

# EQUALITY FIRST

## Promoting a Common Agenda for Equality between Women and Men through Istanbul Process

### STATEMENT

From the workshop "Equality First: Women's rights and democracy building" held on 7th - 8th December 2011 in Beirut, Lebanon

The Euro-Med workshop "*Equality First: Women's rights and democracy building*" organized by Association Najdeh, RDFL and European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI on 7th - 8th December 2011 Riviera Hotel, Beirut gathered activists from women's rights advocacy organizations from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, France, Spain and Sweden and regional feminist networks and coalitions from Mashrek, Maghreb and Europe. The participants discussed, shared analyses, perspectives and expertise on Istanbul Framework of Action and the Istanbul Marrakesh Process, in order to contribute to increasing the awareness and 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.

#### **The participants agreed unanimously on the following:**

In the present context of uprisings for democracy in the Arab world and deep economic and political crises in Europe women's rights have been first to be attacked, abused and neglected, independently of the central role women are playing in the movements against tyranny and theocratic regimes, for freedom and dignity. In the Arab uprisings women were excluded from the transitional structures and decision making processes; in Europe women are the first victims

of the economic crises. In the whole Euro-Med region women are most exposed to poverty and marginalization.

In the present context that is not conducive for gender equality, we remind that women are not a social category but half of the population of the world and no transformational process can be legitimate if women are not full integral part of it. The raising religious fundamentalisms in the whole Euro-Med region threaten women's rights: equality between women and men has been left behind by the conservative regimes. But it does not reach the top of democratic movements' agendas either. Women are paying the highest price of the economic crisis and of the occupations and wars launched in the name of democracy and even in their name.

**The workshop therefore stated:**

1. Their full solidarity with all the women and men who continue to the fight for our dignity and freedom. There will be no "Arab Spring" if the women's rights are not acknowledged as central and are excluded in the transitional processes towards democracy. They refuse to replace one oppressive regime with another, in the name of democracy;
2. There will be no democracy in any country of the Euro-Med region without addressing equality between women and men as a political priority;
3. Human rights are for all human beings. The women's rights are universal human rights: they shape the daily lives of women and their violation is an abuse against women's integrity and sovereignty;
4. The principle of secularism is a necessary condition for achieving equality and women's rights, as well as a space for accommodation and respect of diversities. It should be a structuring principle for all Constitutions together with the principle of non-discrimination and equality between women and men;
5. Istanbul Framework of Action, together with the international conventions and resolutions promoting women's rights and equality between women and men are results of the struggle of the international women's movements for social justice and democracy and against patriarchy. They remain today major political tools, binding member States who have signed them, to

activate them and harmonize the national legislations with the international standards they promote. They remain today major political tools for change in the hands of the feminist and women's movements in the Euro-Med region;

6. Reject political, economic and financial systems in which the driving force is the profit for a small minority on the expenses of the large majority of the population;
7. The EU partnerships must be based on the principle of full respect of fundamental human rights of women and men and no enhanced status must be agreed upon with any Southern Neighbor State where these rights are violated;
8. Refuse military rules, interventions and wars as ways to "install" democracy and solve conflicts;
9. All forms of violence, including acts of sexual violence against women during the present uprisings should be condemned by the international community as crime and punished as such;
10. Just peace in the region can only be achieved by the recognition of an independent and sovereign Palestine State on the occupied territories of 1967 war with East Jerusalem as its capital, the recognition and implementation of the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their home land based on the UN resolution 194.

22<sup>nd</sup> December 2011

Beirut