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PRESS RELEASE

ARAB FINANCIAL INCLUSION DAY APRIL 27 2018

THE COUNCIL OF ARAB CENTRAL BANKS AND MONETARY AUTHORITIES' GOVERNORS CALLS TO EXPAND ACCESS TO FINANCE AND PROMOTE AFFORDABLE FINANCIAL SERVICES FOR YOUNG POPULATION AND ENTREPRENEURS IN THE ARAB REGION

Recognizing the vital role of financial inclusion in strengthening financial stability and promoting sustainable development and social well-being, the Council of Arab Central Banks and Monetary Authorities' Governors, is giving particular attention to the promotion of financial inclusion in the Arab countries. In this regard, and in view of the growing need to sensitize all Arab actors on the importance of financial inclusion, the Council welcomed in 2016 the 27th of April as the Arab Day of Financial Inclusion, celebrated this year under the overarching theme of ***"Promoting young people's and entrepreneurs' access to financial services"***.

In this context, the Council welcomes the measures taken by Arab countries to promote financial inclusion and reaffirms the need to integrate all segments of society into the formal financial system, especially young people, women and entrepreneurs. To this end, it is necessary to improve their access to appropriate financial services and products matching their needs, at an appropriate cost and under reasonable conditions, to protect their rights and to raise their awareness of financial issues in order to enable them to make the right decision on the use of financial and investment instruments.

In addition, the Council underlines the role of Central Banks, Monetary Authorities and other financial sector regulators in the Arab countries in promoting financial inclusion. Indeed, they are called upon to (i) develop appropriate regulatory framework aimed at promoting financial services, (ii) develop payment systems and credit information services, (iii) identify gaps and constraints on supply and demand sides and take the necessary measures to address them, and (iv) encourage the private sector to contribute to awareness raising and financial education in order to build capacity among all community actors.

Furthermore, the Council welcomes several efforts undertaken in cooperation with the relevant regional and international institutions to promote financial inclusion in the Arab region. These efforts have recently led to the establishment by the Arab Monetary Fund, under the auspices of the Council and in cooperation with regional and international institutions of the Financial Inclusion for the Arab Region Initiative (FIARI), with the objective of building capacity and overcoming obstacles to improving financial inclusion indicators in Arab countries.

The initiative comprises a multitude of activities that focus on supporting young people, women's financial empowerment and newly created businesses and entrepreneurs, while providing technical assistance to develop national strategies and policies in the area of financial inclusion.

On this occasion, the Council calls on regional and international institutions to strengthen their cooperation and coordinate their actions within the framework of FIARI initiative, as a mean to support the efforts of the authorities in the Arab countries. The Council also stresses the importance of taking specific measures to raise financial inclusion by encouraging innovation in the financial sector, launching specific initiatives for each segment of the population, including young people and women, with a view to reducing gender inequality and strengthening the regulatory environment for the protection of consumers of financial services and products.

In order to achieve the objectives of national financial inclusion strategies and to find appropriate solutions to main issues, the Council reaffirms the importance of continuing to work towards the development of modern infrastructure, enhancing the legal and regulatory framework as needed, and encouraging innovative financial products and services that meet the needs of the targeted market segments.

Finally, the Council calls all member countries to celebrate the Arab Day of Financial Inclusion through the implementation of dedicated awareness activities to promote and highlight the importance of financial inclusion. The Council hopes that the planned events of this Day will be successful and that the objectives related to the promotion of youth and women entrepreneurship and start-ups will be reached.