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EuroMed Feminist Initiative
المبادرة النسوية الأورومتوسطية
Initiative Féministe EuroMed



Civil Society Consultation – Syrian Crisis

Developing Guidelines for Implementation of Women, Peace and Security Agenda

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EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI) and the Coalition of Syrian Women for Democracy (CSWD) held a civil society consultation on 9th - 10th March 2020 in Beirut on developing guidelines for implementation of Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPSA) in the South Mediterranean, with particular focus on the Syrian crises. The meeting was jointly supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the European Union (EU). It offered a platform for a major discussion to over 65 representatives of civil society organisations, activists, lawyers, and academics.



Increasing the meaningful participation of women in decision making at all levels, in the peace negotiations, constitutional process, legal reform, have been a key priority for EFI and CSWD. In 2016, the partners, together with the Embassy of Sweden in Damascus, organized the first international conference with the support of SIDA and the EU, involving over 100 stakeholders and activists, with diverse backgrounds, to discuss the implementation in Syria of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security. This work continued and in 2018 and 2019 the CSWD accumulated experience and provided in depth recommendations on ways and means to implement in Syria the UNSCR 1325 and engaging a wider number of actors.



The consultation with Syrian activists on developing guidelines for WPSA in the South Mediterranean aimed at enabling a better understanding of the reasons underlying violence against women and girls (VAWG), and favoured a debate on strategies to reduce all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls in the challenging context of Syria, while emphasizing women's agency and participation in all stages of decision-making. The outcomes will be shared with the broader Syrian civil society, and with the members of the constitutional committee, to advocate for an engendered constitution that guarantees gender equality and is a solid base for women's participation in shaping the future of Syria. The outcomes will also be incorporated in the regional guidelines on implementation of WPSA to be produced after consultations that are taking place in eight countries in the South Mediterranean. They will also be presented during the annual United Nations Security Council debate in October 2020 in New York, marking the twentieth anniversary UNSCR 1325.



Recommendations

Legal Reform

- Amending the Penal Code to ensure the annulling of all discriminatory articles that are both sources and legitimization of violence against women.
- Enacting non-discriminatory Personal Status Laws and amending the discriminatory articles of the Nationality Laws.
- Developing and enacting a comprehensive law to combat violence against women and girls.
- Forming a national commission or high council for gender equality to oversee that laws are non-discriminatory, gender sensitive and do not violate international women's human rights law, and therefore legal security for women is provided, ensuring implementation of women's rights and gender equality.
- Reforming the association law allowing freedom of association for non-profit organizations.
- Reforming the composition of the Constitutional Court and its access mechanism.
- Eliminating special criminal courts and reforming military justice to integrate women's rights perspective.
- Reforming and rehabilitating law enforcement agencies to be harmonized with women's rights international law standards (police - family rehabilitation centers - juvenile institutes... etc.)
- Establish a quota for women in the political parties' law.
- Adopting an electoral law that guarantees equality and rotation in lists.

Additional comments:

- There is no judiciary independence in Syria. Therefore, legal reform must come after constitutional reform, as the constitution determines the separation of powers.
- There is neither a Family Protection Law nor a Child Protection Law in Syria.
- A law preventing hate speech must be put in place.
- The entire Syrian legislative system must be reformed because all laws are interlinked (Labor Law, Penal Law, Personal Status Law, Agricultural provisions, Insurance), and are reinforcing discrimination against women.

Administrative Reform

On the Participation level:

- Adopting a minimum 30% quota for women in the administration towards reaching parity.
- Supporting women's participation in neighborhood and in all local governance committees.
- Building infrastructure (kindergarten and guarantee safe access) to enable women's participation in local and national decision making.
- Drafting policies to help women enter the formal labor market.
- Provide a supportive environment that allows women to participate in the political arena.

On the Protection level:

- Providing protection for abused women while preserving their privacy.
- Establishing hotlines for survivors of violence against women and girls.
- Including women in police forces and security services to enable them to deal with survivors of gender-based violence.
- Training judges, police, and medical personnel to deal with cases of gender-based violence.
- Taking measures related to protecting women's private property.

Recommendations

Constitutional Processes

On the Prevention level:

- Tightening measures to prevent girls dropping out of school and ensuring their access to higher education.
- Providing a safe environment in schools and ensuring safe access to these schools.
- Modifying curricula to be gender sensitive.
- Training teaching staff to have a gender-sensitive women's rights perspective.

On the Relief level:

- Guaranteeing the property rights of women during the return and reconstruction process.
- Making places of accommodation more adapted to the needs of women.
- Ensuring safe access and maintaining the dignity of women while providing relief services.
- Ensuring women's participation in the reconstruction process at all levels.
- Creating a financial fund to support housing rehabilitation.
- Eliminating security approval in legal agencies and in buying and selling.
- Ensuring gender-sensitive compensation for expropriation.
- Ensuring the participation of women's organizations in designing and monitoring the voluntary return, of refugees.
- Emphasizing the participation of women's organizations in the local communities to ensure that women's needs are raised and addressed.

Additional comments:

- There is an increase in the percentage of women running for elections in Syria despite all the pressures.
- Entering the local authorities constitutes an important gateway for women to decision-making.
- Syrian women have reached the constitutional committee and many important decision-making spheres.
- There are many projects that improve the status of women on the legal, administrative, and educational levels, but they are not implemented.
- Syrian organizations can benefit from the two handbooks to be published by EuroMed Feminist ABC for Gender Sensitive Education and ABC for a Gender Sensitive Education.

In terms of Constitution:

- Given the supremacy of the Constitution over other laws and legislation, the Constitution should be detailed regarding women's rights, and their protection.
- The Constitution should provide for full equality between women and men in law and before the law. It guarantees equality between all citizens regardless of ethnic origin, color, sex, gender, language, religion and belief, or other characteristics.
- International frame of human rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is a main reference. The Constitution should stipulate that international law takes primacy over national laws.
- The Constitution should provide for a women's quota of minimum of 40% towards reaching parity in the economic, social, political, and administrative sectors.
- The Constitution should provide for criminalization of all gender-based violence and the creation of support and protection institutions.

To enable implementation of gender equality, the Constitution guarantees:

- Neutrality of the State towards all its components.
- A governance on the bases of separation of powers into the legislative, executive, and judicial and on the principle of rotation of powers.
- Neutrality of the legislative, executive, and judicial authorities.
- Unity of the Syrian territories.

Recommendations

Monitoring & Evaluation

In terms of Constitutional process:

- Adopting a strategic plan by civil society organizations, feminists, and others, to pressure for a gender sensitive language of the constitution.
- Continue pressing for a gender sensitive constitutional process, including Syrian refugee women, and urging the implementation of equal citizenship and gender equality.
- Forming a justice body to deal with the files of female and male detainees, kidnapped persons, missing persons, disabled persons, all affected by the Syrian conflict.
- Developing a national strategy for women, along with a national plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325, with monitoring and evaluation mechanism.
- Enabling the participation of women organizations in developing, monitoring and evaluation of gender equality policies and strategies.
- Enabling participation of women's organizations in the reporting, monitoring and evaluation processes, while ensuring their independence.



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