



# **OUTCOMES**

**Regional and National Dialogues  
Southern Mediterranean**

**Gender Regional Platform  
ENI/2015/364-084  
December 2015 – June 2016**



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# OUTCOMES

## 1<sup>ST</sup> Regional Dialogue

3 Feb 2016, Amman

## OUTCOMES

### Regional Dialogue

#### “From the Ministerial Conclusions to Gender Equality Policy Making in the Euro-Med Region”

3 February 2016, Amman

The high-level regional roundtable “*From Ministerial Conclusions on strengthening the role of women in society to gender equality policy making in the Euro-Med region*” took place on 3rd of February 2016 at the Ministry of Social Development, Amman, organized by the Euromed Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI in cooperation with the Jordanian Ministry of Social Development. This event is a part of a policy dialogue and exchange of best practices with existing networks of stakeholders in the Southern Neighborhood, funded by the European Union.

Ministers and their representatives, political leaders and gender experts from women’s rights organizations from Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, joined by EU diplomats and UfM secretariat, strengthened and furthered the ongoing dialogue between state actors, political sphere and civil society on the promotion of women’s rights in democracy building in the follow up of the Conclusions from the 3<sup>rd</sup> UfM Ministerial Meeting on *Strengthening the role of women in society* held in Paris in 2013 and in preparation of the upcoming Euro-Med Ministerial Conference.

The roundtable was a qualitative step in enhancing a cross sector dialogue on gender equality and fostering a sustainable regional process on discussing the Euro-Med Ministerial Conclusions as a major gender equality policy document on national and regional level. During the meeting, the important role of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in supporting this regional civil society initiative was acknowledged. The fruitful cooperation with Ministry of Social Development in Amman contributed to the success of this event.

The meeting deliberations paved the ground for building a gender regional platform in light of the changing context after the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Conference in Paris and in the perspective of supporting the planning for the upcoming one.

#### I. CURRENT CONTEXT

The Euro-Med Ministerial Conclusions focus on supporting women’s role in society by ending discrimination, violence against women and human rights violations as well as empowering women in all spheres of life. Since 2013 drastic changes of the geo-political context have been characterized by two major phenomena that should also be taken in account in the implementation of the Ministerial Conclusions.

- 1) **Increasing violence of extremist groups:** Religious extremism, intolerance and exclusion have impacted the area and threatened previous achievements. Such regression has weakened the concept of gender equality and the enjoyment of women’s rights.
- 2) **Refugee crises:** The massive influx of Syrian refugees and displacement has generated human tragedy for millions of people and has dire results for hosting governments and societies. Women and girls refugees are disproportionately affected. Violence, child labor, trafficking for sexual exploitation, and early marriages are on the rise. The EU is currently closing its doors for refugees and develops anti-terrorist measures that often lead to undesired consequences.

Besides, the ongoing occupation of Palestine remains a central problem and source of violence in the region, preventing women from achieving their rights. Occupation is a barrier to democratic development, creating continuous conflicts that affect societies. Women pay the price on all levels, struggling not only for women’s rights and equality but for independence, in the process losing their children and husbands.

## II. CHALLENGES

Positive achievements in strengthening the women's role in society, reflecting certain level of political will have taken place in the region: laws and constitutions have enabled higher level of women participation, legal systems have been revised, some discriminatory actions have been criminalized, alimony funds have been established, and public campaign supporting women political participation have been organized. In some countries bodies of civil society and government have established joint actions. However, in the light of the rapidly deteriorating context there is an urgent need to exert much more effort in the economic, political, social and cultural sphere and strengthen cooperation among stakeholders. Moreover, the Ministerial Process remains largely unknown in all spheres: governmental, political, and civil society. Major challenges that need to be addressed with effective measures are:

- **Shifting priorities away from women's rights:** The massive increase of violence in the region even further prevents prioritizing women's rights on governments' agendas. The fight against terrorism has become a prominent issue in the discourse of political leaders, weakening the support for and the role of civil society. Furthermore jeopardizing the cooperation between the political sphere and women's rights CSOs.
- **Lack of political will to achieve gender equality:** This explains the absence of bodies following up on the development and implementation of gender equality policies and systems of social protection that realize aspirations for women's rights. There are shortcomings in existing strategies and their implementation in regards to the alleviation of poverty, particularly of rural women. In addition there is not enough work on community-level empowerment programs that encourage the adoption of gender equality.
- **Underrepresentation of women in decision-making:** Figures demonstrated that women are still subject of exclusion, exploitation, and discrimination that prevent their participation in political and public life. Even if they are the majority of educated graduates, they are still underrepresented in political decision making, in the labor market, and are still discriminated in law.
- **Existing gap between texts and implementation:** Even when good intentions lead to strategies and action plans, a gap exists in their implementation and bringing perpetrators to justice. In this regard, what is lacking is a democratic and participatory approach that can lead to the development of legislation for women's rights and change in attitudes and stereotypes.
- **Reinforcement of gender stereotypes:** The violent context leads to strengthening of the traditional roles of women and limit the progress in their rights. Cultural practices that reinforce a discriminatory image of women are portrayed as necessary in a context of violence.

## III. GENDER REGIONAL PLATFORM AND THE MINISTERIAL PROCESS

The participants laid the foundations of a regional gender platform reaffirming the need of a clear women's rights language promoting the values of gender equality and women's universal human rights as central to peace, human security and democracy building.

The regional gender platform is grounded in the need of States' de jure and de facto commitment to international women's rights instruments, which are international law and as such, binding. The following main points were raised as the basis of the platform that would promote and support the Ministerial Process and its Conclusions as major gender equality policy-making document.

- 1) **Reaffirming women's rights are universal human rights:** As such they are not a subject to interpretation by any religion, tradition or culture. There is an urgent need for full implementation of the binding international women's rights conventions such as CEDAW and UNSCRs, without any reservation in addition to harmonizing national legislation with international human rights law.

Furthermore, lifting the reservations of CEDAW is now a major priority as CEDAW is a major reference for accountability.

- 2) **Separation of religion and State:** Taking urgent measures towards ensuring separation between religion and State, political matters and legislation, as this is the only way to ensure the freedom of religion and beliefs of all.
- 3) **Emphasizing on women's rights in times of crises:** Fighting terrorism and radicalization cannot justify reactive policies, nor the exclusion and deprioritizing of women's rights. On the contrary, women's rights need to be focused on during crises. Women are impacted at all times by the patriarchal system and violence against them only exacerbates during war and military crises. Advancement of women's rights is a key to promoting rule of law in any society, and in particular in times of crises.
- 4) **Broadening the concept of national security to human security:** It is imperative that weapon suppliers are held accountable and that the concept of national security is incorporates the values of human security. Violence against women is a human security issue. It is urgent to find political solutions to the conflicts in the region as the only way to solve the dramatic situation of millions of refugees.
- 5) **Reaching a political solution, ending occupation and initiating a regional peace process:** Working proactively for political solutions to the conflicts and initiating a comprehensive regional peace process with the participation of the civil society for ending the military conflicts and occupation.
- 6) **Criminalizing incitement to discrimination:** Religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence should be prohibited by law. There is a need to focus on women groups, whose rights are violated, naming perpetrators of these abuses, and clearly condemning State actions sponsoring fundamentalism or failing to address it.
- 7) **Building cross-sectoral alliances on national and regional level:** Only such substantial cooperation based on the recognition of the gender expertise and the respect of the independence of the women's rights CSOs can bring the support to the political feminist discourse that addresses the present challenges and face the reactionary movements. Such a partnership should be based on democratic and egalitarian discourse and practices.

#### **On the Ministerial Process:**

- 1) **The Ministerial Conclusions are based on binding international law documents:** As they refer to international conventions such as CEDAW and UNSCRs, their implementation is a duty for governments. The support of and cooperation with independent women's rights CSOs will allow governments to widen the process and act for its concrete implementation.
- 2) **Harmonizing national legislation with international conventions:** Notably CEDAW, UNSCR1325, Beijing Platform for Action, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in order to introduce binding legal measures regarding all forms of violence against women and contribute to the bridging the gap between formal and substantial rights.
- 3) **Develop NAPs for the implementation of UNSCR1325:** Their approval by all governments in the Euro-Med region is a goal and a tool to curb violence against women, in particular in crises, and contribute to women's participation in decision making. UNSCR1325, CEDAW, SDG, in particular goals 5 and 16 are the references to implement the universal human rights of women and girls.
- 4) **Unifying scattered efforts in the Euro-Med region:** The efforts of civil society and all relevant institutional and State actors should be in synergy, aiming at involving all stakeholders in gender equality policy making. A coordinated work on regional level is recommended to make conclusions into policy and to transform the commitments into reality.
- 5) **Allocating public resources and developing gender-sensitive budgets:** Governments should allocate personnel and financial resources for training of staff as well as for providing support to the

women's rights CSOs and cooperate with them in designing gender sensitive training program. Budget auditing and developing gender sensitive budgets is of utmost priority in order to strengthen the action towards positive change.

- 6) **Reforming educational curricula:** The change of curricula is identified as a high regional priority. It should be accompanied with national campaigns for zero tolerance towards violence against women; denouncing any cultural pattern or tradition that is violating women's rights and aim for changing the stereotypical image of women in all textbooks. Enhancing the image of women in media should also be encouraged by the development of obligatory codes for media professionals.
- 7) **Protecting the human rights of refugees in countries of asylum:** The rights include family reunion, maintaining dignity and human rights and providing social protection and access to education and healthcare. Before the next Ministerial meeting it is imperative to review the perspective of the EU countries towards the refugees in Europe.

#### **On mechanisms for implementation of the Ministerial Conclusions:**

The high-level roundtable discussion emphasized the need to progress beyond recommendations into developing mechanisms for implementation on national and regional level. A system of monitoring, evaluation and accountability on policies and actions based on the Ministerial Conclusions needs to be developed. By mainstreaming gender, governments should develop a participatory approach framed by a clear speech on the values of equal citizenship rights.

- 1) Building functioning partnership between civil society and government based on the respect of the independent and gender expert role of the women's rights CSOs.
- 2) Creating cross-sector bodies of government, civil society and political sphere that develop, monitor and evaluate action plans to implement the Ministerial Conclusions.\

#### **IV. NEXT STEPS**

1. **Organizing national workshops:** Organizing and inspiring broader cross sector discussions and awareness raising on how to promote and implement the Ministerial Conclusions and debating the recommendations from this roundtable.
2. **Syncing major national development strategies with the Ministerial Conclusions:** Relevant existing ministerial bodies or ministries together with the gender experts identify the gaps between these and propose relevant mechanisms for integration.
3. **Holding a second regional roundtable:** Euromed Feminist Initiative will organize a second regional discussion on the inputs of the national workshops and recommendations in preparation for the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference.

# **OUTCOMES**

## **1st National Dialogues**

**2/12/2015 – 31/05/2016**

**Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia**



# JORDAN

## National Dialogue

28 March 2016, Amman

**OUTCOMES**  
**National Dialogue**  
**“From the Ministerial Conclusions to Gender Equality Policy Making”**  
**28<sup>th</sup> March 2016, Amman**

The Euro-Med Ministerial Process on “Strengthening the Role of Women in Society” is a major tool for promoting and supporting women’s rights and gender equality both regionally and nationally. The third Ministerial Conference 2013 in Paris reaffirmed this, especially in the context of the ongoing political transformations in the Southern Mediterranean, recognizing the important role played by women.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Conference in Paris took place under the co-presidency of the Jordanian Minister of Social Development, Reem Abu Hassan together with the Minister of Women's Rights and Gender Equality, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem and Catherine Ashton, European Union High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission. As a co-chair of the Union for Mediterranean, Jordan’s role is of utmost importance to the process.

In order to follow up on the implementation of the Paris Ministerial Conclusions in Jordan, many different events took place in the frame of the project: “Improving gender equality and democratic governance in Jordan” under the program of the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs (MOPPA) “Support to Democratic Governance in Jordan” funded by the EU and implemented by the Euromed Feminist Initiative. In the frame of this project, Euromed Feminist Initiative made a study on the impact of the Ministerial Conclusions in Jordan. The major findings were discussed during multi-sector discussions on local and national level, raising awareness and engaging women’s organizations and local decision makers in a structural dialogue. Six workshops, followed by roundtable discussions were organized across Jordan, gathering representatives from the civil society, local political leaders and self-governments from the 12 governorates.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2016 a national conference organized in partnership with MOPPA gathered over 90 participants of the process. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, members from the civil society, local government and national stakeholders held a national dialogue, hosted by the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs.

Furthermore, a roundtable discussion took place on 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2016 in the Jordanian Parliament, under the patronage of the H.E. Speaker of the parliament, gathering major actors on national and local level in a dialogue with decision makers who work towards strengthening the position of women in the society.

The participants in the process noted that a progress in women’s rights has been made. However, the rate of change is very slow. They identified political, legislative, and cultural obstacles to women’s rights. Emphasis was put on the changing context and the impact of the refugee crisis. However, they reaffirmed that the Ministerial Conclusions and Ministerial Process provide opportunities to make qualitative changes and improvement of women’s status. They adopted the output of the study on the impact of Euro-Med Ministerial Conclusions in Jordan and suggested recommendations to strengthen and advance gender policy dialogue among civil society, decision-makers and State actors, underlying the importance of involving grassroots organizations across Jordan. The following are the major points that have been raised throughout the process:

- In the context of raising of religious extremism and social conservatism decision makers need to make women’s rights a political priority.
- Women’s increased participation in the economic, political and social spheres is an important step to make, as gender equality is an issue of social justice, democracy and progress.
- The Euro-Med Ministerial Conclusions as well as the Ministerial Process as a whole are an essential tool to raise awareness, build capacity, strengthen cooperation among stakeholders and lead to gender equality policy making.

The following recommendations for the implementation of the Ministerial Conclusions and improving gender equality policy-making in Jordan were issued:

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING GENDER EQUALITY AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN JORDAN THROUGH IMPLEMENTING THE EURO-MED MINISTERIAL CONCLUSIONS

1. Establish follow up mechanisms such as a *Follow up Committee* consisting of women's rights activists, State actors, political decision makers, media and academia. The *Follow up Committee* should create an action plan for the implementation of the Ministerial Conclusions to be supervised by the Inter-Ministerial Committee.
2. Women's committee in the parliament, in cooperation with the women's rights organizations should identify, analyze and propose amendments to the discriminative legislation for women.
3. Increase gender quota both nationally and locally to ensure women's' meaningful participation at decision-making level.
4. Intensify the efforts of the civil society to lobby and advocate for the amendment of discriminative legislation such as inheritance, citizenship, and strengthening legislation regarding violence against women.
5. Build strong coalitions and alliances that use the Ministerial Conclusions as a tool to bridge the gap between international and national level, and urban and rural areas.
6. Strengthen the cooperation between the civil society, political sphere, State actors, academia and media in order to raise awareness of and counteract the gender stereotypes that hinder women's human rights enjoyment.
7. The Ministry of Education is requested to develop curricula and textbooks free of stereotypical representation of women. The *Follow up Committee* in cooperation with the Inter-Ministerial Committee could assist in this work with recommendations and expertise.
8. Include the study on the impact of the Ministerial Conclusions, as well as studies on violence against women, citizenship among others, as references in the educational curricula.
9. Address all cultural and legislative barriers hindering women's participation in the labor market through large scale awareness raising programs.
10. Synchronize the main national development strategies with the Ministerial Conclusions.
11. Implement the recommendations from the Amman Regional Dialogue, 3 February 2016, and organize broader cross-sector discussions and awareness raising workshops on how to promote and implement the Ministerial Conclusions.
12. Hold the 4<sup>th</sup> Euro-Med Ministerial Conference on strengthening the role of women in society in Jordan under the patronage of H.M Queen Rania.



# MOROCCO

## National Dialogue

13 May 2016, Rabat

**OUTCOMES**  
**National Dialogue**  
**“Impact of the Ministerial Conclusions Paris 2013 on Governmental Policies”**  
**13<sup>th</sup> May 2016, Rabat**

The national roundtable “Impact of the Ministerial Conclusions Paris 2013 on Governmental Policies” took place in May the 13th 2016 at the Garden Hotel Farah in Rabat. It was organized by the Union De L’Action Féministe (UFA) and Euromed Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI. The event was funded by the European Union within the frame of the contract “Gender Regional Platform” aiming at providing space for a policy dialogue at national and regional level and exchange of best practices with existing networks of stakeholders in the Southern Neighborhood.

The purpose of this roundtable was to favor national dialogue in Morocco between the civil society, political decision-makers and State officials on the development and implementation of gender equality and women’s rights policy in the light of the Conclusions from the 3rd UfM Ministerial Conference on strengthening the role of women in society held in Paris in 2013 as well as to prepare recommendations and national priorities before the upcoming 4th UfM Ministerial Conference.

The roundtable gathered about sixty participants, among whom the representative of the Minister of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development, the delegate of the Minister for Human Rights, Members of Parliament, ex Ministers, leaders of political parties, the Ambassador of the European Union, and diplomats from the French and Belgium Embassies in Morocco.

Representatives of major women’s rights organizations in Morocco that joined the roundtable were enabled to raise main issues concerning the development of women’s rights in Morocco. It gathered activists from the women committees of trade unions, the Democratic Federation of Moroccan Women, JOSOUR, the Forum of Moroccan Women, and the Moroccan Association against Violence against Women, the Civil Coalition on chapter 19 of the Constitution, the Moroccan Organization of Human Rights as well as journalists and members of the national branches of UAF.

The roundtable discussed the impact of the Ministerial Conclusions Paris 2013 as a major policy document for the promotion of gender equality and independence of women in all fields of life as well as for supporting the fight against discrimination and violence against women. It also allowed a debate over the outcomes of the first regional dialogue held in Amman in February 2016 with common recommendations and priorities regarding policies favoring women rights in the Southern Mediterranean.

It was noted that Morocco has ratified several conventions related to the human rights of women, men and children and has made progress in the sphere of women’s rights. National laws, the Family Code, the Code of Work and the Nationality Law favored a certain number of benefits leading to the reduction of the disparities between women and men in the social indicators such as the increase of women representatives in the elected councils and decision making positions and a gendered budget. Progress was made for women’s rights in the amendments of 2011 Constitution. The governmental project for equality (2012-2016) was developed in order to reinforce the legislative and institutional frame, support bills on respect of the principle of parity and the fight against all forms of discrimination, and violence against women. Some mechanisms were created including an observatory and initiatives to improve the image of women in the media as well as a national observatory on violence against women. However, much remains to be done in order to make equality a reality.

The debates also underlined the importance of the partnership between Morocco and the European Union based on shared values and principles to support equality and women’s human rights in Morocco, as well as to contribute to developing a regional approach to equality in the Southern Mediterranean countries.

## **I. MAIN CHALLENGES**

During the debate, participants discussed the main challenges that were still standing in the way of gender equality. Among the most debated challenges were:

- Even if civil society is more involved in the process, a meaningful participatory approach is still missing in policy and law-making;
- Draft bills don't integrate international women's rights norms and standards;
- The draft bills don't include actual preventive and protective measures against impunity, so as to allow women access to a fair trial (Law against Violence);
- There is no bill on parity/gender equality;
- There is no bill addressing and forbidding all forms of discrimination.

## **II. MAIN CONCLUSIONS:**

The participants highlighted the following points:

- The dialogue between civil society and all political actors and decision-makers should be reinforced and structurally supported in order to strengthen the voice of women's rights organizations and make decision-makers take into account the propositions of the civil society.
- The role of the women's rights CSOs for the control and follow up of governmental policies related to the promotion of women's rights is indispensable. Women's rights CSOs have major contribution in the formulation of law projects and the preparation of governmental programs and should be structurally involved in all stages of this work: from preparation to follow up and monitoring of the implementation.
- It is necessary to constantly highlight the vital role of women in society and of equality between women and men as a pillar of development.
- End all forms of discrimination and violence against women, including polygamy and child marriage.

## **III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Harmonize the national legislation with the international conventions and publish reports on related advancements.
2. Develop a bill on parity and anti-discrimination in order to make gender equality a reality and not just a goal or a slogan.
3. Allocate budgets to reach equality via national structures that have the power to improve public policies.
4. Develop concrete strategy to promote a culture of equality and counteract the stereotypes of the dominant culture that reproduce inferiority of women. Most urgently:
  - a. Revise the school programs in conformity with the international women's rights instruments and the Moroccan Constitution.
  - b. Promote equality as one of the angular stones of security, stability and development in our country, by reconciling democracy and modernity.
  - c. Follow up on political parties' commitment to and implementation of equality and women's rights.

5. Implement the Constitutional provisions on equality and women's rights through:
  - a. Adopting the national reports on equality published by institutions as National Human Rights Council and the Economic and Social Council, and consider their proposals to improve legislation in compliance with international women's rights conventions.
  - b. Establishing gendered indicators and insuring the elaboration of public policies for equality.
  - c. Creating a mechanism to guaranty the follow up and the implementation of the Euro-Med Ministerial Conclusions as well as the civil society recommendations in order to promote those policies.
6. Institutionalize the dialogue with the civil society via sustainable bodies or mechanisms and social dialogue with the trade unions.



# LEBANON

## National Dialogue

18 May 2016, Beirut

## OUTCOMES

### National Dialogue

#### **“UfM Ministerial Conclusions on strengthening the role of women in society - Promoting Gender Equality Strategies and Policies in Lebanon: Priorities and Opportunities”**

**18<sup>th</sup> May, Beirut**

The national roundtable discussion in Lebanon: *“Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Ministerial Conclusions on Women’s Role in Society Promoting Gender Equality Strategies and Policies: Priorities and Opportunities in Lebanon”* took place on 18th May 2016. It was organised by the Association Najdeh, Rassemblement Démocratique des Femmes Libanaises and the Euromed Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI under the Patronage of H.E. Mr. Nabil De Freige Minister of State for Administrative Reform in the frame of the project “Gender Regional Platform” funded by the European Union.

The roundtable provided space and opportunity for CSOs to use the UfM Ministerial Conclusions on strengthening the status of women in the society (Paris2013) as a tool to assess the status of women at national level within a challenging regional context. Furthermore, it enabled the CSOs, decision-makers, State actors and female politicians to engage in a dialogue on gender equality before the 4th UfM Ministerial Conference in February 2017, enhancing a sustainable national and regional process.

The roundtable gathered 31 representatives from major women’s rights and human rights CSOs and networks, representatives from 4 ministries (Ministry of State for Administrative Reform, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Displacement) as well as the former Minister of Justice, women political leaders and local authorities. The roundtable was opened by Christina Lassen, Ambassador of EU to Lebanon.

#### **I. CURRENT CONTEXT**

The participants underlined the importance of using the Euro-Med Ministerial Conclusions as a tool to support and unify the ongoing efforts in Lebanon towards eliminating all types of discrimination, violence against women and women’s rights violations. It was noted that a very slow and limited progress in women’s rights has been made since 2013. The participants identified political, economic, social, legislative, and cultural obstacles in this regards and emphasized the changing context with the impact of the refugee crisis, especially on women and refugee women. The following are the major points that have been raised:

- Priorities should be linked to the changing context characterized by radicalization and the refugee crisis. Improving women’s political role and democracy building was seen as essential in confronting radicalization.
- Urgent need to change the discriminative legislation, in particular the personal status law, mainstreaming of gender equality policies and international commitments in all the ministries and introducing gender quota at political decision making level as means to improve women’s participation.
- Approaching security policies adopted by EU and Lebanese government from the perspective of human rights of women and men and democracy.

#### **II. CHALLENGES**

Slow progress was connected with low level of political will. Major challenges were linked with discrimination in family laws and the maintenance of low level of women’s political participation. While Lebanon is witnessing some of the best grades of social mobility, it suffers from the worst regional rates of gender equality in political representation, and it is one of the countries in the region which made the lowest number of amendments to discriminatory laws governing personal status and citizenship. It was also noted that Lebanon occupies the eighth place among the countries in the world (138 out of 145) that have worst

performance in the area of equality, especially in the field of political empowerment and economic participation.

#### **Major challenges that need effective and urgent measures discussed by the participants:**

- **Lack of political will, consequently de-prioritizing women's rights:** The increased violence due to the crisis further prevents prioritizing women's rights on government's agenda. The fight against terrorism and for stability, as well as the refugee issue have become a priority in the discourse of political leaders.
- **Political sectarian system:** Preventing improvement of the electoral laws and the adoption of quota leads to re-producing the same patriarchal political and sectarian structures that exclude women from political decision-making. This also leads to the perpetuation of women's discrimination that is further a barrier to their participation in political and public life.
- **Discriminatory legal gaps (civil and religious courts):** Although the Lebanese Constitution states gender equality and supremacy of international conventions, the national legislation is not yet harmonized with international law. In the lack of civil laws, the personal status laws are still tied to the personal status courts of the various sects and confessions.
- **Existing gap between texts and implementation, between existing strategies and implementation plans:** Good will has led to the elaboration of some gender equality strategies in some ministries. However, these are not mainstreamed in all ministries, and there is a lack of action and implementation.
- **Budgets are not programme-oriented and are not gender sensitive:** Due to lack of governmental financial resources for gender equality there is a lack of adequate social protection system and empowerment programs. The lack of governmental and public support for women's work and of mechanisms to promote equality facilities (nurseries, training centers, lending facilities, etc.) is particularly visible for women from vulnerable groups that require special care such as elderly, disabled, and prisoners.
- **Reinforcement of gender stereotypes:** The violent context leads to strengthening the traditional roles of women and limits the progress in their rights. Cultural practices that reinforce discrimination against women are portrayed as necessary in a context of violence.
- **Absence of women in dialogue and conflict resolution actions:** This hinders building a culture of peace and equal participation to overcome the effects of war and displacement, in line with UNSCR 1325.
- **Consequences of displacement for host community and women:** Displacement is a burden on all sectors of the country and has negative impact on both the displaced and host women, in particular when specialized services, systems and protection measures are limited ones.
- **The role of CSOs:** Civil society is overlapping and still unstructured, despite the active role of women's movements.

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING GENDER EQUALITY IN LEBANON THROUGH IMPLEMENTING THE EURO-MED MINISTERIAL CONCLUSIONS**

- 1- Take urgent and concrete steps towards harmonizing the national legislation with international women's rights conventions, such as CEDAW and UNSCRs, without any reservations, to guarantee the compliance of the State with its international human rights obligations and make sure that women's rights will not be curtailed based on religious grounds.
- 2- Develop national action plan (NAP) for the implementation of UNSCR1325 that ensure women's participation in conflict resolution and peace building.

- 3- Allocate public resources and develop gender-sensitive budgets: Government should allocate human and financial resources that ensure mainstreaming gender equality strategies and policies in all public institutes and ministries as well as provide support to the women's rights CSOs and cooperate with them in designing gender sensitive program.
- 4- Establish follow up mechanisms such as a follow up cross sector committee consisting of women's rights activists, State actors, political decision-makers, National Commission for Lebanese Women, media and academia to create an action plan for the implementation of the UfM Ministerial Conclusions and supervise their implementation.
- 5- Adopt gender quota at both national and local levels to ensure women's meaningful participation at decision making level.
- 6- Apply human rights and democracy approach to security policies by addressing violence against women as a national security issue.
- 7- Work actively to end occupation and crisis in the region as obligatory process and a condition to solve the refugee and displacement and eliminate violence against women.
- 8- Build strong coalitions and alliances that use the Ministerial Conclusions as a tool to bridge the gap between international and national implementation of women's rights.
- 9- Strengthen the cooperation between civil society, political sphere, State actors, academia and media in order to raise awareness and counteract the gender stereotypes that hinder women enjoyment of their human rights.
- 10- Enhance the human rights education and organize awareness-raising campaigns and actions on women's rights and on the Ministerial conclusions that target women and men, as well as local and national stakeholders, politicians and decision makers.
- 11- Spread information, raise awareness and mobilize for the upcoming 4th Euro-Med Ministerial Conference on strengthening the role of women in society.



# EGYPT

## National Dialogue

22 - 23 May 2016, Cairo

## OUTCOMES

### National Dialogue

#### **“The UfM Ministerial Conclusions on strengthening the role of women in society: Priorities and Mechanisms in Egypt” 22nd – 23rd May 2016, Cairo**

The national roundtable in Egypt to follow up on the implementation of the UfM Ministerial Conclusions Paris 2013 on strengthening the role of women in society took place on 22nd -23rd May 2016 in Cairo. It was organized by the Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement EACPE and Euromed Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI and funded by the European Union in the frame of the contract “Gender Regional Platform”, which aims to provide space for a policy dialogue at national and regional levels and for the exchange of best practices with existing networks of stakeholders in the Southern Neighbourhood.

The purpose of the two days’ deliberations was to favour a national dialogue in Egypt between the civil society, political decision-makers and State officials on the development and implementation of gender equality and women’s rights policy in the light of the Conclusions from the 3rd UfM Ministerial Conference (Paris in 2013) and to discuss national priorities and mechanisms for their implementation in Egypt. The roundtable also elaborated recommendations and national priorities before the upcoming 4th UfM Ministerial Conference in February 2017.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 25 representatives from major women’s rights CSOs from Cairo and from six governorates in Egypt met to discuss the priorities for the women’s rights organizations and mechanisms to improve the status of women’s rights and gender equality in Egypt.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> May, the national roundtable gathered 35 representatives from women’s rights CSOs and CBOs, representatives from ministries and institutions, MPs and political leaders as well as the Arab League to present and discuss the agreed priorities from the national meeting of the CSOs.

#### **I. POINTS OF DISCUSSION**

The participants discussed several topics concerning the status of women’s rights deemed to be important for Egypt:

- Women's political participation and their participation in decision making positions: the need to support women in politics and to encourage feminist politics.
- Women's economic participation: the need to carve policies that enable women’s economic independence.
- Gender based discrimination and the need to work towards its elimination in all spheres by:
  - Common work on redressing discriminatory legislation;
  - Common work on bridging the gap between de jure and de facto equality.

This work includes making the following legislative changes:

- Reforming family law;
  - Issuing a local councils law that ensures participation of women through proper election law;
  - Reforming the law governing professional syndicates and workers’ union;
  - Issuing a new law establishing the Commission for Equal Opportunity and the Elimination of Discrimination.
- The need to establish a mechanism for reviewing all national policies to make sure that gender is being mainstreamed and no gender discrimination results from implementing these policies.

- National strategy for combating gender based violence and the need to establish a mechanism for its implementation.
- Education: the need to invest in making education gender sensitive and reforming culture abusive of women's rights.
- The need to ensure freedoms in private and public spheres, including the right of organization and assembly, and the need for discussing a new NGO law with civil society.

## II. MAIN PRIORITIES

Reaffirming the importance of all these issues and the need of persistent work and comprehensive approach by civil society, decision makers and State actors, the participants agreed on three priorities for the coming period:

1. Exercising pressure to pass the law on establishing a National Commission for Equal Opportunities according to the Constitution of 2014 with the participation of civil society in the preparation of the law, together with government and parliament.
2. Combating all forms of violence against women and girls.
3. Enabling the civil society to work freely and ensuring that freedoms in both private and public spheres are protected and practiced as stated in the Constitution. A new law governing the work of NGOs prepared by government should be discussed with NGOs.

## III. CHALLENGES TO PARTICIPATION

Participants stressed that there are multiple challenges to women's participation, of which most urgent to address are:

### A) Legal challenges:

1. The wide gap between the 2014 Constitution and the various laws concerning women's rights and gender equality – as discussed above.

### B) Economic, social and culture challenges that include:

1. High rates of poverty in the Egyptian society, especially among women.
2. The inherited social and patriarchal system based on customs, traditions and culture of women's discrimination.
3. The reproduction of traditional gender stereotypical roles of women and men.
4. The division between private and public with the multiple roles women play inside and outside the home, hindering their opportunity to participate in public life.
5. High rates of illiteracy in the Egyptian society, especially among women.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

It was unanimously agreed that the governmental machineries should work together with the women's rights CSOs in order to improve the situation of women's rights and gender equality. Several recommendations were issued:

1. The Equal Opportunity Units in the different ministries should be strengthened, and provided with financial means. This is a condition for proper gender mainstreaming to take place.
2. While the women's CSOs should work together with women at grass root level in order to articulate and present their demands, the National Council of Women should work more closely with the CSOs to learn about women's problems, aspirations and activities and to present their demands to the government. The National Council should make sure that government policies are taking gender equality issues into consideration.
3. The National Council of Women should cooperate with and include CSOs in the implementation of the national strategy of combating violence against women.
4. The National Council and CSOs should advocate together for the establishment of a Gender Equality Committee in the Parliament.
5. CSOs working on empowerment of women should work together and form a pressure group.
6. **A joint cross sector government-civil society committee** should be established to monitor the implementation of the UfM Ministerial Conclusions and the recommendations from the regional and national dialogues.



# TUNISIA

## National Dialogue

27 – 28 May 2016, Tunis

## OUTCOMES

### National Dialogue

#### “UfM Ministerial Conclusions on strengthening the role of women society: Impact in Tunisia”

27<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> May, Tunis

#### I. INTRODUCTION

The Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development AFTURD, a member of the Euromed Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI, organized a national seminar “UfM Ministerial Conclusions on strengthening the role of women society: Impact in Tunisia” on 27<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2016 in Tunis. It took place in the frame of the project “Regional Gender Platform” carried out by Euromed Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI. Among the audience were the Minister of Women’s Affairs, Family and Children, as well as members of parliament, the EU delegation in Tunisia, the Ministry of Interior, women’s studies research centers and other civil society organizations.

In commitment to the general principles which constitute the foundation of the Euromed Feminist Initiative, in follow up and reaction to the Conclusions of the 3rd UfM Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society (Paris, 2013) and the outcomes of the regional dialogue on gender equality policy making (Amman, February 2016); moreover, taking into account the requirements of the current situation in Tunisia, the national seminar examined the following three topics:

- Equality in political rights and women’s participation in public affairs
- Fighting violence against women
- The role of education and media in changing the stereotypes about women and the social attitudes towards equality

These outcomes include an overview of the social context and the background, followed by a presentation of the most significant challenges faced by feminist work and the priorities imposed by the current situation.

#### II. GENERAL CONTEXT

The Tunisian Revolution of January 2011 opened up an era of individual and public freedoms, lifted the barriers of political participation for citizens, men and women alike, and granted everyone the right to establish parties, organizations and media institutions, which as a result contributed to the emergence of social expressions previously silenced and the enrichment of the social context, that covered several fields such as belief, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

These expressions took the form of demands for human rights, demands that the old regime tried to suppress, to confront the opposition and monopolize political participation, governing, and opinion. This political oppression led to the weakening of public awareness on the importance of social diversity, respect for difference, and renouncement of discrimination between citizens. This explains the reluctance of decision makers, parliamentarians and public sphere at large, towards individual freedoms and gender equality, despite the articles regarding gender equality in the constitution. This is exemplified by the discrediting and oppositional campaigns in reaction to a bill on equality in inheritance drafted by a member of parliament.

Feminist organizations have been at the forefront of the fight for those rights. These organizations also doubled their efforts to invest in their pre-revolution achievements and push for complete and substantive equality in governance, within political and intellectual circles, and in public opinion. The goals set included the judicial aspect which, along with other democratic forces, they monitored throughout the drafting of the constitution and contributed in the mobilization to enforce equality, ban discrimination, and set a quota principle. Preceding that was the involvement in the Higher Authority for Realization of the Objectives of the

Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition (2011) that preceded electing a National Constituency Assembly, as well as encouraging the adoption of equality in the electoral lists for the National Council Assembly. Feminist organizations also demanded lifting the reservations on CEDAW immediately after the revolution, which actually happened in April 2014.

Feminist organizations as well followed on policies introduced by the government and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Family and Children to ensure no breach occurs regarding the principles of equality.

### III. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

The deliberations of the national conference on the problems regarding participation of Tunisian women in public life, the fight on violence against women, and the lack of awareness on women's rights, shed a light on the promising horizon within the frame of reforms as well as on the gross challenges to enhance the role of women in the new societal structure based on the rule of law, participatory democracy, and respect for human rights.

#### a) Equality in political rights and women's participation in public affairs

Tunisia is preparing for an important step: the local and regional elections to be held in 2017. That is why a special focus has been put on two bills related to local authorities and municipal elections. The debate concerned the mobilization of women's rights organizations in order to contribute to elaborating a legal frame as per the constitution<sup>1</sup>, to guarantee the effective participation of women during this election and in the activities of the elected structures. The stake is to inscribe the principle of horizontal and vertical parity in the electoral list and to integrate the gender approach in the local power mechanisms as well as to develop trainings, awareness raising and advocacy actions.

The independent presidential candidate in 2014 insisted in his speech on the need for women to overcome fear and said that she was especially supported by the rural fringes among voters whereas her candidacy was met with reservations by political parties and the media.

The representative of the Ministry of Women's Affairs mentioned women's economic empowerment programs that work by providing them with micro loans. The conversation raised questions on the success of such programs and the authority of the Ministry that is perceived as a Ministry with a coordinative role between involved actors so to build comprehensive and harmonious policies.

#### b) Combating all forms of violence against women and girls

Interventions emphasized the spreading of this phenomenon and its extension to public and private spheres, as well as the increase in the rate of violence against women and girls of different backgrounds and social and professional backgrounds.

Interventions also focused on the relationship between discrimination and violence against women, since the inferior status of women is what allows violence against them in both private and public spaces. Poor economic status also increases their chance of being victims of violence. Since legislation is essential in changing societal behavior, discrimination must be dropped from all laws starting from **Code of Personal Status**, which designates the father as the head of the family, and discriminates in the treatment of inheritance, to the **Penal Code** which blatantly discriminates against women in several areas: incriminating only female in prostitution; allowing rapists to marry their victim to escape penalties; absence of legal recognition of rape in marriage, etc.

Since 2014, the comprehensive laws to fight violence against women and girls aim to erase discrimination from all legislation concerned with women.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 46 "The State shall work to achieve equality between women and men in elected councils"

### c) The role of education and media in changing the stereotypical representation of women and the attitudes towards equality

As indicated before, women's fight for human rights and gender equality faces many obstructions, including the lack of understanding of human rights by the vast majority of society. This obstruction can be faced through education and media, if used as tools to train the young generations on the universality of human rights. In the frame of major political reforms that are taking place now, the Tunisian educational system is also the subject of a broad national debate initiated by the Ministry of Education in April 2015 entitled "**National debate on the reform of the system education**", with the participation of political actors and civil society, educational staff, pupils and parents. The results of this reflection have just been published recently<sup>2</sup>. This educational system reform project starts from a diagnosis that describes the difficulties that prevent the school institution to perform its core mission. It establishes the general framework of the necessary transformations.

This report refers to the universal principles of human rights, values of tolerance and equality, openness to the world cultural heritage in educational programs but it did not reserve specific room for gender equality. It is an opportunity for associations of civil society and educational institutions to seize the moment for founding act and introduce the recommendations that contribute to spreading the culture of equality in accordance with the principles enshrined in the constitution.

The speaker on the topic of media and media's role in spreading education on egalitarian values focused on the changes observed after the revolution for which we witness the substitution of the regulator role of HAICA<sup>3</sup> to the previous state control over the field of audiovisual information. This body has committed<sup>4</sup> to respect the gender approach and force the owners of the media to commit to avoid discriminatory remarks and images, and to ensure the presence of women in their emissions.

She also drew attention to the lack of monitoring of these mechanisms and the lack of permanent control on the content of emissions from civil society and women's NGOs with the exception of monitoring them during the legislative and presidential elections 2014. She also lamented the lack of regulatory mechanisms in the field of print making it difficult the control over contents. Ultimately, it was stressed the need to change the field of print media like the audiovisual sector and to fill this gap by establishing a regulatory mechanism and encourage a feminist press, which will play an engine role and would set the tone for the public and private sectors.

#### IV. CHALLENGES

Deliberations in the seminar highlighted the most important new steps on the path to equality in the areas of political participation, combating violence against women as well as in the developments in the fields of education and media.

This recorded development is largely due to the principles included in the new constitution, in particular:

- The principal of civil state and the supremacy of the law and bill of international human rights;
- The primacy of international and regional instruments for the protection of human rights ratified by Tunisia;

<sup>2</sup> "The white paper: The proposed reform of the Tunisian education system" in May 2016

<sup>3</sup> Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication

<sup>4</sup> Article 23 The holder of the license [...] commits that neither broadcasts nor emissions contain incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence, particularly for reasons of race, ethnicity, sex, religion, manners, original or opinion.

Article 25 The license holder commits to guarantee the presence of women in television programs and active participation in debate programs. This participation should be designed on the basis of competence and merit away from any form of complacency or stereotype.

- The inclusion of equality and non-discrimination principals in the constitutional text;
- The State's commitment to protect the acquired rights of women and its "pursuit to achieving equality in the elected councils".<sup>5</sup>

This development is also due to the vigilance of the constituents of civil society, in the foreground of which stand feminist organizations since the beginning of the restructuring of the State and the drafting of the constitution. Its noteworthy to mention the still ongoing efforts of feminist organizations to be included in the process of completing democratic transition (decision making in the senate; establishing the constitutional court; monitoring the path of transitional justice; reforming the judicial and security institutions; paving the path for decentralization and participatory democracy and open governance, etc.)

This vigilance points at their awareness of the close tie between the democratic foundations of the State and the guarantees which these foundations provide for the protection of women's rights. It also points at knowledge of the dangers these rights face. As we recall that the first voice raised against equality in inheritance came from under the dome of the parliament, even before the corresponsive executive power negatively reacted. This in addition to the reluctance in passing the **comprehensive law for the protection of female** victims of violence, due to the reservation on fulfilling equality requirements in all laws related to women included in the first draft.

Feminist organizations do not feel safe: the fact is that certain parties frequently resort to first article in the Tunisian constitution - "Tunisia is a sovereign, free, and independent state. Islam is its religion, Arabic is its language, and the republic is its system" - in order to justify hindering further legislative advancement towards equality.

So it is apparent that the **main challenge** at this stage is implementing these free and democratic principles introduced by the constitution within a harmonious and comprehensive legal framework that is detached from religious gravitations, political employment, and possible retreat from principles.

The **second challenge** faced by the feminist movement is maintaining its pioneering position in leading the other components of the civil democratic society, since it is obvious that absence of feminist representatives from the scene of policy making and the creation of gendered mechanisms will lead to the loss of women's rights and responses to their specific needs will be neglected.

Therefore, feminist activists must **take the lead in establishing dialogue and partnership with the government** in order to take part in decision-making processes and guide policy decisions.

Feminist activists must also continue to work **with the components of the civil democratic** society to encourage it to integrate aspects of women's specific reality in their proposed choices, as well as to support gender equality without reservations.

The feminist movement is also required **to constantly mobilize the support of the political community and raise the public's awareness.**

All of which necessitates increasing the movement's ability to grow and improve its performance and offer suggestions and alternatives.

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<sup>5</sup> Art 46: "The State undertakes to protect the **acquired rights** of women, to supports and to improve them. The State shall guarantee equal opportunities between women and men to take on different responsibilities and in all areas. The state is working to **achieve equality** between women and men in elected councils. The state shall take the necessary measures to eradicate violence against women".

## **V. PRIORITIES**

### **A) Women's political rights and participation in public affairs.**

#### **i. Activities:**

- Following up on the laws related to local elections and local authorities, and adhering to including the principle of vertical and horizontal equality in them.
- Continuing the educational and awareness raising efforts to ensure the actual participation of the widest group of women possible on the levels of nominations and elections.
- Preparing the necessary tools to simplify procedures and media.

#### **ii. Mechanisms:**

- Further activate the ongoing networking activities with the aim to share logistical burdens, as well as the educational and preparatory activities for the joint monitoring process.
- Strengthen the relationship with the media in order to monitor and cover all programs targeted at women.
- Activating regional and international networks to support this national effort.

### **B) Combating all forms of violence against women and girls**

#### **i. Activities:**

- Following on the activation of the national strategy to fight violence against women, including all of its legislative and documentary components (through a unified info bank) and institutional components (through dispatching shelter centers for female victims of violence).
- Pressing for the acceleration in issuing the comprehensive law for fighting violence against women and girls, in a formulation accepted by civil society.
- Revoking the statement Tunisia kept after lifting some of the reservations on CEDAW.
- Spreading knowledge of The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, to get it signed and endorsed.

#### **ii. Mechanisms:**

- Activating the role of the established coordination committee to pass a comprehensive law to fight violence against women and girls to mobilize national, regional, and international support for the activities mentioned above.

### **C) The role of education and media in changing the stereotypes against women and the attitudes towards equality**

#### **i. Activities:**

- Feminist organizations follow up on educational reform and join the brainstorming committees in order to support the participating legal organizations, as well as influencing decisions related to all aspects of reform, especially educational ones.

- Follow up on the activities of the Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication and the Journalists Syndicate, with the aim to establish the habits of consultation and respect for the gender approach in how the media covers and writes its content.

**ii. Mechanisms:**

- Networking to increase awareness on respecting women's rights in the fields covered by this seminar and other women's rights issues.

In conclusion to this report, it bears noting that building the foundation for equality needs the participation of both the State and civil society, which is why the "National Council for Gender Equality" initiative in Tunisia, which was officially announced in March 2016, can be considered a positive indicator of the awareness of the necessity to build partnership between official organizations and different components of civil society, especially feminist organization, to ensure the protection of women's human rights and to gradually ban all forms of discrimination. What is required is the activation of this initiative to respond to the demands of concerned organizations and parties.