



EuroMed Feminist Initiative
المبادرة النسوية الأورومتوسطية
Initiative Féministe EuroMed



The International Conference

Implementation in Syria

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

Women, Peace and Security

12th – 13th of December 2018, Beirut

OUTCOMES

The international conference “*Implementation in Syria of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security*” took place on the 12-13 December 2018 at Crowne Plaza Hotel in Beirut. It was organized by the EuroMed Feminist Initiative and the Coalition of Syrian Women for Democracy in the framework of the program “*Toward sustainable peace and democracy in Syria through strengthening civil society and women rights*” funded by Sweden. This program supports the Syrian continuous activists’ demands to establish women’s rights and gender equality as a priority on the agenda for Syria’s future. UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security represents one of the major human rights instruments in this regards as it implies taking concrete measures to enable meaningful participation of women as decision-makers in negotiation, conflict resolution, peace-building and reconstruction.

The conference built on the main conclusions of the 2016 international conference on implementation in Syria of UNSCR 1325 organized by the EuroMed Feminist Initiative and the Embassy of Sweden in Damascus, namely, that ensuring an inclusive process implies additional focus on networking and sharing of information among coalitions and initiatives working on peace and non-violent transition, in order to broaden the awareness raising process on utilizing of UNSCR 1325 as a tool to support women’s participation in all decision making processes.

Therefore the 2018 international conference provided space for different Syrian actors to follow up on the outcomes of 2016, share experiences and lessons learned, and enhance coordination. It gathered over 120 Syrian women’s rights defenders, human rights and civil activists and lawyers, as well as key stakeholders, international and regional actors, UN agencies, international organisations, diplomats and embassies.

The conference featured three panels, four working groups and open discussions. The first panel shared information and lessons learned from different Syrian initiatives and actions in regards to UNSCR 1325 and explored the link between these actions and the gender sensitive constitution building process. The second panel discussed lessons learned from regional challenges and achievements, notably in Iraq, Jordan, Palestine and Tunisia, to support widening of the process in Syria. The third panel presented the engagement of the International Community in supporting the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Syria. The working groups discussed the implementing of the four pillars of the UNSCR 1325; Participation, Protection, Prevention, Relief and Recovery, and drafted recommendations for implementation of these pillars in Syria.

In the opening panel, Ms. Lilian Halls French, Co-president of the EuroMed Feminist Initiative praised the long term cooperation between the CSWD and EuroMed Feminist Initiative, based on the common belief that ensuring women’s rights prevents violent conflicts and is a pre-condition for long term stability. She reminded that since the 2016 international conference on Syria, an intensive work has been done for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Syria in tight connection with the ongoing constitution making process. She thanked the continuous support of Sweden that made possible the promotion of women’s rights in



the heart of the transitional process in Syria. Mr. Mikael Staaf - Chargé d’Affaires and Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Sweden in Beirut and Damascus underlined the role of Syrian women’s rights organizations and reminded that Sweden as a part of the UN Security Council is striving to keep Syria in the heart of the debate and supports mainstreaming of gender equality as an issue of human security. Ms. Sawsan Zakzak, general coordinator of the Coalition of Syrian Women for Democracy, reminded the strong involvement of the coalition for women’s rights and underlined the importance of a wide cooperation of civil society organizations to act for the implementation in Syria of the UNSCR 1325. She mentioned the main challenges the implementation of this resolution is facing in Syria, reminded the different steps of the work achieved during the last years, and underlined that this conference represents a major event in the present context.

The first session discussed various viewpoints and initiatives to implement UNSCR 1325 in Syria.

The speakers raised major challenges that stand in the way of the of implementation of UNSCR 1325 in present-day Syria, identified through numerous seminars and consultations with wider variety of Syrian participants. Among them, the traditional male pre-eminence found in the Syrian Constitution was mentioned, the stated principle of Islamic jurisprudence as the main source of legislation, and a general non-sensitivity to gender in the Constitution. A number of articles in legislation were also listed, that do not uphold equal rights for women, in the Personal/Family Code, the Penal Code, Social Insurance and Labor Law, and in the Nationality Law. Institutions, both executing (administrative) and judicial (courts) institutions, are in general weak in this regard. Consequently, it is difficult to secure the enforcement of women's legal rights. More specifically, there is no credible agency or a council for human rights or women rights, except for two rather inactive parliamentary committees, the Committee on Public Liberties and Human Rights and the Committee on Women, Family and Children.



Other difficulties related to the implementation of UNSCR 1325 are connected with the one party political system, restrictions for new parties in standing for elections, a lack of coherent ideologies and programs among the new parties.

To address the challenges, there is a need to raise the awareness and build related capacity on key subjects such as, the rule of law, citizenship, participatory democracy, gender sensitive policy-making and the benefits of a secular State as the only guarantor for the implementation of universal women's rights. The role of Syrian women's movement was underlined as pivotal. Syrian women's organisations and coalitions have developed major proposals related to a democratic, gender sensitive constitution in Syria.

The establishment of the Women's Advisory Board was also lifted as a unique step supporting women participation in peace-making process, with the need of transforming its role from advisory role to a negotiating role.

The second session exchanged lessons learnt from implementing UNSCR 1325 in Palestine, Jordan, Tunisia and Iraq.

The discussion emphasized the important connection between the UNSCR 1325, CEDAW and the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action; it expressed the shared belief that UNSCR 1325 is a tool, together with other Security Council Resolutions and women's rights instruments, that women's organizations can use to press their governments to secure gender equality and inclusion of women's rights in conflict and post-conflict societies.



Even if the UNSCR 1325 does not apply for women under occupation, in **Palestine**, a National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325 was developed according to UN indicators in combination with indicators adapted to the Palestinian reality. The implementation requires a broad feminist investment and joined forces and therefore an umbrella organization has been formed to sustain the process.

Documentation is required based on research and studies. The results can be used as a tool to put pressure on the UN and the international community. Analyses of violence against women should be conducted with reference to globalization, the international economic order as well as the regime for protection of refugees. The importance of cooperation between the women's organizations and the political parties, while respecting their different roles was emphasized.

In **Jordan** the NAP for UNSCR 1325 was developed due to the combination of a pressure by civil society, building of political will and international support. This combination counteracts a current global negative climate that is narrowing the scope of civil society work under many pretexts, including terrorist threat or a risk to destroy the cohesion of the community. The development of the NAP followed a set of guidelines as participation of women's organizations in its preparation, inclusion of necessary provision of services for survivors, prevention and ending of violence against women and girls, equality and increased participation of women in the achievement of peace and security.

In **Tunisia**, civil society organizations have a role recognized by the Tunisian government and they take part in the preparation of all new initiatives, even those known for having a vision different from that of the present government. The NAP for UNSCR 1325 in Tunisia was not initiated by the government, but more due to pressure from the United Nations. It was extended to cover also natural disasters, beyond crises and conflicts. It is important to note that the plan was developed in the light of the successful campaign of women's organizations to lift the reservations to the CEDAW and the adoption of the law on violence against women. The definition in Article 12 of the law of civil society as a partner in the fight against violence against women was underlined in the debate. The same situation applies to the electoral law, where a quota for the representation of women at the local level has been set at 47%, close to parity. However, there is still a shortage of shelters, for women who are victims of violence. The anti-terrorism law infringes on several legal provisions that should protect basic human freedom and rights. Women's organizations have struggled to promote the use of the term gender when working on the law on violence against women. However, the Parliament has refused to use it, and the term was removed in the final version of the law.

In **Iraq**, the NAP for UNSCR 1325 is the first in the Middle East and North Africa. It was developed from 2012 with the logistic, technical and financial support of EuroMed Feminist Initiative through applying a multi-sector, comprehensive and inclusive approach, based on international women's rights instruments. The NAP has been considered in Iraq as a unique process and a tool that opened the door to mainstreaming and institutionalizing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, as well as a complimentary tool to support the civil society and institutional efforts to strengthen women's rights and improve the status of women. Women's movement has had a leading role, initiating the process, demonstrating that civil society should be structurally included not only in the development but in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the NAP. Iraq has developed a unique structure in the form of a Cross Sector Task Force that provided this structural inclusion and role of women's CSOs, while safeguarding their independent status. Lessons learned include, but are not limited to, that NAP is an on-going process which provides a common platform to strengthen accountability on institutional, organizational and personal level, to enhance a broad cross sector dialogue and coordination amongst diverse actors on issues of women's rights, gender equality and their link with peace and security, raise the awareness and the recognition of women's roles in peace building, involving a broad spectrum of actors, thus ensuring wide ownership. Keeping the volatile situation in Iraq, the NAP has been developed as a flexible document, in order to be able to respond to changing circumstances while maintaining an open dialogue as well as bringing knowledge on UNSCR 1325. An important lesson learned is that the NAP process has also contributed to strengthening the advocacy towards amending legislation that discriminates against women. International support and solidarity have played a crucial role for the success of the NAP; backing the collective efforts has been seen as major precondition to enhance its implementation, M&E and reporting.

The third session tackled the international support for implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Syria.

Ms. Francesca Pavarini, from the Operation, Recovery and Livelihood Division at the EU Delegation to Syria, emphasized the importance of supporting women organizations. Understanding the different power dynamics will allow the EU Delegation to Syria to invest in actions that will produce real impact for women. Such insights will help EU programming in ensuring respect for the “do not harm” approach. With the aim of promoting gender equality and women empowerment while preparing for a political transition and the future post-conflict situation in Syria, the EU Delegation is going to conduct an analysis in which:



- 1) a gender profile will focus on how gender relations have been impacted given ‘the relationship and unequal power distribution between women and men which characterize any gender system’. Women’s and men’s respective gender roles are not only different, but are also unequal in weight, power and value, and this inequality aggravates before, during and after a conflict.
- 2) a "gender audit", will aim to assess the extent to which gender equality is effectively institutionalized in the policies, programs, organizational structures and proceedings (including decision-making processes) Ms. Pavarini expressed the continuation of the EU support to the Syrians in implementing UNSCR 1325.

Ms. Marie Wikstrom, Regional Director of the Swedish Foundation “Kvinna till Kvinna” explained that Syria is a key country for her organization that supports women in 20 different countries. Describing the context as very difficult and sensitive, while on the other hand noting a full engagement of very strong and committed women, Ms. Wikstrom presented the most important challenges of the last seven years, and underlined the complexity of the Syrian situation, with the multiplicity of political players and their different political agendas. She confirmed that supporting the women's agenda is the first priority, assuring that the results achieved on the ground and the commitment of the women's groups have shown that this is the right way, even if the process is long and beset with hindrances along the way.

OUTCOMES

Four working groups were established during the Conference with the aim of exchanging expertise, practices and examples of concrete work in the areas of participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery. Each working group came with analyses and concrete recommendations for actions in each area, reaffirming that it is important to think of the 1325 as a framework and to approach it in connection with other international women's rights instruments. These analyses and recommendations were enriched during the plenary after the reports of the working groups. A cross cutting issue throughout the deliberations has been the question of women's organizations' actions across political divisions versus the precedence of a political affiliation over the feminist agenda. Among the participants there was wider agreement that although neutrality is a big challenge at this time in Syria's history, the core of the work of the feminist organizations should be on the promotion and protection of human and women's rights and democracy rather than a particular political agenda.



PARTICIPATION

The working group on “Participation” emphasized that women’s participation is a key element of citizenship. As an inalienable right, women’s participation should unfold at all levels and in all social groups and institutions.

Although the UNSCR 1325 is non-binding, the working group considers it a valuable reference for the Syrian feminist movement for promoting women's participation. The backing of different actors at both the national and the international level supporting women's rights should be harnessed. In this context the UNSCR 1325 should be used as a tool in the continued struggle for increased women's representation and equal participation in all decision-making positions during the various stages of peace-building and democratic transition.

Following the presentation of the group, the plenary emphasized the following major conditions for an effective role of the women civil organizations in a process of peace building and democratic transition: the necessity of the rule of law, the separation of State from religion (secular State), the need to strengthen women alliances and networks, regardless whether they are pro or against the Syrian authority.



The discussion pointed to a range of challenges and obstacles to the women’s effective participation. Immediate and concrete factors are: the ongoing war, the presence of armed militias, other violence and division in the local communities. To some participants, other factors constitute at least as important barrier to women’s participation: absence of a system of rule of law and of legislation protecting human and political rights in general and women's rights and concerns in particular. Moreover, a dominant religious culture and its presence in State institutions tend to work against the promotion and protection of women’s rights.

However, opportunities were also emphasized. The Constitutional Committee was discussed as an opportunity for promoting women's participation.

Participants stated that the quota for women representation in the Constitutional Committee should be no less than 30%. At the municipal level the quota should be set at parity, 50%, for women.

The knowledge and political skills of the women selected for the Constitutional Committee should be enhanced through an innovative and targeted training program. The aim is that the resulting new Syrian constitution will stand out as a gender-sensitive legal framework that guarantees women's rights, in compliance with resolution 1325.

Recommendations

- Sustain and increase the pressure on all parties, including the international community, for presence of women's right defenders in the Constitutional Committee, for no less than 30%.
- Develop a strategic plan to put pressure on the Constitutional Committee after its formation so that the Syrian constitution guarantees women's rights and is committed to UNSCR 1325 and CEDAW.
- Change the legislation of NGOs to allow establishing of women's organizations that defend women's rights.
- Pressure to transfer the role of the Women's Advisory Board to a substantial one during negotiations.
- Call on the UN to press for the implementation of the UNSCR resolution 1325 in Syria.
- Increase advocacy for building a State of law and institutions based on separation of religion and State.
- Introduce a quota of not less than 30% women's participation in all decision making bodies.
- Raise awareness on gender-sensitive transition justice.
- Find mechanisms to combat extremist religious discourse by finding alternative discourse and support for enlightened feminists and thinkers to be socially accepted.
- Strengthen alliances and feminist networks.
- Apply a bottom up approach in engaging women to participate in various stages of the political process and beyond, and in the stage of reconstruction.

It was also considered of importance to establish a mechanism for monitoring and follow up on women's participation in the various phases of the peace-building process and democratic transition.

The Civil Society Support Room (CSSR) established at the United Nations Office of the Special Envoy for Syria (OSE) to facilitate the participation of civil society in the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva was also discussed. Some in the plenary saw the CSSR as a unique experience that resulted from Syrian women's struggle, and as a useful forum for exchanging ideas and views among Syrian representatives. Moreover, the CSSR has reached a high level of women participation, at a rate of about 50%.

While others found that the performance of the CSSR has been unsatisfactory and that it would be only futile unless various challenges are addressed. They comprise of absence of Syrian leadership in the CSSR in the presence of the United Nations (UN), whose role is supposed to be limited to facilitation, and the inability of the participating organizations to agree on a common agenda. Moreover, there have been continuous changes to which organizations participated and a lack of clear criteria for the selection of eligible organizations. It seemed that meetings of "leaders" maintained a right to exclude any organisation that objected or shared critical views on the work of the CSSR. The rotation and the constant entry of new organizations impeded progress and led to a discussing same point again and again without reaching agreement or results.

The Women's Advisory Board (WAB) to the UN Special Envoy to Syria was also discussed and different opinions were expressed. Some participants appreciated its creation as an achievement in itself, signaling that women's role in Syrian society and specifically in the peace process, has received increased attention among decisionmakers. The peace negotiations, can be considered as a success for Syrian women's struggle and as an important step in achieving the women's participation in the building of a peace process.

Others in the plenary questioned the significance of the WAB in light of the suspension of the negotiating process, and reminded its role as only advisory to the UN envoy. Its work is hardly visible to the Syrian public, and although it is important in principle, it can be seen far from the urgent concerns of women in an environment of precariousness and crisis to most people in Syria. There is a need to find ways to fill the gap between the WAB and the grass-roots. Furthermore, it was recommended to attribute to the WAB a more meaningful role as part of the peace negotiations.

PREVENTION

Recommendations

- Form a qualified committee to examine the extent to which gender-specific training curricula are taken into account.
- Introduce awareness sessions in the schools on women's rights and the consequences of violence against women and girls.
- Work with children through arts to uncover and address gender stereotypes.
- Organize programs and training of teaching staff on gender equality issues.
- Conduct research that examines the gender dimension in the curricula and points out the gaps.
- Open specialized centers to receive complaints of violence and discrimination (hotline).
- Provide training of police cadres on gender equality issues and UNSCR 1325.
- Raise the number of women in the police and ensure the presence of civilian police in rural and suburban areas.
- Improve infrastructure, like lighting of roads, to increase women's security.
- Provide trainings and economic opportunities for women to enter the labor market in conjunction with social and legal awareness.
- Organize awareness campaigns highlighting gender stereotypes in media representation of women.
- Raise awareness of parents in families by various means.
- Address and improve legislation on provision of health insurance and health care.

The working group on "Prevention" explained that they had encountered some problems to separate preventive measures and legal protection as concepts. For clarification the working group has defined prevention as a process in which there is a continuous revision and modification of all policies and mechanisms that aim to prevent all forms of violence against women such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, sexual exploitation of girls, harmful traditional practices and human trafficking.

The group gave a special attention to the education sector and teachers. There is a need to review and develop curricula on issues concerning democracy, human rights in general and women rights and gender equality in particular. Teachers should receive training on the new curriculum as well as on modern, participatory teaching methods in order to promote new democratic values and practices among the new generation.

In the plenary some voices stated that efforts by civil society organizations to develop and change the education sector could only be achieved through close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and other authorities. Acknowledging this, others were of an opinion that the desired changes had a better chance of being realized through the education schemes that have been set up in the refugee camps.

The working group pointed out the necessity to organize advocacy campaigns targeting decisionmakers in order to promote policies and measures for preventing all forms of violence against women on the one hand; on the other hand they emphasized the importance of raising

awareness through campaigns using radio, TV and films for the broader population, women as well as men. In this connection some participants in the plenary drew attention to the negative impact of current radio and television programs in relation to gender roles, as women are most often presented within a frame of subordination, weakness and traditional roles.

In the discussion some argued that civil society organizations had an important role in using the social media as channels for combatting stereotypes of women, promoting a new culture of democratic values and raising awareness about women's legal rights.

The plenary discussed shelters or safe houses that can offer support and advice of different kind for women that have suffered violence. However, some participants highlighted main challenges for civil society organizations to play an active role in this area, as high cost of operating such structures and the need to involve specialists. Others insisted on the need to build up capacities in local communities and to provide basic psycho-social counseling to women victims of violence.

Another priority was raised as to offer trainings for women on how to create mini enterprises or wage employment in order to enable them to become economically self-sustaining, as a way to counteract violence against women. Training of women in self-defense techniques was recommended as well. More women should be recruited in the security sector (army, police, security and civil defense). Security personnel should be also trained to understand the particular security concerns of women and girls and to perform professionally.

Lighting of roads and streets, and at a different level, health insurance were some of the issues brought up by the plenary. In the plenary session the question of transitional justice from the Bosnia experience, was the subject of a lively discussion. It was agreed to request the EuroMed Feminist Initiative to provide training on transitional justice mechanisms including the relevant experiences from other countries.



PROTECTION

Recommendations

Political Protection

- Provide protection and build resilience of women and girls subjected to sexual and gender-based violence and empowering them to send complaints about violations cases.
- Invite the United Nations Special Rapporteurs to activate the procedures for the protection of women and follow up on the reports.
- Organize an international lobbying campaign to demand that the United Nations and international community assume their responsibility about these violations.
- Follow-up to decisions issued by the UN Security Council.
- Issue periodic reports that monitor cases of violence.
- Prepare a database that gathers all activities of United Nations bodies and international organizations related to combatting VAW.
- Strengthen networking and international cooperation.
- Develop a media campaign that highlights violations.
- Hold local and regional activities aimed at studying the mechanisms and procedures of addressing impunity of perpetrators of gender crimes and implementation international conventions.
- Lift impunity for perpetrators of genocide and war crimes, including crimes of sexual violence
- Recognize the dimensions and differences in the protection of human rights in conflicts and post-conflicts and call on all parties to protect women and girls, especially from sexual violence.
- Provide protection to witnesses in international courts and women in refugee camps.
- Promote the use of international monitoring mechanisms if absent at the national level.
- Apply women's quota at the different levels, including in the political parties, and the rotation of lists.
- Develop policies that ensure equal political participation of women.
- Strengthen institutional and individual capacities of women.
- Conduct research and studies about the impact of war on women political participation.
- Emphasize the role of women in building the future of Syria and support the absolute necessity of women's participation in building peace, democracy, and reconstruction.
- Adopt concrete measures to enable women to have an effective role in peace negotiations.
- Organize international and national advocacy campaigns on the importance of women's political participation at all decision-making levels.

The working group on "Protection" underlined the link between UNSCR 1325 and human rights and in particular the link with CEDAW as it addresses the need to respect and protect women's human rights, which include political, legal, social and economic rights, in order to enable women's equal participation in peace negotiations and future reconstruction. As UNSCR 1325 is a general frame of principles; consequently, each country should use it according to its context. The different governments and conflicting parties can choose the protection measures of women's human rights particularly, that are best for their context and the phase of the conflict. Constitution and electoral systems are an example.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the source of rights in the absence of laws as well as using international monitoring mechanisms in the absence of national mechanism for protection of rights. Therefore the important role of the United Nations Special Rapporteurs and international committees was underlined in providing protection of women's political rights. Addressing impunity for perpetrators of genocide and war crimes, including crimes of sexual violence, and protection of witnesses in international courts and protection in refugee camps is a challenge and a need that can be addressed only with the support of the international community.

At the level of legal protection the group identified a complex of laws that constitute impediments to the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Syria of today, starting with the Syrian constitution, Election Law, Personal Status Law, Penal Code, Labor and Social Security Law, and the Nationality Law. Different articles in this legislation are discriminatory for women and do not offer rights for women equal to those of men.

- Organize promotion campaign to change the perception of women only as victims.

Legal Protection

- Report on the violence and ensure the application of relevant national laws and international treaties.
- Cancel the Personal Status Laws due to its religious frame.
- Develop a comprehensive law on the “Protection of Women against Violence” that criminalizes all forms of violence against women, including trafficking of women for sexual exploitation, and holding the perpetrators accountable.
- Insert in the Penal Code measures to ensuring witness protection.
- Review and engender election law, working law, associations law and nationality law.
- Elaborate a gender sensitive constitution.
- Build capacities and sensitize judiciary officers and medical personnel on working with women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Establish shelters and safe house for women victims of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Abolish exceptional courts.

Social Protection

- Highlight the negative role of customs and traditions and address them. Cancel the Ministry of Awqaf (Islamic Affairs).
- Adopt social integration policies and community programs for women.
- Address the role of the media in order not to reproduce gender stereotypes.
- Strengthen the role of civil society organizations
- Develop support and reintegration programs especially for women survivors of violence.
- Develop and modify educational curricula in accordance with a gender perspective.
- Provide programs addressing women reproductive and psychological health.
- Ensure mix classes in schools, for boys and girls together.
- Ensure compulsory education for all children.
- Empower women and educate men on gender equality values and principles.
- Adopt different protection measures such as implementing training program for military officers.
- Conduct researches and studies on the physical, psychological and economic effects of violence against women.
- Conduct advocacy campaigns to highlight the situation of women victims of violence and address the impunity of perpetrators.

Economical Protection

- Ensure equal wages for equal work for women and men.
- Establish a fund to guarantee loans for women especially those who are not owners.
- Encourage small enterprises.
- Create anti-poverty funds.

Some participants in the plenary were critical of the principle in the Syrian constitution of Islamic jurisprudence as the main source of legislation and the actual pre-eminence of Islamic law, the general lack of gender sensitivity in most legislation, and the absence of women quota for decision-making bodies. According to the working group, a separate law should be adopted for “Protection of women against all kinds of violence”.

In the plenary some voices pointed to problems with some executive instructions and orders that give a different meaning to a law or empty it of its original intent, new laws that do not replace or cancel old ones, or laws that are not enacted due to the absence of an executive instruction.

Concerning economic protection, the discussion tackled the need to assist vulnerable groups of women, widows and orphans, provide training on self-employment and formation of micro-enterprises, including offering them credit support to start their business, or giving them small plots of land for agriculture.

Regarding social protection, it was stated that Arabic and Islamic culture, and the accompanying social control, are the main challenges for implementing the UNSCR 1325. The plenary was divided between those demanding the abolition of the Ministry of Awqaf (Islamic Affairs), and separation of Awqaf funds from the Government budget, and those who argued that the problem does not reside in the existence of the Ministry of Awqaf itself, but in the overlapping of Islamic religion and the Syrian State, as opposed to the concept of a secular State.

Other points raised in the discussed include the need to reform the education sector and curricula, the freedom and independence of public media, the need to improve the quality of social and health support to women, including rehabilitation services for women traumatized and victims of violence.

RELIEF AND RECOVERY

Recommendations

Relief

- Locate shelter centers in areas outside the control of the conflicting parties under supervision of civil and international organizations.
- Consider in all relief programs the basic needs of women, children and chronic diseases.
- Acknowledge the role of the civil organizations to supervise and monitor the implementation of relief programs.
- Establish a database of beneficiaries (studies and research).
- Empower women and involve them to participate in the relief operations.
- Move from relief operations to economic empowerment projects for women.

The working group started its presentation with a definition of “relief”, understood as the immediate, short-term response to emergencies such as armed conflicts, natural disasters or medical outbreaks.

According to the working group, relief operations responding to armed skirmishes must be neutral and take place outside of the direct control of warring parties, while it should be supervised and monitored by civil society and international organizations.

In Syria relief operations have not everywhere been conducted in accordance with international standards. Cases have been reported where distribution of food was politicized or used for personal enrichment, and there have been examples of women in shelters who became victims of violence and rape. Some relief workers have been subject to kidnapping and even murder.

It is important, according to the working group, that research and studies be conducted in order to act on the basis of a reliable data-base and to ensure that the right groups with the greatest needs are being assisted. Women should be associated with the relief operations to achieve more acceptance in the communities as well as to ensure that the need of all the women are being met.

There has lately been a tendency of moving from relief operations towards assistance for livelihood projects and start-up of micro and small enterprises.

The working group argued that before entering the “recovery/reconstruction”, with the associated funding for reconstruction and development, three major conditions (stages) must first be met: an end to armed conflict on all of the Syrian territory; departure from country of all non-Syrian fighters and powers, commence a political solution in accordance with Resolution 2254 (drafting of a new constitution; safe and unconditional return of displaced persons and refugees, equitable distribution of development, ensuring women participation, etc.).

However, other participants found that the three mentioned criteria or conditions were very harsh and difficult to meet, especially when considered from the perspective of areas that are almost completely (70%) destroyed, such as Harasta, Duma and Al-Raqqa, and in urgent need of reconstruction. The discussion raised questions such as: what shall happen if these three conditions are not met in the foreseeable future, or as the situation in Iraq, that has gone through 15 years of transition with a mix of armed fighting, of authoritarian power and external domination? If reconstruction will start before there is a political solution, which incentive will there be for the Syrian regime to go for negotiations? How then to avoid a perpetuation of abuse of power and violation of human rights? Participants mentioned a range of crucial and urgent issues that require resolution:

Political detainees, abductees, disappeared persons, young men who are hiding to avoid military service, the safe return of displaced and refugees who do not dare to return, and alternative or temporary housing for them, compensation, which according to the participants, should be equal between men and women and not according

Recommendations

Recovery

- Unless the reconstruction process takes place before:
 - Cease armed conflict on all Syrian territory - Exit all non-Syrian parties from Syria.
 - Initiation of the political solution, which includes:
 - A) A draft gender sensitive constitution for the "constitutional committee" to ensure the implementation of UNSCR 1325;
 - B) The safe and unconditional return of displaced persons and refugees;
 - C) Enabling them by all means to establish their former ownership;
 - D) Balance in reconstruction and services between the countryside and the city
 - E) Issuing a number of gender sensitive laws and legislation
 - F) Lessons learned from previous experience with regard to reconstruction and the involvement of women
 - G) Institutional reform which ensures effective participation of women

to the Islamic Sharia, the children with Syrian mothers and non-Syrian fathers, and individuals and militias who carry the weapons and use them against civilians without control.

Also discussed was Syrian ownership of the reconstruction process, foreign companies versus national companies, the proportion of foreign labor to Syrian labor, a fair divide of reconstruction between cities and rural areas.

At the end the participants confirmed the need for institutional reform, starting with the education sector to the judiciary system emphasizing the importance of including women at all levels in these processes.



CLOSING REMARKS

At the closing session, Ms. Boriana Jönson, Executive Director of the EuroMed Feminist Initiative, reminded that democratic development cannot be achieved without the implementation of women's rights. The event has been very rich and important all along the two days and marked high level and quality of debate and valuable outcomes. EuroMed Feminist Initiative will continue to support to civil society organizations that are defending women's rights and are advocating for the implementation in Syrian of the UNSCR 1325.



Ms. Sawwan Zakzak, General Coordinator of Coalition of Syrian Women for Democracy, underlined the richness of the outcomes due to the great interaction between the participants that represented a wide diversity and differences in political positions. When it comes to the women's cause, fragmentation in the feminist ranks should not be allowed. Finally, she thanked all those who participated in the conference as well as the EuroMed Feminist Initiative. The event has turned out as a bright combination of partnership, solidarity and international support, which can unite different groups that engage themselves for the common good of their country. The outcomes of the work of the conference are extremely important, not only at the national but also at the international level. They serve as a roadmap for the best way to implement in the Syrian context the UNSCR 1325. The outcomes will be available in Arabic and English and distributed to all, including the international community.

