



RECOMMENDATIONS

EURO-MED WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONFERENCE

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY BUILDING PROMOTING A COMMON AGENDA FOR EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

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Amman Jordan



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RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE THIRD EURO-MED MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE 2013 PARIS

Introduction

1. The Euro-Med Conference of civil society organizations and networks “Women’s Rights and Democracy Building: Promoting a Common Agenda for Equality between Women and Men” took place on 7 – 8 June 2013 at Hotel Landmark in Amman, Jordan. It was organized by the European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI and the partners in the MENA region Arab Women’s Organization and Sisterhood is Global Institute from Jordan, Association Najdeh and Rassemblement Démocratique des Femmes Libanaises from Lebanon, the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates from Tunisia, the Egyptian Association Enhancing Community Participation from Egypt and Women’s Studies Centre from Palestine as a result of the two year regional process to promote a common agenda for equality between women and men through Istanbul-Marrakech Framework of Action.
2. During 2011 the regional Euro-Med campaign, “Equality First” was launched in order to preserve the fundamental women’s rights as universal human rights and to promote equality between women and men in the whole region. Many developments took place in the region, highlighting the link between women’s rights and democracy building in the follow-up of the Marrakech Ministerial Conclusions 2009: Around 2,500 women and men had the opportunity to directly discuss women’s rights and democracy-building and regional and international mechanisms that promote and protect them. During the process, civil society organizations, Ministers and ministries’ representatives and political leaders and decision-makers from Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Tunisia, France, and Sweden, EU diplomats, members of the European Parliament, legal experts and academics, municipality leaders, and women’s rights organizations have together strengthened and furthered the discussion.
3. The goal of this process is to sustain the Istanbul-Marrakech Frame of Action as a major regional tool for improving of women’s rights; to contextualize it in the present developments in Euro-Med: political transitions in the MENA and economical and financial crises in Europe; to promote it as a part of the international women’s rights framework linked with the Millennium Declaration that reaffirmed gender equality as both a goal in itself and a condition for the achievement of other goals and development.
4. In addition to the EU, this process has been supported in its different phases by the partnerships and contributions of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty, the Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project REEWP/Oxfam-Québec, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Mediterranean Women’s Fund, Ford Foundation, Norwegian People’s Aid, and Hivos.
5. The Conference held on 7-8 June 2013 in Amman is a culmination of this process. It gathered over 150 representatives from women’s rights organizations and networks, State actors, political leaders, members of parliaments, academics, and media from the Euro-Med region to discuss and finalize the recommendations to the 3rd Ministerial Meeting to be held in September in Paris.
6. The participants acknowledged the role of Jordan in hosting this conference and welcomed the initiative of France, Jordan and the EU to organize the next Ministerial Conference on Women in September 2013 in Paris. They underlined the importance of making their voice heard in the Paris Ministerial Meeting and issued the following recommendations.

Recommendations

The conference supports the conclusions from the Ministerial Meeting Marrakesh 2009 and calls upon the Governments at the Paris Ministerial Meeting in 2013 to further enhance and concretize the future steps towards achieving gender equality. The aim of gender equality policies is to ensure that women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and responsibility in all areas of life. The principle is that everyone, regardless of sex, has the right to work and support themselves, to balance career and family life, to participate in the political and public life on equal footing, and to live without the fear of abuse or violence. Gender equality means that women and men are of equal worth and implies ensuring the knowledge and experience of both men and women to promote progress in all spheres of society.

1. On Democracy and Women's Participation

Gender equality is a pillar of democracy and therefore all the obstacles to its achievement across the regional, national and local contexts comprise a major hindrance to democracy and development. The conference emphasized that freedom, dignity, physical and psychological integrity, equal access of women and men to resources and opportunities, health education, and decision-making are prerequisites to democracy. Women's rights are at the core of all transitional and reform processes that take place in the MENA and at the core of all policies addressing the economic crises in Europe and therefore their implementation is not only an essential part but also a measure of democracy. Reform process towards democracy can only be successful if the values of gender equality and human rights are considered. Democracy demands equal participation and sharing of power, duties and responsibilities, but women face numerous obstacles due to discriminative patriarchal structures, practices and procedures as well as social and cultural attitudes. Moreover, violence used against women to limit their participation is an extreme form of control and discrimination. Therefore a broader debate on defining democracy is needed in the whole region, mobilizing the communities for transformative changes and placing women's rights at the highest priorities for State action, political parties and civil society. Civil States where politics is separated from religion are a precondition to achieving equality, respecting diversities and protecting the beliefs of all.

- Adopting proportional electoral systems, combined with a legally and constitutionally binding gender quota of minimum 40% representation of women in order to ensure their application and overcome deficiencies in democracy. These mechanisms are transitory towards ensuring women's equal participation in decision-making, policy-making and implementation. Follow-up on non-compliance through significant sanctions, including disqualifying the non-compliance lists.
- Applying the principle of separation of politics and religion, non-discrimination based on gender and equality between women and men as a guiding principle for all constitutions, as a necessary condition for achieving equality and women's rights. Incorporating clear provisions guaranteeing equal citizenship rights between women and men.
- Adopting gender equality laws in all the countries of the Euro-Med region, ensuring its institutionalizing in the government policies and action plans to safeguard women's rights from regressive measures.
- Forming of women's rights or gender equality committees in the national assemblies.
- Engendering the national budgets and introducing gender-based statistics.

2. On Women's Rights, Regional and International Mechanisms to promote them

Never has it been more important to apply international conventions and activate national tools for gender equality. The Marrakech Ministerial Conclusions 2009 has been cited in connection with the other international women's rights mechanisms as parts of the same framework promoting women's rights as universal human rights. They articulate the political will to strengthen the action by governments for gender equality, following their obligations to other international conventions and resolutions that were signed. To make the connection between the Marrakesh Conclusions and the International Conventions is crucial, as is

the connection between the International Conventions themselves. During the Ministerial Meetings the governments have agreed to fight discrimination. The Convention of Elimination of all forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW) provides a definition of discrimination and concrete measures on how to curb it; UNSCR 1325 addresses women's participation in the political sphere and their role in solving conflicts, while the Beijing Platform for Action explains that a critical mass of minimum 30% of underrepresented is needed in decision-making and in all spheres in order to be able to take into account the needs and interests of women. Enshrining women's rights and gender equality as well as the principle of non-discrimination based on gender in all the constitution enables legislative changes addressing existing discrimination. Equal recognition of rights and duties defines citizenship. Therefore, affirming constitutional equality is nothing more than making both women and men full citizens, making gender equality a defining feature of the State. Holding reservations to sustain formal and legal discrimination of women in personal status matters (divorce, marriage, inheritance, property, and custody) is not possible as it amounts to denying women their full citizenship, which is the purpose of the CEDAW. Introducing reservations is contrary to the purpose of the treaty and hence invalid according to Art 19 of Vienna Convention on the Laws of Treaties. In Europe the lack of implementation of existing legislation is an obstacle to full and real democracy.

- Meeting the long-term demand of civil society by lifting all reservations on CEDAW and ratifying the optional protocol.
- Harmonizing national legislation with international laws and standards for women's rights, grounded in their universality.
- Developing National Action Plans for implementing the Ministerial Conclusions as a channel for dialogue between State actors and women's rights organizations and as a monitoring mechanism. Allocating budgets for their development and implementation.
- Respecting gender equality and women's rights as a condition in every bilateral and multilateral agreement and the ENP. EU must base partnerships on full respect of human rights of both women and men and develop strict and reliable tools to assess their implementation as stated in the ENP.

3. On Education and Awareness-Raising

Changing attitudes and discriminatory patterns requires not only a political and legal intervention by the State but also broad awareness-raising action addressing cultural gender stereotypes. The educational system and curricular are framed by patriarchal values and gender bias and propagate these stereotypes. Personnel in concerned authorities (diverse ministries) working on creating educational programs and curricula often spread discriminatory patterns themselves.

- Exerting efforts to reform the educational system, the curricula and the educational programs to promote the values of citizenship, human rights and gender equality, to stop violence and discrimination, to promote women's rights as a human rights issue and not a family issue.
- Giving priority to providing training programs on gender equality and women's rights for professionals (teachers, police, security personnel, hospitals, and judiciary). Gender mainstreaming in the ministries, in particular Ministries of Education, should be made a State priority with relevant policies and adequate budgeting.
- Both national and international women's rights NGOs may provide needed expertise and advice in tailoring these programs.
- Legislating and developing mechanisms that ensure the fair distribution of work for women and men in the private and public sectors and development of social state services to allow all genders equal participation in economic and social life.

4. On Dialogue between Women's Rights Organizations and Decision-Makers

A vibrant and active civil society and independent women's rights NGOs play important monitoring and advocacy roles. Civil society is a critical partner in the reform processes bringing the voices of women to the reform agenda. The participants debated on the need to develop concrete and diverse mechanisms that enhance the dialogue between women's rights NGOs, political players and State actors. Implementation of women's rights mechanisms requires institutionalizing conclusions of the critical dialogue between civil

society, political decision-makers and State actors where the decision-makers can consolidate the demands of women's NGOs for gender equality borne out of their experiences with the grassroots.

Cooperation and dialogue between governmental and non-governmental actors is important for implementing what has been discussed thus far. In the process of strengthening women's role in society, it is crucial that everyone continues to play their part in a broad and inclusive dialogue. It is important to engage governments, parliamentarians, officials, civil society organizations, women's associations, academia, professional associations, media, and others to cooperate at local, national, regional, and international levels. This dialogue must include both women and men.

The independent status and functioning of women's rights NGOs are preconditions for having a vocal civil society. Autonomy of the women's rights NGOs is a fundamental principle in the dialogue with the State's leaders.

- Enabling adequate legislation of women's rights organizations to play its leading role in reshaping the society that contribute to the fight against extremisms;
- Establishing channels for dialogue with NGOs as independent and full rank interlocutors, as encouraging the forming of cross sectoral committees enabling dialogue on gender equality of diverse actors.

5. On Violence against Women, Peace and Security

Violence against women in all its different forms and as a constitutive part of the patriarchal system is structural and exists everywhere. The structures of violence in war and in "peacetime" are constructed as poverty, unemployment and economic insecurity. The UN and the Commission for Human Security have launched the concept of *Human security* intending to move the (security) focus from the State to the human being, but even this concept escapes the fact that the threat against women's security lies also within the relations of their affiliation. Women are the victims of violence committed by their closest partners and men in their family, in their own homes. At the same time violence used by armies and armed conflict in war justifies rape and sexual humiliation in addition to violence against women at home. Security problems constitute the daily multi-faceted discrimination women experience within societies that sustain their oppression, subordination, inequality, discrimination, and feelings of insecurity.

Studies show that in Europe, "violence against women is far more dangerous to the female population than terrorism or cancer". As many as 45% of European women have been victims of physical and/or sexual violence. Cross-cultural studies have found that cultural norms endorsing male dominance, female economic dependency, patterns of conflict resolution emphasizing violence, toughness, and honor, and male authority in the family predict high societal levels of domestic violence and rape.

Conservative and traditional trends together with religious fundamentalist movements are hindering women from becoming full citizens and to live free of violence in the whole region. In the MENA countries, many governments have reservations against CEDAW, which contributes to reproducing violence against women in the public and private sphere –in family, in marriage, with inheritance and property, etc.

Women's rights organizations are reporting abuse of women's rights and increasing violence against women in the public space in the contexts of ongoing occupation, political transitions and violent conflict with displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. All this makes it urgent to introduce binding legal measures regarding violence against women and provide protection according to UNSCR 1325.

- Introducing urgently binding legal measures criminalizing and penalizing all forms of violence against women in order to close the gap between formal rights and substantial/real rights and to strengthening public awareness of the violation of women's sexual and reproductive rights.
- Signing and ratifying the European Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), especially the EU and European Council States member

states, in order to enter into force immediately, and provide a Task Force against violence against women with their resources and information to implement their mandate.

- Establishing shelters, centers and hotlines for abused women under the supervision of specialized women's rights organizations. Providing special support to victims of violence through funding special programs at the psychosocial level.
- Introducing data and statistics, harmonization and publication on VAW and allocating budgets for curbing all forms of violence against women.
- Adopting special laws to protect women migrant workers from violence and exploitation.

a) **On Palestine**

Women are the most vulnerable during military conflict and occupations. The occupation of Palestine is an impediment for women to play their role in building their society. The occupation adds extra responsibilities to women to build families and communities during and after the collective loss. The dominant culture is that women have no complaints and therefore their psychological trauma remains unrecognized. Palestinian women suffer from multiple tensions and worries, not only because of the social, economic and political conditions under which every Palestinian family lives, but also because their husbands or sons or daughters are pursued, imprisoned, injured or murdered; or because their houses are destroyed or they suffer from multiple losses. In addition women are excluded from the peace negotiation processes and therefore their needs, perspectives and demands are not taken into consideration.

- Immediate ending of the occupation and recognition of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State on occupied territories of 1967 war, with East Jerusalem as its capital and the respect of the right of the Palestinians to return to their home land according to the UN resolution number 194 and support the State of Palestine to be a member in the international agencies.
- Immediate end to the building of Israeli settlements on the occupied territories and the withdrawal of the established ones; setting up time agenda to finish the peace negotiation.
- Including women in a participatory and comprehensive peace process in accordance with UNSCR1325 on Women, Peace and Security, as a condition to allow transition towards democracy, enhancing respect of human rights of both women and men.
- Support Palestine in attaining its membership as a State in the United Nations.

b) **On Women and Syrian Conflict**

Syrian women in particular are living in tragic conditions. The participants call for a political solution based on a civil, pluralistic and democratic Syrian State, free from oppression and dictatorship through:

- Urging inclusion of women's rights and gender equality in the agenda of democratic transformation and for inclusion of the women's rights movement in the process of building a new constitution and transitional justice program.
- Protecting women from all kinds of violence.
- Integrating the needs of Syrian women refugees and displaced women in all humanitarian aid programs.