cancer, reviewing congenital disorder screening system and measles elimination protocols, improving early detection of malaria and treatment protocols, appraising and developing further HIV/AIDS Surveillance System, and provision of orientation sessions for medical professionals on HIV/AIDS/STI. WHO efforts were also joined by UNDP efforts in encouraging and facilitating the participation of relevant UAE government officials and CSOs leaders in regional and international conferences on HIV/AIDS. UAE government representatives participated in two regional workshops in Bahrain and Morocco organized by UNAIDS. Religious leaders from UAE also participated in the recent Arab Region Religious Leaders Colloquium on HIV/AIDS in Cairo. Towards the end of the year, UNDP in partnership with the UAE MOH and UAE RCA launched a pilot project on raising awareness about HIV/AIDS in UAE.

Energy and Environment for Sustainable Development

Protection of environment and natural remains on the top of the UAE government priorities. During the year, a number of UN entities, including FAO, UNDP, UNU, and WMO worked with UAE government in the area of environment and natural resources

protection and development. UNDP provided technical support to improve the capacity of national/sectoral authorities to plan and implement integrated approaches to environmental management and energy development, improve capacity to monitor environmental conditions and trends, and support the effective use of Date Palm to combat desertification and increase its yields. Partnership developed with the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA) for organizing an international exhibition and conference on Sustainable Transportation in Developing Countries in UAE that will take place in early 2005.

Global Compact and Partnership Development with the Private Sector

Given the important role it plays in the UAE economy, UNDP worked to forge a strong partnership with the private sector with the objective of eliciting its support for achieving the MDGs on one hand and making it socially and environmentally responsible on the other. In this respect, several UN supported activities took place including the development and piloting of retail standard for UAE and provision of policy advice to Dubai Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) sector. In the area of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Shell in partnership with UNDP organized the first Middle East CSR Forum. The forum was attended by a representative from the UN Global Compact. Similarly, the Emirates Environment Group with UNDP's support launched a CSR network in UAE. The two initiatives associated with media campaigns helped as well to raise awareness about the MDGs, human development approaches and incorporating CSR principles and practices in private sector development plans.

Fostering Democratic Governance

Support was provided by UN agencies to UAE in fostering good governance. This is represented in the participation of UN entities in different workshops and seminars and provision of quality inputs. An example of this is UNDP's participation in the Arab Strategy Forum that was organized by Dubai Emirate in December 2004. The annual forum brings high-level government officials from the Arab states and some other countries, and globally profound personalities and experts in international politics and economics to discuss and come up with recommendations and strategies for the development of Arab countries. UNDP actively participated in the forum and presented a paper on human development.

UNITAR continued to strengthen the capacity of the UAE diplomatic system. UNITAR's Executive Director delivered a lecture on the United Nations system to the Emirates Institute of Diplomacy. For the third consecutive year, UNITAR organized a training course for young Emirate diplomats on the role and functioning of the United Nations. That was prior to the opening of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly in New York and included participants from Qatar and Kuwait as well.

UNDP is working in partnership with key federal government ministries, e.g. Ministry of Finance and Industry, on public administration reform and modernization with the view to improve the equity of the public services and increase its efficiency. Several strategic projects are jointly being implemented in the area of E-Governance and access to information. The major ones are on Performance-Based Budgeting, the development of an Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) for the federal government, and introduction of the concepts of Total Quality Management. UNDP is also advocating for the use of ICT for Development. In relation to this, study tours were facilitated by UAE UNDP CO for government officials from Algerian and Jordan to learn from UAE experience in E-Governance and public administration. That was done in coordination with UNDP COs in the two countries

Human Rights and Protection

UNHCR continued to provide international protection for refugees and asylum seekers in UAE and to raise awareness among concerned government officials and NGOs staff about the human rights and the refugee law. During the reporting period the files of long awaited 62 Asian Ugandans refugees were closed after receiving UAE temporary passports. 22 Iraqi refugees were also successfully repatriated to Iraq. In collaboration with the Human Rights Department of Dubai police, UNHCR organized a workshop on Refugee Law for 42 participants from 7 Middle East countries, including government officials and NGO representatives. UNHCR is also advocating for the setting up of a Human Rights Department in Abu Dhabi similar to the one in Dubai.

Support to Emergency Response Efforts

UAE is increasingly becoming a springboard for supporting UN global response to disasters and emergencies worldwide. It is as well as a strategic point for emergency response resources mobilization in the Gulf region. As such, WFP consolidated its presence and expanded its global support operations during the reporting period. By December 2004, the UN agency had 60 staff providing critical technical, procurement and logistics support to humanitarian relief operations worldwide. WFP UAE office procured goods and services for a total annual value of US \$ \$20 million. During 2004, several donations were secured from private and government entities, including a US \$ 6.3 million donation from Saudi Arabia, and a US \$1 million donation from the HH Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qassimi, Ruler of Sharjah. The partnership between WFP and the Dubai Development and Investment Authority (DDIA) gave birth to the concept of the Dubai Humanitarian City, a unique platform for UN agencies, NGOs and other humanitarian organizations. The Dubai Humanitarian City now is one of the largest emergency response bases in the world, with WFP's facilities supporting FITTEST, the only emergency technical response unit in the world. FITTEST provided support to over 50 countries in the world in 2004, with over 100 missions, and coordinated the deployment of the interagency humanitarian emergency

telecom networks in Liberia, Sudan and Indonesia (during the Tsunami humanitarian response).

Collaborative UN Assistance and Operational Coordination

The UN Resident Coordinator's office in UAE took the initiative to organize a roundtable on the Arab GCC Countries and UN Technical Cooperation that brought together representatives of member states of the GCC and 17 UN agencies in Abu Dhabi in March 2004. During the first ever and unique roundtable several common challenges in the region were identified in the different political, social, economic and human development areas. Recommendations were made to prepare a GCC specific millennium development Goals report for the GCC countries given their particular characteristics. It was also agreed to give a special attention to youth by developing policies that promote the rights of the youth to participate and reap the benefits of development and encourage their active participation in matters that affect their lives, particularly in promoting healthy lifestyle, including awareness and prevention of HIV/AIDS. Water and the environment and protection of natural resources were among the important areas the participants discussed and made proposals for its support.

With the growing role of UAE in the Arab region and given its strategic geographical location and advanced infrastructure and communication facilities it is becoming a central support and logistical point for the regional and global activities of an increasing number of other UN agencies and organizations, such as WFP, UNICEF and UNOPS. UAE is also a safe haven for the personnel of UN agencies operating in Afghanistan in the event of an evacuation as well as a springboard for operational activities of these agencies (UNOPS especially). In addition to that, a large number of non-Resident UN Agencies are visiting UAE yearly to participate in national, regional or international conferences organized/hosted by UAE or to provide technical assistance in different fields at the request of UAE government. As such the Resident Coordinator functions in the UAE are growing, particularly in the area of provision of logistics and operational support to other UN entities.

With the absence of a UN Resident Coordinator in the State of Qatar and the Sultanate of Oman, UAE RC also provides support for UN activities in the two countries. Towards the end of 2004, the Resident Coordinator office facilitated the visit of UNDP Administrator and other UN staff to participate in the High Level G77 Forum on Trade and Investment in Doha. During his visit, UNDP Administrator held discussions with senior Qatari officials to advocate for achieving MDGs and to boost the cooperation between the State of Qatar and the UN.

In closing, I wish to express my most sincere appreciation to all colleagues who have contributed to this report and to colleagues in the United Nations Development Group Office for their continuous support.