



European Union

Gender Regional Platform



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### Press release

## **In Cairo, Euro-Med Civil Society Conference Issues Recommendations on Gender Equality Policy Making to the 4<sup>th</sup> UfM Ministerial Conference on Women's Rights**

The Euro-Med Women's Rights Civil Society Conference took place on 22-23 November 2017 in Cairo, organized by the Euromed Feminist Initiative with the support of the European Union (EU). The Conference gathered over 130 representatives from 107 women's rights and human rights civil society organizations (CSOs) and networks, as well as gender experts, academia and media from 26 countries.

The Civil Society Conference was the final act of the women's rights CSOs-led policy dialogue, initiated by the Euromed Feminist Initiative since 2015, which developed a Gender Regional Platform with policy recommendations to the 4<sup>th</sup> Union for Mediterranean (UfM) Ministerial Conference. As part of this process, the Conference aimed to foster, widen and sustain this regional dialogue on gender equality and to issue a Declaration to the Ministers of the 43 countries of UfM.

At opening panel, Ms. Leila Al Ali, Co-President of Euromed Feminist Initiative, underlined the importance of the gathering in the present context of shrinking of the space of the civil society. She greeted the Conference stating that, "The experience has shown that no achievement for women's rights has ever been reached without the involvement of women themselves and the action of Women's Rights Organizations."

Ambassador Ivan Surkoš, Head of the EU Delegation to Egypt, reiterated in his opening remarks the commitment of the EU towards women's rights in the region. "This commitment to gender equality is also rooted in the EU at different levels as a founding value", Surkoš said. "Our key priority is to promote the role of a proactive civil society in advancing women's status and in contributing to sustainable and inclusive development", Surkoš added.

In her welcoming remarks, Dr. Maya Morsi, the President of the National Council for Women in Egypt underlined the involvement of the women's movement in Egypt in the developing of the National Strategy. "The government and civil society joined hands to implement the Strategy together and we are hopeful that it will play an important role towards gender equality in Egypt", Dr. Morsi stressed.

The Minister of Social Development of Jordan, Ms. Hala Lattouf, reminded all participants that armed conflicts and extremism are major challenges for the advancement of gender equality in the region. "The conflicts in our area resulted in a huge influx of refugees in the region, which affects us socially and economically," Minister Lattouf underlined in her speech to the conference delivered on her behalf by Dr. Ahmad Abu Haidar, Director of Policies and Strategies at the MoSD Jordan. Dr Haidar also emphasized the important role of Jordan in this process, Jordan being a Co-Chair of UfM together with the European Union.



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The keynote was delivered during the first session by Ambassador Mervat Tallawy, Director of the Arab Women's Organization in Egypt, who reminded that, "The sectarian wars in the region have dragged women's rights backwards and stripped them from a lot of the gains they have made over the years", while the Co-President of Euromed Feminist Initiative, Ms. Lilian Halls-French highlighted the indispensable role of the civil society in general and the women's movement in particular, in counteracting this regression. "We need to strongly support the independence of women's rights CSOs and the civil society by respective governments in the region," she stressed. In this regard, Mr. Diego Escalona, Head of the Cooperation at the EU Delegation to Egypt, emphasized during the second day of the conference that, "The EU utilises different cooperation instruments, including funding, for directly supporting CSOs in implementing projects and initiatives in fields of gender equality". He added that EU bilateral commitments specifically targeting gender aspects and women and girls' empowerment in Egypt currently exceed EUR 20 million.

The participants worked in 2 days to prioritize most urgent actions and policies to be taken by the Ministers, before the next UfM Ministerial Meeting, in the areas identified by the Ministerial Process. They summarized their recommendations according to the expertise and experiences on the ground and issued a Declaration to the Ministers.

"This Declaration and the Gender Regional Platform will remain the roadmap for the women's rights organisations to continue their independent dialogue with the decision makers in order to contribute to improving of the status of women's rights in the region," Boriana Jonsson, Executive Director of the Euromed Feminist Initiative stated during the concluding session. She added that "These recommendations remain a tool in the hands of the civil society, together with other international women's rights mechanisms to continue our work towards gender equality and women's rights in the whole region".

Executive Director of Euromed Feminist Initiative Boriana Jonsson and Co-President of Euromed Feminist Initiative Leila Al Ali presented the Civil Society Declaration to the Ministers during their Ministerial Meeting on November 27 in Cairo.

"The Euromed Feminist Initiative has followed the UfM Ministerial Process on women's rights since their first Ministerial Conference in 2016 in Istanbul, and has since then used the Ministerial Conclusions as a major regional tool for mobilizing the civil society, supporting the accumulation of political will for the promotion and implementation of women's rights and gender equality across the Euro-Med Region.

To this end, Euromed Feminist Initiative launched a policy dialogue in 2015, led by women's rights CSOs, with the support of the European Union, that brought together over 600 representatives from women's rights CSOs, CBOs, gender experts, academics and researchers with decision makers and legislators. The outcome of this dialogue process is the Gender Regional Platform with concrete policy recommendations to the 4th UfM Ministerial Meeting which were taken into consideration in the UfM Cairo Ministerial Declaration.