

For Immediate Release



## **AUB panel on climate change assesses recent Durban summit**

Beirut, Lebanon- 22/12/2011 - The Climate Change and Environment in the Arab Region and the United Nations in the Arab World Programs at the AUB Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs organized a panel discussion entitled: "Was There Any Progress at the United Nations Climate Change Negotiations in Durban?"

The discussion which took place at AUB on December 20, 2011, was moderated by international politics professor Karim Makdisi who is also IFI's associate director. After Makdisi's overview of the Road to Durban starting from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Ibrahim Abdel Gelil, professor of the Academic Chair of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahayan and director of the Environmental Management Program at Arabian Gulf University (Bahrain), started the discussion.

Abdel Gelil, presented the Arab countries' positions in climate diplomacy especially since the "Arab region is one of the world's most vulnerable regions to the potential impacts of climate change."

In particular, Abdel Gelil highlighted the Gulf Cooperation Countries' "oil-driven climate position" which in his opinion is related to the national economy of each country with the United Arab Emirates adopting the "softest role" in the negotiations due to the country's high investment in renewable energy while other more oil dependant countries like Saudi Arabia adopted "an oil driven strategy of slowing down the process."

"Egypt's mediating role" according to Abdel Gelil is driven by its more vulnerable position to the threats of climate change.

Abdel Gelil considered the agreement in Durban by all major carbon emitters including China, India and the United States of America to have a legally binding emission reduction commitment as a "breakthrough." According to Abdel Gelil, the outcomes reached at Durban have given the climate change negotiations a new momentum, a lifeline for the global carbon market and a big push to switching to a green economy.

Habib Maalouf, president of the Lebanese Environment Party and environmental columnist for the *As-Safir* Lebanese daily, was not as optimistic with regards to the impact of the Durban outcomes. According to Maalouf, the ease with which a country can withdraw from the international agreements, citing Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol only a few days after the Durban agreement, indicates how such results may not be positively reflected. Maalouf went further to state that "postponing reaching a legally binding agreement till 2020 is not an achievement" as many are stating. On Lebanon's environmental issues, Maalouf brought up the new gas

exploration plans, stating that such plans are an indicator that the country is not planning on developing its renewable energy production. Maalouf concluded by noting that that next year's Conference of the Parties hosted by Qatar can only reap positive results for Arab countries, if these countries would present a common initiative during the conference.

**Vahakn Kabakian**, head of the Lebanese delegation negotiating in Durban and climate change advisor to the office of the Minister of Environment (MoE), gave an overview of the Lebanese position during the negotiations that took place in Durban. Kabakian explained the importance for Lebanon to have "a balance between mitigation and adaptation." Accordingly, the Lebanese delegation based their position on three main pillars which included "mitigation, adaptation and shared vision." Kabakian highlighted that Lebanon is also taking on its share of commitments to contribute to mitigation measures such as its commitment during the Copenhagen conference to a national 12 percent target of renewable energy production by 2020.

The audience that included representatives from the public sector, civil society, media and AUB students and faculty contributed too the discussion that focused on issues such as Lebanon's role in the climate change negotiations in particular if it was vocal enough during the Durban negotiations, Lebanon's new gas exploration plans and its implication on its 12 percent renewable energy production commitment at Copenhagen, and the effectiveness of the multilateral system represented in the UN.

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Note to Editors

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