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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Contribution of the United Nations system to the preservation and
management of cultural and natural heritage in Western AsiaNote by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the governing bodies of the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme the comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Contribution of the United Nations system to the preservation and management of cultural and natural heritage in Western Asia" (JIU/REP/88/5).

Annex

COMMENTS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON CO-ORDINATION ON THE REPORT OF THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT ENTITLED "CONTRIBUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM TO THE PRESERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE IN WESTERN ASIA" (JIU/REP/88/5)

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on Western Asia was the fourth and last in a series. The first three reports dealt with Latin America (JIU/REP/82/5), Eastern Asia and the Pacific (JIU/REP/83/10) and Africa (JIU/REP/85/5). The report covered 12 countries of Western Asia (Bahrain, Democratic Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen).
2. The Secretary-General and the organizations of the United Nations most directly concerned by the report (FAO, UNDP, UNEP) welcome the report of JIU, which deals with issues of great importance to the development of Western Asia. The organizations of the United Nations system welcome the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report, which highlighted the importance of a system-wide approach to the long-term sustainable development of the region. The organizations also welcome the report's recognition of the valuable co-operation and support provided by the United Nations system to the countries in the region.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

3. The report examined the main FAO activities in the preservation and management of the natural heritage in the broadest sense (paras. 18 and 80). Related FAO activities in the region under review are diverse, complex and numerous and could not all be described in detail. Nor was it the acknowledged purpose of the report to do so. FAO agrees in general with the descriptions regarding its activities, which were reported in a selective manner.
4. The report referred to the Inspector's impression that the projects being implemented by the organizations of the United Nations system did not appear to relate to a clear-cut national policy or strategy based on priorities (paras. 83 and 97). While FAO does not wish to comment on the efforts of member nations themselves in the formulation of national policies and strategies, it must be stressed that in the preparation of natural resources development or management projects, FAO takes into consideration the priorities set by the countries in the region as defined in their national development plans. In addition, careful account is always taken of the priorities agreed upon in regional bodies, including the FAO regional conference and regional commissions, such as those on agriculture, economic and social policy, land and water use, and forestry.
5. The preservation and rational management of natural resources is a continuing priority in FAO programmes and activities in Western Asia, as clearly indicated in the FAO programme of work and budget for 1988-1989. One of the medium-term objectives for agriculture in the same region concerns assistance to member nations

in managing scarce natural resources and combating desertification and deterioration of rangelands. In the same context, it is recalled that the Nineteenth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East, held in March 1988, requested FAO to continue its support to the Near East Network on Arid Land, Forest Restoration and Desertification Control and its assistance to countries in the region on watershed management, afforestation, fuelwood production, sand-dune stabilization and conservation and management of forest resources.

6. In conclusion, FAO generally concurs with the four recommendations made in the report and will continue, within the limits of its resources, to strengthen its activities in the region, taking into account these recommendations.

United Nations Environment Programme

7. Recommendations 1 and 2 called for assistance by the United Nations system to the countries of the region in preparing long-term national strategies and short-term policies for the preservation of the cultural and natural heritage and in streamlining and strengthening specialized services in various ministerial departments responsible for the conservation of that heritage. It should be noted that UNEP promotes the formulation and implementation of regional and national conservation strategies for integration into national development plans and assists Governments in that endeavour upon request and subject to the availability of resources.

8. With regard to recommendation 3, which called for major efforts to train larger number of specialists in cultural and natural heritage conservation, UNEP is supporting the establishment of regional training networks in Latin America and the Caribbean, Western Asia, Asia and the Pacific, and Africa, aiming at better co-ordination of environmental training at the tertiary level and the exchange of information and methodologies.

9. Recommendation 4 was concerned with the need to explore new avenues for mobilizing additional funds. UNEP, through its clearing-house facility, relates the needs of developing countries for environmental assistance to available sources of technical and financial co-operation. The establishment of that facility expands the catalytic and co-ordinating role of UNEP in the field of international environmental development co-operation.

10. With respect to paragraphs 37-49 of the report, which covered the UNEP contribution to the project, the comments below refer to particular paragraphs indicated:

(a) The Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS) (paras. 39 and 40: As part of its GEMS programme, UNEP is actively interesting the countries of the region in the utilization of system technology for geographic information to ensure the proper and rational use of its renewable natural resources. That is being undertaken in the context of the GEMS Global Resources Information Database (GRID).

(b) International Referral System for Environmental Information (INFOTERRA) (para. 41): The number of countries that belong to the system has increased from 6 to 12 (Bahrain, Democratic Yemen, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen), all of whom have appointed a national focal point.

(c) International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals (IRPTC) (para. 42): The paragraph was not found to be particularly clear. The problem appears to result, in part, from the tenuous connection between natural resource conservation and a chemical register such as IRPTC. The following text is proposed as an alternative:

"42. The activities of the International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals (IRPTC) are concentrated on the development and maintenance of a computerized database about the potential adverse effects of chemicals on man and the environment. The Register operates through a global network of national correspondents, some of whom are in the Western Asia region. Using its computer resource and international contacts, the programme provides assistance in the form of information, data and technical advice in response to questions. Within the region, that takes place mainly through the national correspondents (designated in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates), although the UNEP Regional Office for Western Asia also plays a significant role in providing assistance."

(d) Paragraph 44: UNEP has assisted three countries (not two, as stated in the report) in preparing national plans of action to combat desertification. They are Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. For Jordan and Yemen, FAO and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia helped UNEP in 1987 (not 1985, as stated) to prepare those plans. UNEP drew up a proposal for the preparation of a plan of action for the environmentally sound management of the Damman Aquifer, which was reviewed in March 1988 by representatives of the Gulf Co-operation Council.

(e) Paragraph 47: UNEP also assisted the Red-Sea and the Gulf of Aden Environment Programme (PERGSA) in the preparation of projects for coastal monitoring and management in Democratic Yemen, Jordan, Somalia and the Sudan. In 1985 UNEP prepared a national programme for marine and coastal area environment management in Democratic Yemen. Specific projects were formulated for inclusion in the national development plan.

11. The report did not address the issue of wildlife and protected areas. It should be kept in mind that UNEP is co-operating with the countries in the region regarding the international aspects of the question of biological diversity, as well as national action conducive to a commitment to the global conservation of biological diversity. UNEP has exercised its catalytic and co-ordinating role in reviewing the status of implementation of the World Conservation Strategy and in the formulation of national conservation strategies by providing continuing secretariat services to the Ecosystem Conservation Group, which consists of UNEP, FAO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the

International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. In view of the massive over-exploitation of wildlife for international trade, UNEP has supported the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) since its entry into force in July 1975. States parties to the Convention at present number 97, one of which (Jordan) is in Western Asia. The United Arab Emirates withdrew from the Convention on 27 January 1988. UNEP provides the CITES secretariat, which provides technical and scientific support and advice relating to the international trade in wildlife. The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals provides a framework for co-ordinated research and conservation measures, such as habitat protection and hunting regulation under regional and/or species-specific agreements. There are 28 States parties to the Convention (none in Western Asia). The secretariat of that Convention is also provided by UNEP.

United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)

12. The report noted that in Western Asia, the United Nations system was involved in implementing a large number of projects in different spheres of natural heritage, conservation and management and environmental protection issues and that a few projects were linked to the restoration and rehabilitation of historical urban centres and monuments. While acknowledging the "unquestionable utility" of those activities, the report concluded that they needed to be strengthened in four areas: strategy, institutions, training and financing.

13. With reference to recommendation 1, Habitat is prepared to provide technical assistance, upon request, to the countries concerned along the lines suggested by the report. However, it should be borne in mind that adopting policies and strategies and limiting the number of priority projects, as suggested by the report, is ultimately the prerogative of the beneficiary countries themselves.

14. The streamlining and strengthening of specialized services in municipal departments, efficient organization, strengthening of resources, and decentralization are ultimately the prerogative of national Governments and the response would vary from country to country. Habitat is prepared to provide technical assistance when requested by the countries of the region. It continues to give high priority to training and would support that recommendation. Habitat views the restoration and preservation of historic monuments and sites in the context of the overall planning, development and management of human settlements. Income generation, employment creation and the improvement of shelter, infrastructure and services through "area revitalization" is one of the important planning principles of this approach.

International Maritime Organization

15. The report called upon the organizations of the United Nations system, inter alia, to give assistance to the countries concerned in such areas as development of natural resources and environmental protection. IMO is pleased to report that it has provided appropriate advice and assistance to the countries of

the region in the areas of maritime safety, prevention and control of pollution from ships and from dumping, and maritime training in response to their requests or in accordance with the decisions and priorities approved by the relevant intergovernmental bodies. In this connection, IMO largely co-operates with UNDP and the UNEP Regional Seas Programme, particularly through the Mediterranean, Kuwait and PERSCA action plans. The recommendations of the report have been noted and will be taken into account by IMO wherever appropriate.