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PRESS RELEASE

EURO-MED WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONFERENCE

FROM THE UFM MINISTERIAL CONCLUSIONS TO GENDER EQUALITY POLICY MAKING IN THE EURO-MED REGION

The Euro-Med Women's Rights Conference "*From the UfM Ministerial Conclusions to Gender Equality Policy Making in the Euro-Med Region*" took place on 28-29 November 2016 in hotel Crowne Plaza Beirut. It was organized by Euromed Feminist Initiative in the frame of the process *Gender Regional Platform* supported by the European Union. This process aims to contextualize the implementation of the UfM Ministerial Conclusions on women's rights (Paris 2013) in the on-going challenges in the region, to enhance regional cross sector co-operation through policy dialogue as well as exchange of best practices with existing networks and stakeholders in the Southern Neighborhood. This process involved over 600 representatives from women's rights CSOs, CBOs, gender experts, academics and researchers came together, and decision makers and legislators in 6 national and 2 regional dialogues to analyze the changing context since the last Paris Ministerial Conference 2013, to discuss gender equality policy making and agree on national and regional priorities in the current context, in order to prepare concrete policy recommendations to the upcoming 4th UfM Ministerial Conference in 2017.

The Euro-Med Women's Rights Conference discussed and finalized the *Gender Regional Platform* with policy recommendations accumulated through the dialogue process and created favorable conditions for a common work towards follow up and monitoring the implementation of the Ministerial Conclusions in the areas of discrimination against women and women's participation and role in political and economic life, education, violence against women and ensuring freedom and independence of civil society. It was attended by over 100 participants from 22 countries from the Euro-Med Region. Representatives from civil society, media and academia, were joined by Ministers and representatives from ministries involved in the Ministerial Process, decision makers and political actors, as well as the European Commission, the European External Action Service and UfM.

H.E. Ms. Alice Chaptini, Minister for Displaced Persons Lebanon, welcomed the conference participants to Lebanon and expressed her and her ministry commitment to women's rights and empowerment of women especially in the present context of numerous challenges for people of the whole region.

Mr. Jose-Luis Vinuesa-Santamaria, Head of Sustainable Development Section at the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon forwarded the address of Ms. Irène Mingasson Head of Unit DG NEAR B/2 Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations-Regional Programmes Neighbourhood South, who emphasized that gender equality is a founding value of the EU and acknowledged the value of the participatory process undertaken by Euromed Feminist Initiative that led to this conference, as well in the formulation of policy recommendations.

Mr. Azaizeh, Minister of Social Development Jordan, underlined that the increased violence and extremism that characterizes the present context affects women the most because it forced many to return home and abandon their workplaces. Therefore he emphasized, “We need to study carefully the situation in order to fight it to restore women’s rights in the area”.

Ms. Lilian Halls French, co-president of the Euromed Feminist Initiative, called for strong policy recommendations to support gender equality policies to be adopted at the ministerial meeting of next year and underlined the need to develop stronger international solidarity to lobby against discriminatory laws and violations against women in general.

In her address to the conference sent via video, Ms. Néziha Labidi, Minister of Women’s Affairs, Family and Children, Republic of Tunisia underlined that elimination of all forms of violence against women is among the priorities for the ministry and stressed the importance of having a comprehensive and participatory approach to fighting violence against women as new data shows the increase of violence in Tunisia. She greeted the participants and expressed her commitment to continue the cooperation with the civil society.

Minister of Political and Parliamentary Affairs and Minister of State of Jordan, Mr. Maaytah discussed social barriers that hinders women’s progress and emphasized that “social development depends on women’s empowerment and education as a whole”.

Boriana Jönsson, executive director of Euromed Feminist Initiative, underlined that the conference is a strong contribution to the whole dialogue process of the civil society with decision makers on how to translate the Ministerial Conclusions into policy action and how to make next year’s ministerial meeting focus on concrete measures by the governments, using lessons learned and sharing of best practices in the region through this process.

Member of Parliament of Croatia, former first deputy of the Prime Minister and former minister of foreign and European affairs Ms. Vesna Pusic said that implementation of the human rights of women and gender equality is a gain for the whole society.

The conference highlighted once more that a dialogue with decision makers and legislators, initiated by the civil society and in particular by women’s rights organizations, is crucial for creating policies that address gender gaps and discrimination. The Gender Regional Platform with final policy recommendations for the 4th UfM Ministerial Conference on women’s rights will be transmitted to all relevant ministries of the 43 countries of the UfM together with the report from the conference. This document will also be sent to the secretariat of UfM.