

ASSECAA 10th Retreat ,

Ezulwini, Kingdom of Eswatini

May 11-12, 2023

Summary of Day one(May 11) proceedings

Under the patronage of His Majesty King of Eswatini, the Senate of the Kingdom of Eswatini and the Association of Senates, Shooras and Equivalent Councils in Africa and the Arab World(ASSECAA) organized ASSECAA's 10th Retreat at the Royal Swazi Convention Centre in Ezulwini, Kingdom of Eswatini on May 11-12, 2023 .

The meeting was attended by heads and members of Senates and Shooras councils representing 20 member countries of the association. It was also attended by representatives of regional and international parliamentary organizations and unions, as well as many ambassadors and representatives of diplomatic missions accredited to the Kingdom of Eswatini. Also present were ministers, members of parliament in Eswatini, journalists and media personnel, in addition to Mr. George Washira, the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations.

The Retreat began at 9:30 am in the presence of the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Eswatini, His Excellency Cleopas Siphos Dlamini. The President of the Senate in the Kingdom of Eswatini, Her Excellency Lindiwe Dlamini inaugurated the opening ceremony with a welcome speech, expressing her gratitude to the heads and members of the participating delegations and representatives of local, regional, and international organizations and institutions .

She also highlighted the significant role played by the Association and the historical ties that unite the Arab and African regions .

Following her speech, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Eswatini delivered an important address, in which he welcomed the participants on behalf of the King of Eswatini. He expressed his happiness that Eswatini was chosen to host this important meeting, which discusses carefully selected topics that are closely related to the current challenges facing the world, which have negatively impacted the economies of all countries.

His Excellency Na'am Mayara, Speaker of the House of Councilors of the Kingdom of Morocco , Chairman of ASSECAA, delivered a speech expressing his sincere gratitude and great appreciation to the Kingdom of Eswatini, its government, parliament, and people for the generosity and warm hospitality accorded delegates. He also expressed his happiness for holding this important meeting, highlighting the importance of retreats as they provide an opportunity for leaders of councils to discuss and exchange ideas and visions on various issues related to the roles and tasks of the Association, as well as those related to the regional and international arena. He emphasized the importance of the topics discussed in this meeting as it is held in a tense global and regional context, marked by a range of economic, social, developmental, environmental, and geopolitical challenges that have direct implications on the requirements of decent life for peoples.

Several speeches were also delivered at the meeting, which emphasized the importance of the topics being discussed for all the peoples of Africa and the Arab world, given their significance and relevance, and the fact that they affect the lives of citizens and place

extraordinary burdens on all countries and governments in terms of dealing with, and finding appropriate solutions to them. This is because the challenges being addressed by this meeting are still evolving and have not been definitively tackled yet.

Following the opening session, the first work- paper entitled "The Effects of Multifaceted Global Crises on the Economies of Africa and the Arab World" was presented by Dr. Souleman Bukar. The paper discussed the impact of the global economic crisis on emerging countries, particularly the overall economic and social effects on African and Arab countries. It pointed out that while governments around the world are working towards a gradual recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis in Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, imposes additional challenges on emerging economies and countries' efforts to recover from the health crisis and then get back in the right path to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs) by 2030.

The paper also highlighted that the pandemic has forced governments to reduce budgets allocated to education, infrastructure, and other capital expenditures. The consequences of the recent shocks (especially the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic) have accelerated the process of structural changes in the global system. The significant risks in the short term lead to the entrenchment of structural changes in the economic and geopolitical landscape, which increases the risk of other global threats that we will face over the next ten years.

The paper focused on the current crises and their effects on the economies of Africa and the Arab world, including the energy supply crisis, the cost of living crisis, inflation rates, economic contraction, geo-economic warfare, the gap in climate change mitigation, and the exacerbation of social division. The most dangerous risks in the short term are introducing structural changes to the economic and geopolitical landscape that will accelerate other global threats we will face over the next ten years.

Regarding the effects of the current economic crisis and its impact on the economies of Africa and the Arab world, **the paper arrives at the following conclusions:**

-The global economic crisis and current geopolitical tensions and instability have had a negative impact on African and Arab countries, particularly through the following :

-The global crisis has led to economic slowdown and exacerbated the already difficult economic conditions in Africa and Arab countries.

-The rise in energy prices and inflation has also affected these regions, leading to increased production and living costs.

-This has led to greater constraints on economic growth, resulting in increased unemployment rates, budget deficits, and rising debt.

-Increased interest rates have also contributed to economic slowdown in these regions.

The paper also highlights the response to the global crisis in African and Arab countries as follows:

-African and Arab countries implemented various policy measures such as monetary and fiscal policies to alleviate the impact of the crisis.

-Stimulus packages were implemented to support businesses and affected households.

-Austerity measures were taken to reduce budget deficits and debt levels.

-Economies were diversified away from commodity exports.

-Investments were made in other sectors such as technology and renewable energy to promote sustainable economic growth and development.

Regarding measures that Africa and Arab countries can implement to address the effects of the global crisis, the paper suggests that in the context of the current global economic crisis, there are many efforts that can be explored further to promote sustainable economic growth and development in sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East. These efforts include :

economic diversification, infrastructure development, human capital development, regional integration, entrepreneurship , innovation, and sustainable development. By prioritizing these initiatives, policymakers can help alleviate the impact of the current global economic crisis and promote sustainable economic growth and development.

Specifically, Africa and Arab countries can implement the following measures to address the effects of the global crisis:

-Economic diversification: Diversifying their economies away from traditional commodity exports and investing in other sectors such as technology, renewable energy, and tourism.

-Infrastructure development: Investment in infrastructure development such as transportation, energy, and communication can reduce the cost of doing business, attract foreign investment, and promote regional integration.

-Human capital development: Investment in education, health, and skill development can create a skilled workforce that can drive economic growth and development.

-Regional integration :

Promoting regional integration through trade agreements, regulatory alignment, and the creation of regional economic blocs.

-Entrepreneurship and innovation :

Encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation can create new businesses and industries, leading to economic growth and sustainable development.

Regarding global development challenges, the paper identifies some of these challenges, including:

-Slow structural transformation and limited economic diversification

-Declining human capital (high poverty, inequality, and unemployment rates)

-Poor Governance

-Climate change issues

Summary of Participants' Contributions:

The participants at this meeting made many important interventions and emphasized the crucial importance of discussing such topics. They highlighted the need for more effective measures and actions to address the serious consequences of these crises on the economies,

food, and energy. They confirmed that food security issues should be a top priority on the legislative agendas of African and Arab councils .

The discussions concluded with the following:

-These topics are of top priority for the Arab and African regions and require the concerted efforts of all to revive the economies of these countries. -Parliaments are the only institutions capable of leading these efforts and promoting them towards finding appropriate legislation to address these challenges. -Through organized cooperation, parliaments can formulate strategies that will provide the necessary solutions to common challenges.

-The global economy has been largely shaken by successive and interconnected crises .

-The world as a whole has suffered from the negative repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic .

-Geopolitical conflicts and their repercussions on markets, raw materials, and energy have further complicated and weakened economies. Meanwhile, the world has been increasingly witnessing the pressures of climate threats on human life and resources. All of this has made economic challenges more difficult and complex than ever before, particularly in the African and Arab regions.

-The impact of economic crises can be summarized through three main channels. Firstly, the rise in prices of primary commodities such as food and energy, which pushed inflation even higher, leading to the erosion of income values and weakening demand. Secondly, countries' economies were affected as they struggled with trade and supply chain disruptions, and remittance flows from overseas workers. Thirdly, there was a decline in business confidence and an increase in investor uncertainty, leading to low asset prices, tighter financial conditions, and possibly even prompting capital outflows from emerging markets.

It can be said that the main features of the global economy in the period 2022-2023 that have led to expectations of slow economic recovery have to do with three main factors- continuing supply chain bottlenecks, rising global inflation rates, and the deepening debt crisis. Recently, the crisis of banking risks and the bankruptcy of some banks due to high interest rates have also emerged.

It is clear that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening and moving towards further instability, exacerbated by global inflation and rising debt, which has affected the ability of many countries to respond to and recover from these crises.

Regarding Africa and the Arab world, there is no doubt that the two regions are not isolated from the crises and conflicts that have occurred; rather,, they have been greatly affected, though to varying degrees and in multiple ways. This has greatly impacted their political, economic, and social conditions, as well as their plans and trajectories for sustainable development. Thus, many countries in Africa and the Arab world have been impacted by global crises and have not been able to distance themselves from them. They have entered into a maze of liquidity shortages, inflation rates, and deepening debt burdens, not to mention the growing challenges of food scarcity and climate change. As a result, their economic growth rates have slowed down significantly.

The economic performance of Arab and African countries in the past three years has been noticeably affected by these successive crises , the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic

and the Russian-Ukrainian war. This has led to a sharp decrease in economic activity, affecting many sectors such as tourism, transportation, and trade. This in turn has resulted in a significant decrease in gross domestic product, an increase in unemployment rates, and a significant increase in public budget deficits and public debt. Moreover, global food price increases and deepening poverty have had direct effects on the financial and banking sectors, and indirect effects in the form of economic slowdowns in the two regions.

Today, African and Arab countries face unprecedented challenges that are complicated by international and regional conditions. These challenges are primarily related to food security, the environment, climate change, and the resulting financial crises, which hinder development and waste material and immaterial wealth. This requires everyone to address the root causes of these challenges and deal with them more rationally in order to find immediate solutions that aim to establish new practices that keep up with the global trend and cope with multiple crises with the aim of safeguarding the rights of future generations and saving the future of our world.

In addition to the economic challenges, both regions also face an environmental crisis where climate change is causing harsh weather conditions such as heat waves, floods, and droughts that affect communities around the world. The loss of biodiversity also threatens the ecosystems that are necessary for human existence. This crisis is not just an environmental problem but also a social and economic one, affecting the well-being of communities, business productivity, and economic stability.

The traditional economic model is no longer able to withstand these complex and difficult challenges or keep up with the rapidly changing trends in a world that is highly complex and uncertain. Therefore, parliamentarians representing Arab and African nations have a high level of responsibility and face a challenging task of turning these complex and difficult challenges into opportunities for success and development. This can only be achieved by supporting common economic cooperation pathways between the African and Arab regions, creating an enabling environment for open, flexible, sustainable, just, and transparent economic and investment growth, adopting a participatory development approach to generate investment opportunities in new economic sectors, supporting supply chains, and movement of goods, services, and talents across borders, adopting innovation, modern technology, and digitization, building capacity, and transferring knowledge and good practices to accelerate economic recovery, improving the quality, and well-being of our Arab and African nations.

Some suggestions put forward by participants for parliamentarians include the need to strengthen parliamentary, political, and economic relationships and alliances to build nations within the framework of positive diplomatic relations that contribute to achieving sustainable development goals. It is also important for parliamentarians to make greater joint efforts to crystallize visions, pathways, and strategies that enable the economies of Arab and African countries to overcome the multifaceted effects of international crises. Furthermore, there is a need to support common economic cooperation pathways between the two regions, which can generate sustainable and flexible economic and investment growth characterized by openness, flexibility, sustainability, justice, and transparency .

Adopting a participatory development approach can help create investment opportunities in new economic sectors and support the movement of goods, services, and talents across borders. Innovation, modern technology, and digitization should also be embraced to accelerate economic recovery and promote sustainable development .

Finally, building capacity and transferring knowledge and good practices will be essential for addressing the challenges facing the Arab and African regions, improving the quality of life for their people and ensuring their economic and social well-being.

Regarding the challenges facing the world and the successive economic crises and their effects on the Arab and African regions, we should not surrender to the current circumstances but rather work together to find appropriate solutions to confront these crises.

The nature of the current stage requires parliamentarians in Africa and the Arab world to play a greater role in harnessing capabilities and resources to drive the economies of the Arab and African regions forward in order to meet these challenges. This is particularly important with the emergence of countries in the Middle East and North Africa as rising powers that rely on digital technology, creativity, innovation, resource technology, and artificial intelligence. This progress and development can be integrated with the diverse natural resources and food production capabilities that African countries possess .

Additionally, it is essential to harness the resources and knowledge possessed by the Arab and African regions to create new forms of modernity that promote trade and human development.