

# EQUALITY FIRST

Promoting a common agenda for equality between women and men through  
Istanbul Process

Workshop

“Equality First: Women’s Rights and Democracy Building”

7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> December 2011 Beirut

## CONCLUSIONS

Representatives from women’s rights networks, coalitions and organisations from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Spain, Jordan, Algeria, France, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Sweden gathered in Beirut on 7<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> December 2011 at the workshop “*Equality First: Women’s Rights and Democracy Building*” organized by RDFL, Association Najdeh and European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI to share perspectives and expertise on Istanbul Framework of Action in order to contribute to the raising of the awareness and increasing of the capacity of women’s NGOs to lobby and advocate for its implementation by the governments. The workshop was supported by the European Union and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty, as part of the regional project “*Promoting a Common Agenda for Equality between Women and Men through Istanbul Process*” funded by the European Union.

1. The workshop is a decisive step of the process that these NGOs and networks are building together to invest in the Euro-Mediterranean political space with the values of equality between men and women and the demand for the recognition and implementation of basic rights to full citizenship and gender equality. The vitality of the connections and the similarity of the analyses structured by the universality of women’s human rights, while recognizing the specificities of the different contexts, allowed the participants to develop a strong common speech.

2. The participants underlined the importance of the common framework for action, known as Istanbul Framework for Action (IFA), adopted by the Euro-Med Ministerial Conference in Istanbul 2006 and its follow up Ministerial Conference in Marrakech 2009, as the first common political document agreed upon and signed by all the States in the Euro-Med Region themselves with which the Euro-Med governments have indicated commitment to work for universal women’s rights and gender equality. The participants also pointed out their will to use it as a common tool together with CEDAW and the other international conventions related to women’s rights, to promote women’s rights, in connection with the on-going fight for non-discrimination and equality.

3. The workshop affirmed that CEDAW is not a foreign body and questioned the limited understanding in Europe that presents it as a tool that mainly concerns the South. They

condemned the slur of CEDAW in the Arab world as a "Western invention against the national and family values".

4. The workshop strengthened the common discourse on using IFA in connection with the international conventions in a context of uprisings for democracy and political transformations in the Arab countries and deep political and economical crises in the European ones.

5. The participants expressed the determination to act together concretely and quickly recognizing the urgency of the situation and the severe backlashes, threats and sufferings that women are facing. They affirmed the will to support the struggle of the Arab women for civil Constitutions and legislations that ensure full equality between women and men. All unanimously agreed to conclude that there will not be "Arab spring" if women and women's rights are excluded from the transformation processes.

6. The workshop questioned the European Neighbourhood Policy and the lack of monitoring and implementation of the human rights, even less of women's rights, in the partnership agreements between Europe and the Southern countries and agreed that knowledge and awareness, lobby and advocacy towards EU should be sharpened by the rights-based NGOs in the Euro-Med regions.

7. The classical concepts of democracy and citizenship were critically re-examined and questioned, wherewith freedom, dignity, physical and psychological integrity, access to resources, health, education and power of decision on their own bodies and lives were posed as fundamental principles of democracy. Without the respect of these principles women will remain second rank citizens and equality cannot be achieved without the full implementation of women's rights.

8. Religious fundamentalisms are a major threat to women's rights and freedoms. As long as religions interfere in the political and public sphere, the word "moderate" to describe them is deprived of meaning.

9. No positive change for women can ever happen without the mobilisation and the organization of women themselves. Therefore the participants reaffirmed the will to make the Istanbul Framework of Action known and lobby their respective governments for its implementation. But also in the process to work together in order to mutually enrich their analyses and contribute to filling the gap between formal rights, laws, declarations, resolutions and reality of women's lives.

10. Many challenges were identified in the recent context: the lack of political will, the lack of commitment of the governments, the pressure of the political context where conservative trends, ultraliberal policies, religious fundamentalisms and militarism are joining their forces to carry on the subordination of women, including physical attacks on the ones who are fighting against it.

11. Important challenge to be faced is the development and sustaining of this common process by the participants themselves and the ability to link it with the daily work on the ground for the preservation of the basic rights of women.

12. The success of the process "*Equality First*" will depend on the capacity to sustain it, to spread it and to make it appropriated by our organisations, coalitions and networks.

13. The process "*Equality First*" and the whole discourse need also to be made known out of the circle of our respective organisations. It needs to be spread further and attract the diverse components of the democratic movement in our respective countries. This means to invest in these movements with our feminist analyses as a driving element of any social transformation.

22<sup>nd</sup> December 2011

Beirut