Developing Cyber Legislation to Promote Arab Knowledge Society

ESCWA, in collaboration with the League of Arab States (LAS), organized a workshop on "Developing and Harmonizing Cyber Legislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab Region". The workshop, held in Cairo 14-15 March, brought together legal experts, judges, lawyers and delegates from Arab justice ministries, particularly those involved in creating national laws related to cyberspace and to Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Participants also included representatives of government authorities and agencies involved in ICT field as well as non-governmental organizations.

Chief of ESCWA ICT Applications Section, Nibal Idlebi, delivered a statement on behalf of the Commission, saying the unfolding ICT revolution is evidenced by the growing number of Internet users and the proliferation of ICT applications and electronic services in various fields. Nonetheless, the enabling and legal environment in the Arab region still falls short and is characterized by limited use of e-services and investments in the ICT domain. Hence comes the interest of ESCWA in the field of cyber legislation in order to develop a legal and regulatory environment for building the information society while mirroring other experiences, such as that of the European Union and Southeast Asia. Idlebi said the workshop falls within the framework of "Regional Harmonization of Cyber Legislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab World," a project funded by the UN Development Account and currently implemented by ESCWA. The project aims at developing a set of directives and model laws for cyberspace to be used and adopted by Arab countries as well as contributing to capacity building in ESCWA member countries in the development and harmonization of cyber legislation.

LAS representative Ehab Makram emphasized the importance of activities undertaken by ESCWA and acknowledged all efforts exerted to make the workshop a success. He skated over regional activities undertaken by the LAS Legal Department in the context of cyber legislation, calling them central for the provision of an enabling environment that facilitates growth of the ICT sector, promoting the development and use of electronic services, building user confidence, and thus accelerating the move towards a knowledge-based society in the Arab region.

The workshop mainly focused on "ESCWA Directives for Cyber Legislation." which are a tool that supports Arab countries in developing their cyber laws while ensuring harmonization at the regional level. They cover six areas: e-communication and freedom of expression; personal data protection; cyber crimes; e-signature and e-transactions; e-commerce and consumer protection; and intellectual property in the cyber domain.

ESCWA consultant in the development and drafting of the directives, Wassim Harb, moderated the training and explained the methodology adopted, which includes extensive research of the most important experiences and of regional and international references. In addition to Harb, experts presented case studies, practical examples, legal verdicts and means to apply the directives on the national level. LAS Legal Department also contributed a paper on intellectual property on the Internet and in cyberspace.

Discussions revolved around the role of governments at the national level, regional cooperation ↵

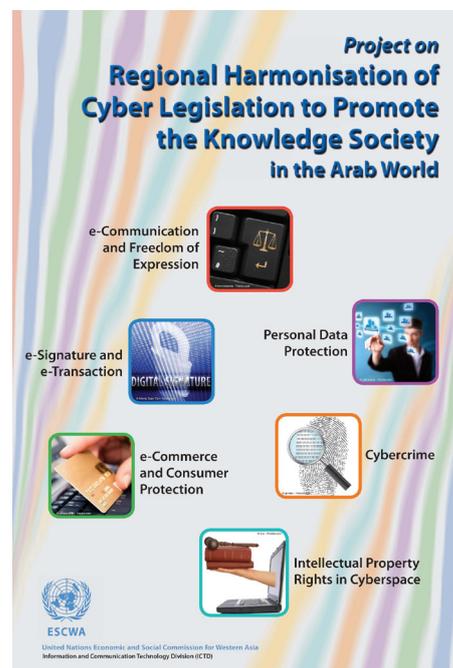# Training on Databases for Gender Analysis

Acting on a recommendation from a meeting of the inter-agency and expert group on Gender Statistics in Arab Countries, held in Beirut in 2009, to improve national capacities in the production and dissemination of gender statistics, ESCWA, UNICEF and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) organized the "Eighth Regional Training on DevInfo for Gender Analysis" on 5-9 March in Beirut.

The DevInfo software is a powerful database system for monitoring human development. It is a tool for organizing, storing and presenting data in a uniform way to facilitate data sharing at the country level across government departments, UN agencies and development partners. The software has features that produce tables, graphs and maps for inclusion in reports, presentations and advocacy materials. DevInfo is compliant with international statistical standards to support open access and widespread data exchange and operates both as a desktop application as well as on the web, so it can be accessed from anywhere.

The workshop aimed at training gender focal points on becoming proficient in developing databases for gender statistics, improving gender analysis, coordinating and disseminating gender indicators. The five-day workshop drew together 33 participants representing nine UN agencies and national statistical offices, women machineries and gender focal points from various ministries in 11 Arab countries.

Participants were trained on the design of databases, templates, metadata entry, and administration and customization of databases on the DevInfo platform. They were provided with necessary tools and knowledge to make gender statistics available and accessible to a wide range of stakeholders through future development of web-based gender databases. ■

Cyber Legislation Workshop (Cont.)

and integration in the field of cyber legislation, the importance of capacity building and awareness-raising, training for various stakeholders on formulating national laws, and the needs and requirements for improving legislative processes in the Arab region.

The workshop included 38 participants representing 14 Arab countries, as well as international and regional organizations. It came in the framework of a recommendation made by the Council of Arab Ministers of Justice at its 27th session to maintain cooperation between the Executive Bureau of the Council and ESCWA on legal matters for developing and harmonizing cyber legislation in the region.

For more information, you can visit the workshop's URL:

http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1785E ■