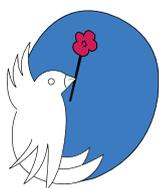


Regional Dialogue on Enhancing Democracy through Strengthening Women's Social, Political and Economic Rights

20th and 21st of June 2012 – Beirut, Lebanon

Roundtable Report



RDFL



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مؤسسة فريدريش ناومان من أجل الحرية



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"Promoting a common agenda for equality
between women and men through Istanbul Process"

Roundtable Report
Regional Dialogue on Enhancing Democracy through Strengthening
Women's Social, Political and Economic Rights
June 20-21, 2012 – Beirut, Lebanon

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“Full respect of women’s rights and gender equality should be in the core of all political reforms. It is a precondition to build real democracy”.

Participant at the roundtable



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Acronyms

ARAB-EURO	Europe and the Arab World
ATFD	Association Tunisien des Femmes Democrate
AWO	Arab Women Organization
BpA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
EACPE	The Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement
IFE-EFI	European Feminist Initiative
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
EU	European Union
EURO-MED	Euro Mediterranean
IFA	Istanbul Framework for Action
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NAP	National Action Plan
NGOs	Non- Governmental Organizations
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
RDFL	Rassemblement Démocratique des Femmes Libanaises/ Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering
REEWP	Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WR	Women's Right



Foreword

We are pleased to present this report on the roundtable discussion “Regional Dialogue on Enhancing Democracy through Strengthening Women’s Social, Political and Economic Rights” that took place on June 20-21, 2012 in Beirut, Lebanon.

The event was organized by the European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI, Najdeh Association, and Rassemblement Démocratique des Femmes Libanaises (RDFL) within the framework of the two year regional project “*Promoting a Common Agenda for Equality between Women and Men through Istanbul Process*” funded by the European Union. Within this project IFE-EFI and their partners in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and Palestine launched a regional Euro-Med campaign entitled “***Equality First***” which targets political parties, state actors and decision makers in order to advocate and promote women’s rights as an integral part of democracy and sustainable development, placing equality between women and men as a priority on their respective agendas.

The event, organized in cooperation with Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project (REEWP)/Oxfam-Québec and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty, aimed to provide a platform for discussing women’s rights and democracy. The majority of the speakers emphasized the critical importance of providing this space for a constructive dialogue between the different stakeholders as a means to strengthen their cooperation. Deliberations also further demonstrated that multilayered cooperation is instrumental for achieving changes in policy on any level. Many speakers illuminated the universality of women’s rights and the common reference to the international and regional mechanisms promoting them. The debates emphasized that although women’s rights are both the cornerstone and safeguard of democracy, social justice cannot be attained if half of the population (women) are excluded, either politically, socially or economically, and kept in inferior position, often by control and violence. In addition, the roundtable raised several viable feminist alternatives to the present, ever-increasing influence of conservative trends. This was achieved by critically examining both challenges and opportunities that have arisen for women’s rights in the current political climate coupled with the continued encouragement of utilization of international conventions and safeguards and regional tools for gender equality.

Moving forward, we wish to express our sincere thanks to all of the participants who contributed to these lively debates that sought to consolidate a dialogue between civil society, state actors and politicians, as envisioned in the Istanbul Framework for Action (IFA). We would also like to extend our deepest appreciation to both the European Union and the Government of Canada who made this event possible through their generous financial support. Finally, we wish to thank our partners for this innovative collaboration. By sharing a common commitment and vision, and by fostering synergies and harmonization, we hope to advance and ensure greater realization of women’s rights in the Euro-Med region, a challenging goal yet within reach for us all.



Executive Summary

The roundtable “*Regional Dialogue on Enhancing Democracy through Strengthening Women’s Social, Political and Economic Rights*”, brought together state actors, politicians and members of civil society from the Euro-Med region. It was organized by the European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI, Najdeh Association and Rassemblement Démocratique des Femmes Libanaises (RDFL) within the framework of the two year regional project “*Promoting a Common Agenda for Equality between Women and Men through the Istanbul Process*” funded by the European Union. Within this project IFE-EFI and their partners in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and Palestine launched a regional Euro-Med campaign entitled “**Equality First**” which advocates political parties, state actors and decision makers to promote women’s rights as an integral part of democracy and sustainable development and ensure that equality between women and men is a priority on their agendas.

The roundtable, organized in cooperation with Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project (REEWP)/Oxfam-Québec and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty, provided space for consolidating a regional dialogue on the advancement of women’s civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights, as envisioned in the Istanbul Framework for Action (IFA). It also aimed to examine challenges and opportunities that the current political processes in the MENA region have opened for women’s rights and how the international conventions and regional tools for gender equality can be utilized. The debate generated feminist alternatives to the increasing influence of conservative trends in the region.

Some major challenges analyzed during the discussions were related to uncovering the linkage between neo-liberal economic policies, conservative social trends, increasing of religious trends and fundamentalisms and how their interference in the political sphere brings new limitations to women’s rights. Another challenge raised was the non-supportive role of progressive political parties for women’s rights. The majority of these parties do not incorporate gender equality as a measure of democracy on their agendas and easily compromise women’s rights for their own interests – as evidenced in the results of the recent parliamentary elections in the region. The participants highlighted the absence of national economic development plans to address the lack of economic, and educational/vocational opportunities that affect women’s economic rights. Furthermore the high level of violence against the opposition has consequences for women’s participation in the uprisings, for fear of increased insecurity and violence against women and sexual violence. An additional challenge to the entire MENA region is the need to address democracy from a women’s rights perspective, as a part of the national liberation, acknowledging that democracy is not compatible with occupation, nor with a sectarian system, be it political or within the community.

Many participants raised specific concerns for women’s rights, namely the need for urgent legal reforms mitigating abusive legislation, improving law enforcement practices and adopting binding mechanisms. There also needs to be comprehensive awareness-raising actions exposing and condemning humiliating practices and addressing continued violence against women, often justified with increasing cultural relativism. The lack of access of women’s rights NGOs to spheres to influence decision-makers was highlighted as one of the major barriers for social progress. Even where there is better legislation, it is faced by a lack of implementation, in both parts of the Mediterranean.

Regardless of the difficulties, the two days of deliberations showed that opportunities are still abundant. The Arab uprising opened the door to reactivate women’s status and to link women’s



rights with national struggles and democratic changes. It was stated repeatedly during the discussions that the time to seize opportunities to create change at all levels was now, especially in the context of the new constitutions in the Arab uprising countries which are the basis for building democracy and achieving equality. Thus, entering a clear reference to the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination as referred to in the international and regional women's rights mechanisms was seen as vital and an opportunity to debate democracy in light of women's rights. In this way advocating for women's participation and non-discrimination in legislation was described as a means to ensure social security and rights. It is a crucial time to re-affirm this framework as the sole reference and to monitor and pressure governments to utilize the international women's rights instruments to counteract the intrusion of religious conservatism in political life and to harmonize national legislation with international conventions. It was stressed in many cases that even where there are favourable laws, in order to bring positive changes for women, there needs to be greater focus on implementation. Together with changing discriminatory legislation, many noted that broad awareness-raising campaigns would be needed in order to change patriarchal culture and stereotypical perception of gender social roles. There was a common agreement that violence against women is a result of the global patriarchal system and as such, is universal and used in political transitions as a means of control.

The participants viewed the current situation in the region, with threats of increasing conservatism, as an opportunity for the feminist movement to build a broader base with the grassroots and with the democratic movement, introducing women's rights as a principle of democracy and their demands for putting equality between women and men as a priority on the agendas. In this aspect, the importance of women's unification was highlighted, together with the need for solidarity, networking and coordination at the national, regional and international levels as a precondition to build civil and democratic states. This cooperation was seen also as a way to renew feminist discourse and enable the uncovering of religious extremist discourse that hampers achieving women's rights. There is also the need to promote alternatives to empower women at the economic levels with skills' gathering, organizing and structuring their struggle as well as continuing women's role and participation in the uprisings. Many interventions emphasized the need of a holistic feminist approach, prioritizing women's rights and adopting a feminist perspective as a scientific tool for analysis of gender segregated data and elaborate political and social analysis.

Several proposals were put forward during the discussions. Seeking methods to legally ensure women's political participation, notably in the transition processes, was seen as an entry point to achieve women's rights. A minimum of a 30% gender quota was described as a priority together with the democratization of electoral systems and laws. Various mechanisms were explored to address women's rights in political parties and on the governmental level, in order to monitor and hold the decision-makers accountable, such as the establishment of gender equality, multi- sector committees at the national level and in the political parties.

The participants underlined the importance of providing a space for a constructive dialogue between the different stakeholders. They adopted recommendations to the governments to enhance social justice and democracy through strengthening of women's social, political and economic rights.



Recommendations to the Governments

Measures to be adopted in the sphere of the Civil Society

1. Adopt legislation and develop mechanisms that enable the independence of the civil society organizations, especially those working with monitoring of human rights of women and men, to play an advisory, accountability and monitoring role on the performance of the Governments and the elected assemblies. These mechanisms should enable civil society to participate in the policy-making processes, especially through monitoring of the implementation of international instruments and conventions on human rights and in particular on women's rights and gender equality, such as CEDAW.
2. Recognize the need for and develop effective mechanisms for women's rights and human rights organizations to address complaints and negotiate for cases of violence and discrimination against women, against women's rights and against women's rights defenders.
3. Develop mechanisms that enable civil society to hold a constructive dialogue with governments, and organize public hearings in parliaments on violence and all forms of discrimination against women.
4. Enable the election of representatives from the civil society to the national bodies working with women's rights and human rights as opposed to them being nominated or appointed by the State. Call for the institutionalization of these bodies and cease all forms of political patronage or State authority over these bodies.

Measures to improve women's participation in the political sphere

1. Adopt, ratify and activate the international references of women's universal human rights without reservations and selectivity, enabling women's equal representation and participation. Harmonize national legislations with international conventions and resolutions that the States have ratified and that enhance women's political participation, such as CEDAW, BpA, UNSCR1325, and Istanbul-Marrakech Framework for Action (IFA).
2. Adopt mechanisms to enable civil society to monitor the implementation of the States obligations towards the international and regional conventions on women's participation to which it is a signatory.
3. Adopt mechanisms that aim at promoting women's political participation, such as minimum 30% quota as agreed by the UN in Beijing in 1995, as a temporary measure to address the lack of democracy and improving the status of gender equality.
4. Enact enhanced political analysis based on MDG indicators on gender equality and implementation of women's rights.
5. Adopt electoral systems and design electoral institutions that enhance developing of party systems and promote women's political participation at the national and local levels, such as adopting list proportional representation.
6. Engender the national budgets, especially the political budgets and introduce gender based statistics.

Measures to improve women's rights in the social and economic sphere

1. Introduce legal, economic and social rights based on the international conventions, allowing the equality in wages for the same value of work (pay equity).



2. Harmonize national laws with international conventions, especially in the sphere of economic and social rights.
3. Introduce ongoing information mechanism that updates decision and/or policy makers on the international economic and social rights conventions and instruments.
4. Enable women's entrance to the labor market to non-traditional fields, roles and positions.
5. Adopt policies and mechanisms such as gender quota to ensure women's participation in economic decision and policy-making and implementation.
6. Develop policies that facilitate women's access to loans and national programs for management and marketing.
7. Make provision for public transport enabling women's mobility.
8. Develop policies and mechanisms that ensure the fair distribution of work between women and men in the private and public sectors. For this purpose, develop social state services as kinder gardens to enable women's participation in the public and economic life and production; introduce mechanisms to encourage and enhance men's participation and sharing of responsibility in the private sphere; adopt international best practices and legislations that address sharing of responsibilities in the families.
9. Protect micro-credit institutions from donors' external pressures with regard to lending projects for women.



Introduction

The *Millennium Declaration* reaffirmed that gender equality is both a goal in itself (MDG-3), and a condition for the achievement of other goals and development. Therefore the obstacles to gender equality across the regional, national and local contexts, comprise a major hindrance to the peoples' potential to fully achieve these goals.¹ The IFE-EFI together with several Arab women's rights organizations have launched a Euro-Med regional campaign "***Equality First***" in order to advocate decision-makers to place equality between women and men on their political, social and economic agendas.

Despite some progress made in implementing political, social and economic reforms, and commitments, states are facing a number of challenges in the field of women's rights. Women's participation in the political sphere remains low, legislation discriminatory, gender stereotypes are prevailing and hindering progress, and cultural discriminatory patterns remain unchallenged.

In the face of the global economic crisis, women, already vulnerable, are further plagued by insecurity, low salaries, low pensions, unemployment, and poverty. The majority of low income or low waged workers are women. Poverty is not only a lack of financial means; it is also a lack of access to full citizenship and to have decision-making power over one's own life choices. The transfer of responsibilities of the states in the fields of education health, child and elderly care towards the private sector penalizes women, by making it impossible for the majority of women to combine a professional life or involvement in the public sector with their family life.

Additionally, social and economic policies go together with the realization of security and peace policies – generally funds for militarization come through funding cuts to the social sector, yet the profits of the arms' trade are tremendous. These political choices are interconnected with the roles of women who are labeled as the weak part of the society to be protected from "the other". Women always carry the heaviest burden of war and occupation. The subjugation of women and domestic and sexual violence in peace turns into rape, sexual assaults and slavery in war - all of these are used as strategies of war. This continues to be true in the on-going military conflicts all over the world.

Violence against women persists across the world as a way to systematically exercise dominance and control. Furthermore the universal social tolerance to this violence is supported by the promotion and adoption of discriminatory legislation in many countries. Thus violence such as prostitution, slashing, stoning, rape and sexual abuse are receiving state and governmental acceptance.

The conclusions from the Euro-Med Workshop "*Equality First: Women's Rights and Democracy Building*", on December 7– 8, 2011 in Beirut, a part of the same project, show that nowhere in the Euro-Med region, women's rights and gender equality are considered as priority issues by decision-makers. The political processes are not supporting an enabling environment in which women can exercise their right to participate in social, cultural or political life. Today, women face economic and financial crises, with fundamentalist forces and conservative trends increasing their influence and pressure on political leaders. This has, as a consequence, limited the freedom of women and their empowerment, and continues to reinforce gender stereotypes that prevent women's participation in the public, political and economic life. The precarious political, economic and security situation

¹ Arab Women Parliamentarians Project, UNIFEM 2007



is leading to postponing the implementation of women's rights. Even if governments claim their commitment, women's rights are seldom on the top of the political agendas; consequently policies addressing them properly are not being prioritized. The delays in the implementation of women's rights are always justified with other, more pertinent issues.

At the Ministerial Meeting, "*Strengthening the Role of Women in Society*" in November 2006 in Istanbul, Ministers of the Euro-Med region, in the framework of the Barcelona Process, adopted a set of principles and a five- year framework for action to increase women's role in political, civil, social, economic and cultural spheres, as well as to fight against discrimination. This framework was strengthened at the second Ministerial Meeting on November 11-12, 2009 in Marrakech, where the Ministers underlined the need for "actions at national, sub-regional and regional levels, targeted towards improving women's status, strengthening the role of women in political, civil, social, economic and cultural life, and combating all forms of discrimination against women and girls." Ministers stressed the need for concrete measures and specific commitments in the areas of civil and political rights, economic rights, and cultural and social rights, proposing to integrate gender equality as one of the priority project areas of the Union for the Mediterranean. The IFA is unique as it has been negotiated and agreed upon by the governments of all participating countries and the Ministerial Conclusions acknowledged the governmental commitments to women's rights, recognizing that there are inequalities between men and women that should be addressed.

Women's organizations and networks experienced that the whole Istanbul process could constitute an Arab-Euro tool for the promotion of gender equality, protection and strengthening of women's position in the society. Therefore the IFA, together with the other international and regional instruments promoting gender equality becomes essential in the development of women's rights, empowering of women and achieving social change. IFA and the international conventions need to be positioned now in the context of the current political transitions, as one common framework to promote, protect and further women's rights, especially during the process of discussing and adopting new constitutions.



Promoting the right for women to lead a life free from violence should be a priority for all states. It requires a global approach and a sustainable dialogue and partnership between the governmental institutions and the civil society, especially the women's organizations. In parallel to a broad dialogue on a national level, it is also important to continue regional and global dialogue. The Euro-Med region provides a unique space for this cooperation based on the promotion of women's rights as universal human rights while implementing the conventions as a first step to enabling women to participate in building democracy.

Roundtable Objectives

The roundtable aimed to provide a space for an inclusive and constructive regional discussion and to consolidate a dialogue between civil society, state actors and politicians on advancement of women's rights in order to contribute to strengthening of women's position in the society in the three





main areas of civil and political rights, economic rights, and cultural and social rights, as envisioned in IFA. It also aimed to examine the challenges and the opportunities that the recent political developments have opened for women and women's rights and how international conventions and regional tools for gender equality can be utilized in the processes of democratization. The discussion also aimed to enrich feminist alternatives for women's full citizenship and economic empowerment, as opposed to the present increasing influence of conservative trends and patriarchal hegemony.

Format

Ten state actors, 11 politicians, representatives from 29 women's rights NGOs and 17 human rights, regional and international development NGOs, 4 experts, together with 4 members of the media as well as lawyers and businessmen and women participated in the roundtable in order to exchange opinions, ideas, experiences and expertise and to contribute to building a common discourse and action for improving the status of women in the region.



The roundtable contained a number of keynote addresses in the opening, five panels, followed by in-depth plenary discussions. One session contained three working groups, who prepared the recommendations of the roundtable. Six moderators shared the responsibility to chair the sessions and to provide key elements from the discussions into the concluding remarks summarized by Borianna Jönsson, the Euro-Med Program Director of IFE-EFI and Joumana Mehri, President of RDFL.

The discussions situated women's rights in the current political developments in the region and examined opportunities and strategies to advance them. They also reviewed existing policies and identified gaps and needed interventions to address them on different levels: governmental, civil society, and international community.

Roundtable Proceedings

Day One – 20th of June 2012

Changing Contexts: New Opportunities and Challenges for Women's Rights in the Region and State Obligation to Protect, Promote and Respect them in Democracy Building



Ms. Leila Al Ali, Executive Director of Association Najdeh opened the roundtable by underlining the collaborative efforts invested in pressuring the governments of the Arab countries to improve the status of women's rights and the support of the European Union on issues of gender equality. She explained the Euro-Med campaign "**Equality First**" and invited the state actors to strengthen their work by putting gender equality as a priority on their agendas, especially in the contexts of the Arab uprising for social justice and democracy.



Ms. Elsa Fenet, First Secretary, EU Delegation explained the importance of the exchange of ideas within the Euro-Med region. She shed light on the women's active participation before and during the Arab uprisings and stressed that the changes present valuable opportunities, but also a risk of regression. Ms. Fenet noted that even if women are active in all areas of life, they are still under-represented in positions of responsibility. In Lebanon women's representation in parliament is only 3%. She drew attention to the fact that Lebanon signed CEDAW but with reservations, and the phenomenon of violence against women is still pertinent even if women's rights activists have been working with awareness-raising and lobbying for changing discriminatory legislation for a long time. Therefore, she expected that these issues would be raised during the discussions and pointed out some critical steps that needed to be taken. These include: adopting the gender mainstreaming approach, lifting the reservations from CEDAW, developing policies to address women's under-representation, and adopting affirmative measures such as quota to enable women to reach senior decision-making positions, changing of discriminatory legislation involving men in the fight against violence against women and finally coordinating and unifying the efforts from the government, women's rights NGOs, and the international community and maintaining dialogue among these spheres on the policy-making level.

Ambassador Mansour Abdallah from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lebanon welcomed the participants and pointed out that one of the pillars of democracy is the commitment of the state to protect the rights of all citizens – men and women alike and therefore reiterated the state's responsibility to enhance these rights in order to boost democracy. He referred to several areas where it is essential to amend laws in order to protect these rights, including: health, education, political participation, economic development, and media and to fight poverty and violence against women as women are those who pay the price for these actions.

Mr. Abdallah also directed the attention of the participants to the responsibility of the state to protect women during war and military conflict. He concluded that women should be given a broader role in the society not least through providing them with just opportunities at labour market and investing in changes in the educational system, as this is important not only from the perspective of justice but also for the development of the whole society. In the end he turned to women's rights organizations and encouraged them to continue their work of promoting women in the society, noting that changes may be slow but in their content they are revolutionary.

Dr. Basheer Esmat, Adviser to the Minister of Social Affairs, Lebanon emphasized the importance of knowledge of the situation in order to be able to foment change and therefore commended all the awareness raising efforts made by the civil society. He also underlined that the whole society should be involved and work together in order to move forward, underlying the need for cooperation between the different spheres in order to achieve social development and overcome poverty. Mr. Esmat focused on security and women and raised several questions in this regard as how security arrangements affect women or should security be only linked to "political issues." How does political and social insecurity increase violence? He raised the idea that violence against women is both a result and a reflection of the gender power imbalance. To be able to eliminate all discrimination against women, it is necessary for women to achieve the balance of power. For this purpose, he noted that full gender equality is needed. As social and political security affect women's status, he again stressed the state commitment to protect women's rights. However, he concluded changes in legislation and society can only happen if the balance of power is corrected.

Ms. Anna Kapellas, Chargé d'affaires at the Embassy of Canada in Lebanon emphasized that there are many mechanisms to implement gender equality but there is never "a quick fix" as many steps need to be taken. She suggested that the common challenges in all countries



need the long term commitment of the state and political actors, along with common solutions to implement them. She underlined the role of the international donors in this work, as Canada and EU who also work for and support all efforts towards gender equality. Ms. Kapellas noted that the Arab uprising has opened up opportunities and created more activists who have joined with the many others who have been working for a long time. She suggested working together in synergy and strengthening cooperation rather than duplication may lead to better results. However, as economic empowerment leads to social emancipation, she suggested that without improvement of economic rights, it would be difficult to reach an overall improvement of the society.

Ms. Maryse Guimond, Project Director of the Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project (REEWP)/Oxfam-Québec appealed to all participants, representing different spheres of the society, to join efforts and reaffirm their commitment in order to accelerate progress. She stressed that there cannot be sustainable development without full participation of all spheres. She pointed out that the REEWP Project advocates and contributes to promote women's economic rights, gender equality and regional and international cooperation and partnership as working in isolation does not advance women's rights. In order to make changes, she noted that critical gaps on economic and political levels should be closed and this needs a comprehensive approach, institutions policies and a legal framework to support equal participation. Ms. Guimond underlined in conclusion that only joint investment can provide just alternatives.

Ms. May Shalabieh, Program Manager at Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty emphasized that reforms are a priority in the Arab world. She made the link between reform and participation of women and expressed the belief that this gathering could lead all of the participants to a common vision related to women's rights, a vision of changes of legislation according to international standards and the IFA.

Positioning Women's Human Rights and the State Obligation to Promote and Protect them in the Current Social, Political and Economic Processes

Speakers: Mr. Fahed Sulieman, Member of Central Council of PLO

Ms. Joumana Mehri, President of RDFL Lebanon

Moderator: Ms. Layla Hamarneh, AWO Jordan

Mr. Fahed Sulieman, gave an overview on a regional level and pointed out the difficulty in discussing comprehensive democracy in the context of the relative immaturity of democracy in the region. He raised the issue that democracy is not only about elections, but it is about the rights of each individual and highlighted the link between women's rights and democracy underlying women's rights as an integral element of democracy. He pointed out that there are some essential conditions necessary in order to provide a minimum space enabling a women's rights discourse. He cited the Palestinian case – Israeli occupation, internal division and violence that prevent democracy and the implementation of women's rights. He questioned how there can be women's rights when there is no space for democracy itself. In this context he said that women's rights are not put aside, but they do not have





the same space as other democratic issues. He focused on Palestine whose territories are under occupation and colonization and raised the question of how to overcome the hardship to move towards democracy.

The refusal to recognize Palestinians as citizens and their rights to self-determination is therefore a major barrier to democracy. In addition, when Israel does not consider itself as an occupying force, it does not respect the rights of prisoners according to international conventions. The weight of the devastating daily political and economic issues, especially after Gaza July 2007, when democratic and human rights became divided on an internal level and when additional repression started, democracy faced a serious regression. The first who pay are women living under occupation. Mr. Sulieman raised also many common points between an authoritarian regime and a regime that implements religious values: both talk about internal crises and use it as an excuse to affect and delay respect for human rights and women's rights. After Oslo, democracy received a new dimension related to a Palestinian State. The idea was to build democratic institutions which would lead Palestinians to work together for a democracy, creating a balance between women's rights and a political regime. But as democracy is a pillar of the national issue, no movement can promote it within the structure of a regime and consequently no women's rights can be implemented. Independently, gender equality is on a daily agenda and is a slogan in dealing with the political situation. Their political agenda include:

- Affirmative action in all the institutions and social and economic organizations.
- Respect of women's rights and promoting of the international conventions.
- Broad education on the cultural and social level, promoting the individual rights that cannot be negotiated.

Ms. Joumana Mehri, started on an optimistic note, reminding the audience of the pivotal role women played in the Arab uprisings. Despite the ignorance and neglect of women's rights, she added, women participated as fighters and citizens struggling for change. These actions achieved many gains, such as women having more visibility in public, the parity law in Tunisia, the recent victory of women in the parliament in Algeria, women in Egypt, in Syria, all fighting for their freedom. However, she underlined some challenges connected with the political pressure that put a stop to further achievements and even brought regression. In Lebanon for example, she noted that religious social powers have become political powers and this poses dangers for women as they have to face a coalition of political and religious oppression which reproduces same form of oppression and dictatorship, but now from a religious point of view. The increasing extremism that we witness, she stressed, is also related to the political regional agenda - religious oppression is practicing symbolic violence against all the societies. This also aims, she added, to impede the role of governments and laws, impeding the development of the whole society. The lack of support of political parties is also a challenge, such as when a political party becomes religious it cannot be a tool for change. This breeds a culture of intolerance and extremism that increases discrimination, starting with discrimination of women. Furthermore, she noted, it leads to militarization, including all types of oppression. Ms. Mehri expressed her hope that all states will be civil states, as first victims of religious oppression and militarization are women. She underlined that during crises and transitions, women's issues are not a priority and posed the question of how to introduce women's issues as an integral part of all change. She also elaborated on the difference between the women's movement and the feminist movement stressing that the feminist movement calls for fighting against all types of discrimination and for women's rights. She suggested some strategies for the feminist movement as:



- Make a priority for the feminist movement to enhance its role as a part of the democratic movement;
- Strengthen the feminist discourse and join all efforts in building democratic civil states.
- Maintain international standards as reference, not religious laws.
- Network and build coalitions, with other NGOs, trade unions, political parties and demand equality first for all.
- Lobby for women's quota as a means to enhance political participation for women.
- Continue to fight against all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence

Ms. Mehri concluded that gender equality and full citizenship of women are the gateway to all issues and that laws need to respect and to protect everybody. Consequently, systems' that call for *fatwa* cannot be respected.

Summary Following Plenary Discussion

Several persons noted that there are many examples demonstrating that women have always participated in democratic transformations. However, they should always stay organized and pursue their work as integral part of this movement for change or they will be pushed back and lose any progress they have made. One of the female politicians expressed that political rights



of women is a national issue and should be a priority. Furthermore, it was elaborated that as politicians they have to follow the political agendas of their parties but as feminists they should adhere to women's rights agenda as well. They noted the complication when a political party is religiously based, such as the Muslim Brotherhood who in Egypt stated they govern in the name of God, and therefore women's rights are hampered. It was stated that 25% of political representation, as in Iraq today, is not enough to encourage meaningful women's participation and therefore the quota should be increased. Patriarchal structures in the societies were also raised as a problem.

Gaza was given as an example where the social climate and development shifted towards religion and against women's rights. Even if Hamas brought women representatives into parliament, many ministers are married to more than one wife, so representation within discriminatory social structures per sig does not help to achieve gender equality. Generally the structures of the political parties are also male, so we need to raise the question how they implement women's rights in their work and programs. A positive example was given with Morocco, with their Socialist Party of Progress that discusses gender equality within the party program and structure. Many persons referred to the question, which society we want to build: a society towards women's rights and equality or opposing women's rights and therefore, emphasized the link between democracy and gender equality. If the society does not go towards gender equality then we cannot call the transformation processes democratic either.

The experience in Sudan was likened to that in Gaza and it was noted that the two demonstrate that the cultural and social structures will be only affected by political and legal structures. There cannot



be social changes when legally and politically there is still the issuing of *fatwas*. Sometimes the efforts of the feminist movement can give the opposite results to those expected, as with the quotas, if overall these are adopted and implemented in a context of lack of conditions for democracy. Therefore the role of the state and the obligations it has towards international documents was raised as crucial to protect women's rights, whereas another dimension was raised: the Israeli occupation and all of the refugees double the challenges for women, especially in a context when the PLO and other democratic entities are not fulfilling their role. A concern was expressed that while many fear the impact of religious parties on women's rights, these are mobilizing regionally and therefore a suggestion was put forward to strengthen the feminist speech and networking with trade unions, democratic movements and political parties and to attract more women, by addressing grassroots, and poor and rural women.

The Algerian experience of feminist organizing was brought up as a best practice in creating a political party with a national and feminist agenda. It was stated that in order to have gender equality, a precondition is a democratic state coupled with the rule of law.

The debate ended with the suggestion that legislation is needed but is not enough, as the relationship between the political sphere, administration and legal sphere should be linked with the capacity of the civil society to influence and enhance decisions favouring women's rights and stimulating cultural development for women in the society. Mentioned again was the usefulness of the quota system. It was suggested that even though laws are still under the cover of *Shari'a law*, there is a need for implementing the Sharia law in a flexible way. In this context, opinions were expressed that secularism is an important precondition for women's rights. However, secular political governments per se could not lead to a secular society as this government can be secular but the community is not. Secularism was connected therefore with the development of the society, with development of culture and socio-political issues. It was also noted that people generally are not interested in extremist parties and these are not their first choice. The comparison was made between religious extremism and an invading army, and the end result of invasion and control of a community. The question was posed as to how to organize to prevent these parties from ruling.

Differences between the quota systems were elaborated and a representation list was suggested as the best option. Empowerment of women was seen as an entry point to development, social justice, and gender equality while it was reiterated that if women are not in the decision-making positions then there is no democracy.

The majority of the comments in this debate expressed the opinion that the Arab uprisings opened up opportunities to end theocratic regimes and to lead to the victory of democracy.

Economic and Political Insecurity and Violence against Women

Speakers: Ms. Anne Marguerite Appel , Gender Consultant, The Netherlands

Dr. Asha El Karib, Researcher, Executive Director of the Organization for Research and Development, Sudan

Moderator: Ms. Suzan Aref, Women's Empowerment Organization, Iraq

Ms. Marguerite Appel shared some insights on women's economic participation from the UNDP regional strategy for MENA. She underlined that women's participation in the labour force is globally very low: 70 % of all the unemployed in the world are women, which affects further women's and



men's roles, as women are forced to accept their domestic roles. Therefore if we want to make changes we have to address the issues of domestic work and grey/informal sector. Economic participation of all depends on the ability to balance women's work and their rights. Ms. Appel expressed an opinion that women are in need of protection rather than empowerment. Women have made huge progress in education, but they, for example, have to leave schools as higher dowry is expected for highly educated women, a gender stereotype that also affects men. This situation is aggravated by stereotypes concerning "women's" professions, like teaching. However there is a growing shift towards women studying science. As for the labour laws, they promote equal treatment and maternity leave issues. However there is still a gap between the wages. With reducing of the power of the welfare state women are pushed out of the labour force and consequently receive lower pensions.

Ms. Appel mentioned several challenges, among which is the lack of gender segregated data; lack of insurance that women's labour force considers entire range of women's rights; high unemployment rate, gender based segregation, and a gap between demand and skills. In addition, labour laws are still based on the one breadwinner approach, putting the man as the head of the family.

She suggested some strategies that include highlighting women's and men's contribution in the domestic spheres, underlining the realities of the families and adopting policies enhancing two incomes approach, bringing light to evidence of women's work via enforcing national and international plans and adapting educational system to the needs of the economic development. To this goal, it will be useful to exchange experience and best practices with non-traditional vocational training.

Ms. Appel recommended that these strategies should be coupled with addressing gaps in labour roles, protection of rights of refugees and elimination of discrimination, reduction of women's domestic burden, moving beyond informal sector and supporting an economic system that favours development. In conclusion Ms. Appel emphasized that democratic change will not empower women unless challenged, as political parties always tend to move women's rights off of their agendas and are not seen as priorities.

Ms. Asha El Karib started her introduction with news that the court in Sudan sentenced to death by stoning a 17 year-old woman. The women's movement is working on the appeal but they need international support if they are to be successful. She underlined that the division of Sudan into two states has led to worsening of the security situation and the political and economic conditions, leading to increased violence and armed conflict, which can practically be called a war, also within the conflict border, inside Darfur. Sudan has lost 70% of oil resources in a time when all other sectors, except consumption, have been neglected. This situation has led to worsening of the economic situation and increasing violence against women and children, sexual violence, sexual harassment in the streets as well as in the Institutions. Personal Status Law is outdated and backward while criminal law, because of the concept of adultery, considers victims of rape criminals. She underlined the aggravating effect of such legislation that takes place during an armed conflict when sexual violence is increased and many victims of rape are accused of adultery. The courts accuse and penalize only women, never men. The police have the power over women and the law protects violence against women. They punish girls in the street because her brother is holding her hand as this is said to be against public morals. And these laws are not part of the Sudanese traditional laws or inheritance. All these laws came in the name of Islamic *Shari'a* under the religious state.

The Sudanese women's movement is based on the long-term organized women's movement with rich experience that helps today to face these challenges with pride. For the last 15 years women



have been the main pillar of the popular movement. They have faced growing militarization of society, discriminatory laws, mandatory covering of women (which is not part of the Sudanese tradition; it was imported from abroad and has become a formal uniform in the universities and in public institutions). Women were called many times to stay at home. However, the feminist movement has refused this decision. Ms. El Karib emphasized that after the division of Sudan there is also a need for a transition from dictatorship towards diversity and respecting human rights. In this period, Sudanese women worked on a quota system to increase women's participation in decision-making. However, it is not enough as the political agenda is also very important. The government consists of one party only and the elected women find all of their demands related to women's rights refused – the government neglects CEDAW and the African Protocol. There is control and intimidation of women's rights organizations and in particular of Ms. El Karib's Organization for Research and Development and it is difficult to work in a strategic way unless there is resistance to the religious state, unless there is a clear vision of a civil state. The government speaks of a civil state based on Islamic *Shari'a*. It works based on a constitution but where there is no mention of gender equality. With the division there is emphasis on South Sudan and a neglect of the North. The obstacles are many, but Ms. El Karib believes there is hope and the feminist movement is strong.

Summary Following Plenary Discussion

The discussion focused on the social tolerance for and the magnitude of violence against women, the lack of awareness, accompanied by acceptance and lack of governmental will to address it on a legislative, political and economic level and/or to implement laws when they are good. Some examples of this violence were given from Europe. For instance, in Germany for 70 euros one can purchase a pizza and a woman. In Madrid, in the industrial zone women- mostly coming from Eastern Europe - stay all day half naked above or below the waste, waiting for "clients". In the evening in the same location, Nigerian women replace them. And yet there is no general law or framework on the EU level to curb this violence. Participants raised the possibility of using the term "femicide." More pressure on the governments is needed to put violence against women as an integral part of all policies, including security policy.

Others also affirmed that the existing laws are shameful for women. In Morocco, these laws are the result of efforts from the feminist movement activities since the 1980s. Women's economic role has been recognized for being essential in Morocco, but the problem is also cultural because women's labour is governed by stereotypes that consider it as complimentary not as primary labour. Women are still seen as complementary to men therefore work at home is the only work recognized for women and is not paid. Some strategies were suggested; for one, the feminist movement must deploy all efforts to break down stereotypes on a cultural level and change educational programs. Success stories were recommended to be used more forcefully in the communities in order to change people's mentalities. As decision-makers are part of the societies, this issue should become a common priority. Progressive men should be involved and need to be aware that when women become decision- makers, they are in tiny minority and it is difficult for them to represent all women as they often follow their party priorities in a male dominated world or their religious priorities before women's issues.

Many noted that gender- based violence, including rape, has been institutionalized in the MENA and laws are turning a blind eye towards the victims. Women are facing violence everywhere, even if there are laws, like in European countries. In MENA, the feminist movement is part of the national issue. However the broader women's belief that violence against women is a personal issue was



raised as an important challenge. A concern was expressed about the increased influence of this discourse. In this regard, it was stressed that a broader discussion on the root causes of violence against women is needed and the feminist movement have to reach a consensus. Analysis from the work on the ground showed that the women's movement does not stand on a solid theoretical background, especially after the increase of extremism and therefore, their arguments are not strong. Some participants were perplexed as to why the women's movement does not focus on secularism. Ratification of all the conventions would be enough for the protection of the rights of women during crises and conflict, but the question of the implementation is equally as important. Even countries that have ratified CEDAW do not implement its articles. Finally, the institutionalization of violence against women and discrimination against women has been normalized - people have become used to it happening and it eventually becomes acceptable. In addition, the laws contribute to the normalization.

The urgency was raised to uncover the impact of rape, but as in Iraq, Libya, Syria, women are not ready to talk about their experiences. They can say they have been in prison and beaten, but not raped, as they would be thrown out of their family. Women live in pain and trauma. Raising awareness, networking, reaching out to more women and strengthening of the international solidarity was pointed out as a necessity, in order to better understand true impact of rape on women.

Another important issue raised was the public-private divide. The core issue is that men are viewed as the financial providers, while women are not and this creates the basis for inequality that is confined by law. It is not enough to demand only economic policy to increase women's participation at the labor market without combining it with policies that favour sharing of the domestic work between women and men and introducing parental leave for men, or without addressing the rights of the employees. Therefore a comprehensive approach is needed to address this inequality and identify common links within laws and to view all rights as indivisible.

Another core issue is to define marriage as legal partnership and move away from the idea of man as a head of the household and the sole provider, towards the pattern of shared responsibilities for the household. Gender segregated statistics are needed to show the discrepancies for both men and women, to better pinpoint the discrimination, how to better address it and how to garner men's support.

Women's economic empowerment is closely linked with violence against women - if women are economically independent they have much more power. It is important to make the connection between empowering women on both the political level and economic level. In Jordan, for example, the quota system is not enough to enhance participation of women on a political level. It was mentioned that the role expected from the EU is to promote women on an economic level and broaden their opportunities.

Participants acknowledged the varying positions related to the representation of women on a decision-making level along with the fact that it has been a long term debate. It is important to extend and share experience on the different modes of the quota system. Political participation could be a good entry point at local levels in some communities but women need to understand the process – have a clear agenda then build constituencies based on the agenda. This is community-based participation. Men also need to have a gender equality agenda. A positive example of proxy candidates was given from India, where those women were using the space to develop themselves and became candidates.



Representation was also addressed from another perspective, exemplified with the situation in Sudan, where until 2002 the leading political party engaged with civil society, established governmental institutions and organizations and funded them to participate in all the conferences and seminars so that they could provide a different image of Sudan. Therefore, attention should be paid to representation in regards to the different political context.

The need for international solidarity was again underlined as a condition to address these issues with the basis for international cooperation being the universality of women's human rights. The idea of Israel as a Jewish State that enhances extremism was questioned and raised. Electoral systems based on civil and not tribal laws should be adopted to facilitate democratic political transition. And finally, it was determined that democracy is needed all around the world in order to better solve national problems.

Labour Market, Social Protection and Women's Rights: Feminist Perspectives in the Context of Economic Crises and Political Transitions

Speakers: Dr. Magdy Abdel Hamid, Consultant Political Development Policies, Egypt

Dr. Lilian Halls French, Sociologist, Co- President IFE-EFI

Ms. Aouicha Bekhti, Founding Member of Democratic and Social Movement (MDS) and Co-Founder of the Party for Secularism and Democracy (PLD) Algeria

Moderator: Ms. Boriana Jönsson, IFE-EFI

Ms. Lilian Halls French emphasized that this roundtable is an achievement in that it established sustainable links of mutual cooperation, support and solidarity that IFE-EFI built with the partners of the campaign "**Equality First**". In the Arab world the uprisings that involved women and men together were followed by the systematic exclusion of women from the decision-making processes that shape the future of their countries. In Europe the economic, financial and political crisis leads to a severe backlash for the people's fundamental rights. Women are the first and most affected by the policies of austerity, dismantling of public services, increasing of social inequalities, decreasing of salaries and social protection. They form the main body of the flexible and cheap workforce and face the worst wave of regression of their status, gains and rights since the Second World War.

In the whole Euro-Med region increasing political conservative trends deprive women from their equal citizenship rights. Meanwhile, the fundamental rights of women to control their own bodies and own lives are increasingly threatened by the growing intrusion of religions in the public sphere. Feminist analysis underline the prevalence of patriarchal gender power structures that sustain women's subordination all over the Euro-Med Region. One can see the connections between conservative political governments, ultra- liberal economic systems that are supporting them, strengthening of militarism and increase of religious fundamentalist movements to confront the equality between women and men and the right of all but especially of women to full citizenship, a decent life and a life free of violence.

International conventions and resolutions promoting women's rights should remain a common reference in





the whole Euro-Med Region, connected with the relevant regional and national tools promoting women's rights. The fight for a democratic, non-militaristic and secular world has no borders in order to have women's rights recognized as political issue and equality between men and women as an integral part of democracy.

Ms. French determined that building a strong Arab-European common feminist discourse is essential to support and exercise pressure on the governments in order to have legislation based on respect of women's human rights, without intrusion of religions in public, political and legislative spheres, and to ensure full implementation of the laws.

Mr. Magdy Abdel Hamid stressed at the beginning of his speech that it is not possible to work in the same manner and use the same mechanisms and means as before as if there is nothing happening. In the Arab region there are so many changes taking place which require different and new ways to deal with all issues including women issues. The region is living a change yet it is not sure if this change is a democratic one or not.

He underlined that there is a long way to go - many revolutions have taken place during history, some have started and exploded, yet ended up not being completed. In Egypt now the political Islamic powers- Muslim Brothers and Salafists are getting to the authority. It happened also in Tunisia, might happen in Yemen and what seems in Libya. The whole region according to him will soon see an era of control of political Islam. This political system may bring radical changes in many issues; including women's situation, their right to work and generally their status in the society.

He also brought to the attention the conditions for women's work and how these influence women's security: in Egypt, 60% of the working women are not subject to law. They work in the informal/grey economy without security or protection and for very low salaries. This linked with the fact that 70% of the poor are women, then we are facing oppression and exploitation of women and this is a result of the patriarchal mentality. But patriarchal oppression should be always linked with class oppression and with the instrumentalization of religion. This is happening all over the world. To face these challenges Mr. Hamid suggested more and better organizing and stronger support to feminist organizations.

Summary Following Plenary Discussion

Many participants expressed concern over the level of influence that populists and extreme right movements have in Europe and similarly religious extremism in the Arab countries, and this development was seen as playing a major role in decreasing the rights of women and increasing the gap between formal and informal rights. The issue of the vulnerability of rural women, of immigrants and domestic workers was raised by many.

A major discussion took place on the use of non-traditional methods to address the stereotypical perception of women and gender inequality. Some suggestions were made to work with the poorest women and women in informal sectors who form the majority of women in the labour market. Others suggested that to use non-traditional methods is actually to work in the classical feminist way: make links and question the traditional concept of citizenship, show that we are not followers but citizens of the countries where we live, question the classical concept of democracy and address the fact that without the full implementation of women's rights there is lack of democracy and lack of citizenship. The importance of placing the women's struggle with the democratic movements was emphasized as well as working with men and advocating sharing with them feminist concepts and analyses. Reaching out to women broadly was stressed as another important strategy in a



context when patriarchal power has been strengthened by militarization, religious extremism and the political regimes.

Many challenges were raised due to the exclusion of women from the decision-making process such as lack of unemployment benefits for women in the field of agriculture while men receive these benefits, lack of access to own property in Arab countries, the perceived family and domestic responsibilities of women, and the fact that women's rights are treated as part of tradition and culture and not as part of human rights. It was therefore emphasized that addressing women's economic rights was a core issue in the context of political transitions.

It was also stressed that women and feminists should benefit and learn from the experiences of each other, especially related to political Islam. Algeria was given as an example where in the name of religion and the country's morality, women have been abducted and raped. It was noted that the majority of the victims of the Islamists were women and the leftists, especially rural and poor women.

Increased solidarity among women was again emphasized as a major strategy and it was noted that European women also need international solidarity to combat stereotypes and inequalities. A common issue for the feminist movements in the Euro-Med region is maintaining women's rights especially in the public sphere.

Day Two – 21st of June 2012

Common Agenda for Implementation of National, Regional and International Mechanisms promoting Women's Rights and Gender Equality

- Speakers: Ms. Leila Al Ali, Executive Director of Najdeh Association, Lebanon
Ms. Touria Tajeddine, President of Espace de Citoyenneté Tanger UAF Morocco
Ms. Layla Hamarneh, Director of Projects Arab Women Organization, Jordan
- Moderator: Ms. Afaf Marei, Executive Director, EACPE, Egypt

Ms. Leila Al Ali discussed the EU and new European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) as a mechanism for change. She emphasized that unfortunately the EU continues to address democracy in a traditional way, compromising human rights and mostly women's rights and gender equality, maintaining a gap between rhetoric and reality.

She stated that the financial support provided by the EU, even though benchmarked, is not clear and does not put rights at the core of social transformation. Instead, the EU seems to be serving their economic interests. The EU talks about democracy and the need to stabilize the region, and allocates millions of dollars to support the region - but those who are trying to hold onto power in the region are the remnants of the former regimes alongside the Islamists. Ms. Al Ali raised two main issues of concern: firstly, the ENI as a mechanism is not linked to previous agreements and not connected to older programs. Secondly, it does not link the decision of international legislation or the MDGs to the new agreements. Thus, in doing so, the EU jeopardizes women's rights and opportunities to support





and improve women's conditions in the context of rising political and religious extremism.

Ms. Touria Tajeddine discussed the limitations for achieving rights in the today's new context. There was a dream that the "West" would help but they seem preoccupied with ensuring their own interests in the region. The new religious governments are incompatible with women's rights. In the new constitution in Morocco, gender equality was not taken into consideration. That's why only one woman reached the government and she is from an Islamist party, in a context where the government comprises socialist parties. The government took a decision to adopt CEDAW but ratifying it is not enough if the national laws are not harmonized with the international legislation, with legislation that protects women including during conflict. Therefore one of the priorities for the women's movement is to coordinate and make national laws compatible with international laws. Another important point Ms. Tajeddine raised is that international conventions cannot and should not be selective, as rights cannot be selective either. Ms. Tajeddine put forward some propositions for strategies to empower women such as strengthening the exchange of experiences between countries. She gave the example of collaboration between Jordan and Morocco in discussing trafficking; an experience thanks to which a new law was discussed. She suggested also researching the different approaches and disseminating studies about this topic. She underlined the difference between language and discourse and suggested as an outreach strategy to simplify the language according to a targeted group, without changing the discourse. Noting that Islam has been monopolized by some groups, she stressed the fact that together with UNSCR 1325 we need to look for more tools uncovering the monetary profits of the military industry and selling of weapons. In conclusion Ms. Tajeddine noted that we need to recognize the weaknesses of the democratic and women's movement and to face the reality that democracy cannot be achieved without democrats.

Ms. Layla Hamarneh underlined the importance to pause and re-think strategies and believes that now is a good time to do so. She stressed that international conventions are the only references but unfortunately government deal with them using a double speech: one to the world and another to the people. The grassroots women's network *Musawa* in Jordan has identified the international conventions because the government is not taking them seriously. Women's organizations have no other way but to adhere to the international conventions, especially in the present context, not selecting among them but approaching them comprehensively, in order to show that women's rights are universal and cannot be shaped to suit culture. Another point she stressed was again the need to harmonize national law with international conventions and make it possible for women to file a complaint according to the international agreements. But the situation today is that governments are breaching women's rights freely and there is a new attack on CEDAW, which is raised accused to be an instrument of the West by religious groups. There are now coalitions forming between conservatives and new religious groups in Jordan exemplified by the uniting of tribes with Islamists in order to oppose the divorce law.

Ms. Hamarneh ended by emphasizing an urgent need to make justice work for women, through:

- Continue to consider the full and equal participation of women and men as the basis for democracy.
- Carry on with the call for political and legislative reform during this insecure and unstable transitional period.
- Pay more attention and put special emphasis on advancing women's economic empowerment to face the impact of the financial crisis and combat poverty.
- Strengthen coordination between feminists in the Euro-Med region to promote gender equality and amplify women's voices.
- Implement international and regional conventions as the reference for the universality of



women's rights to face cultural relativism that is used to undermine the concept of gender equality.

Summary Following Plenary Discussion

Taking on the discussion on the new ENI, the link between development and democracy was underlined. An opinion was expressed that before Arab uprisings the democratic movement was arguing that development could not be achieved without democracy. Now with the EU approach of "more for more", what is needed is to enhance mechanisms for democratic elections, unions, political parties and other democratic and political reforms. In parallel, it is needed to find an environment for foreign investment as this is the main issue in the agreements of the EU with the southern countries. It was suggested that the civil society needs to point out to the EU that real democratic transition requires political change and assessment of the economic system. A strategy was suggested to re-assess the relationship between the EU and the neighbors in all its dimensions: gender equality, justice, and environment, to name a few. The EU calls for proposals use the same models as previous. One example is its willingness to "contribute to security and the prevention and settlement of conflicts" without mentioning a word of reference to UNSCR1325. The results of this assessment would provide the base for the future relationship and for the sake of coherence gender equality and justice would have to be part of it. It was stated that the EU need to strengthen their gender equality language and to use conditionality in its agreements with southern countries in order to support women's rights. The principles of market economy do not necessarily go together and are often contradictory with sustainable development, demonstrated by the last economic crisis and the increased investment in the military. Therefore redefinition of democracy and development from a gender/feminist perspective was expressed as a recommendation to the EU.

Other participants emphasized again the need to abide by all international conventions without being selective, in order to be able to counteract the other powers that have their own means and tools, including monopolizing the media and legislation. Ratifying conventions is not sufficient but it is important because it gives the feminist movement the opportunity to defend the cause. For example, Sudan has not ratified CEDAW and this weakens the chances of the feminist movement to advocate. As different from UNSCR 1325 – even if the government doesn't respect it, there is no National Action Plan but it is there and makes feminist movement's position stronger. CEDAW is equal to blasphemy in Sudan and therefore other strategies are being used, such as creating mass support of CEDAW by working with poor women and with victims in order to enable them to build their own opinions and sensitize them to the articles of CEDAW without saying it is CEDAW. This creates a positive atmosphere among the women's groups. Many participants stressed that if not linked with national legislations the international conventions are of little use. The connection was made between the implementation of the law, the awareness of the society and the gender equality agendas of the political parties.

It was unanimously agreed that sticking to the international conventions as the reference for women's rights and calling for their application is the only alternative for the feminist movement in order not to lose all achievements thus far. As there are no obligatory mechanisms to follow up it was stressed to always ask the EU to link EU programs to binding mechanisms. Promoting free market on the expense of reducing services always leads to more violence against women. Therefore it was stated that to fight successfully violence against women, economic and political changes are needed.



Another major problem connected with development was stated to be the media, which are spreading and feeding gender stereotypes, such as portraying women as inferior. It is connected with governance and control. Exclusion of women from access to economy and politics deprives them from control over their lives and choices.

The role of the political parties was also raised. An opinion was expressed that the parties have lost their identities, leading to the illusion that civil society could replace them. As for women, they are more attracted to join social society as it is a more women- friendly space. But change comes through political parties and one likened the characteristics of politics in the region as speaking one way but acting and analyzing in another way, often contradictory.

Another opinion expressed was that like governments often hold dialogue with the Islamists, similarly governments should listen to the voice of the women's rights movement and adopt their recommendations as these are coming from the needs of women on the ground. The women's movement has to be strong to impose certain conditions. This solidarity is needed on the national, regional and international level as well as solidarity with the social movements. In building common agendas it is important to use lessons learned from the past so as to not repeat mistakes. Iraq was given as an example of an invasion of the Islamic groups and consequential fighting.

A question was raised as to whether to hold dialogue with religious leaders and some examples were given of approaching all the religions in the same way and having a principle stand to have them not interfere in the political sphere. Dialogue with progressive religious leaders is perceived as possible. As for dialogue with political Islam or fundamentalist Catholic leaders, it is a difficult choice and if needed, it can never take place at the expense of women's rights.

Solidarity and International Cooperation between Feminist Organizations as Essential Support for Real Democracy, Just Peace and Full Equality: From International and Regional to National and Local Cooperation Promoting the Principle of Women's Rights as Universal Human Rights and Gender Equality

- Speakers: Ms. Halima Jouini, Board Member, Association Tunisien des Femmes Democrate (ATFD), Tunisia
- Ms. Sama Fayez Aweidah, Gender Expert, Director of Women's Study Center, Palestine
- Ms. Suzan Aref, Development Consultant, Founding Director Women Empowerment Organisation, Iraq
- Moderator: Ms. Rahmeh Mansour, Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project (REEWP)/Oxfam-Québec

Ms. Halima Jouini raised the issue that the Arab uprising has not abolished discrimination and patriarchal practices. She gave Tunisia as an example, where new issues of poverty were uncovered now, which affected mostly women. She stressed the need to work on social, economic and environmental levels (where women are affected with health problems). She pointed out that what has been achieved by the women's movement in Tunisia has been supported by international feminist solidarity. Until today it was crucial for the Tunisian feminists to be supported on the



regional and international level. One more opportunity for solidarity work will be the World Social Forum in Tunisia in April 2013. In the preparation of the World Social Forum, Ms. Jouini called upon all networks and women activists to participate and work together, building on achievements and cooperation, by launching common activities based on solidarity. An important point is the universality of poverty for women. Therefore she recommended that the women's movement never differentiates the women's political fight for equality from the fight for social justice and against poverty.

Ms. Nivine Hussary from Women's Study Center read the paper of **Ms. Sama Aweidah**, Gender Expert and Director of the Women's Study Center in East Jerusalem (Ms. Aweidah could not attend the roundtable due to visa complications). Ms. Aweidah underlined in her presentation that the international community has recognized women's rights as an indispensable part of human rights and experts have revealed the negative impact of denying women's rights on economic, social and cultural development. Nevertheless and despite all of the efforts of the international community to include women's rights within human rights , the status of women in the world has not improved and they continue to face different degrees of the same challenges. Denial of women's rights continues to exert a considerable negative impact throughout the world. Poverty and other forms of negative developmental phenomena have emerged as a result of the failure to engage the participation of women or to target them in a just and equal manner. Failure to bring about equality and security for women is an international phenomenon without geographical boundaries.

She went on to say that the achievement of social justice in every country usually faces obstacles related to political interests. The emerging new political order feeds and even legitimizes armed conflicts under the pretexts of maintaining or preserving security. Globalization and privatization, concentrate wealth into the hands of a small minority, while poverty and exclusion are increasing in poor countries. The fight for gender equality cannot be separated from the struggle to achieve social justice and the issue of women's rights must concern the general community and all democratic forces. Ms. Aweidah concluded that the challenges cannot be resolved without a united framework of action among Arab women and with European women's organizations.

Ms. Suzan Aref raised the point that although discrimination and violence have local expressions, they stem from the global patriarchal system based on domination and control that perpetuates inequality as a global phenomenon. Therefore it is necessary to develop joint work between women's movements on the basis of solidarity and common feminist analysis and to address the patriarchal power structures that hinder the full enjoyment by women of their human rights, both locally and globally. However this joint work should be based on gender equality standards as reflected in the international conventions and resolutions.

She gave examples from Iraq, where the gender discrimination and violence is open and supported by legislation, and so legislation itself constitutes violence. Concerns about women's security, health and position are absent from socio-economic and political life. On a political level women are absent from decision- making and peace negotiations and the created Ministry of Women is a ministry without portfolio. In this situation, the women's movement has deployed all efforts to demand gender equality and has been active on a grassroots level and has achieved some positive gains, mostly on the level of forming structures to facilitate gender equality on national level and a gender quota.





Many challenges remain, connected with rising extremism, violence on a family and community level that controls women and restricts their freedom and participation and weak networking among women's organizations. Ms. Aref stressed in the end that hope is political action and there are opportunities. She pointed out some, such as women's experience regionally and internationally, progress of the women's movement towards peace building, and the global and international efforts to expose and fight violence against women. She emphasized the importance of international solidarity and working together in order to face and address the local expressions of intolerance of Political Islam and their political agenda against women. She concluded the need for international solidarity and exchange of experiences in order to build bridges across borders to strengthen women's voice and movement.

Summary Following Plenary Discussion

The need for international solidarity was common thread in all discussions. The panel's presentations created inspiration for a debate strategizing solidarity. Cooperation and solidarity in all fields was emphasized as being important for the women's movements in order to face the current situation of increasing limitations for women. Solidarity in building common agendas was recommended and be geared towards certain countries and lobbying certain governments on similar issues. An important point was raised that solidarity should be on equal basis to counter-act different discourse that divides the women's movement. But to strengthen solidarity it was noted it is essential to strengthen coalition- building, relations and cooperation on the national, regional and international level, not only among the women's movement but with governmental institutions, political parties, and researchers. It was emphasized that civil society should be present in drafting of all strategic policy in order to enable gender equality to enter into all spheres of decision-making. In this sense exchange of lessons learned is an important entry point to help activate the content of UNSCR1325 to build the just peace in the region.

Many of the participants raised as essential the issue of building cross-borders and overseas partnerships that contribute to achieving women's rights as universal human rights using all international instruments. . An important issue was raised regarding the need for protection of women activists especially those who work in the field of women's rights. A recommendation emerged for international NGOs and agencies to work more for the promotion of local women's NGOs and their role in the civil society.

Others suggested that an important strategy would be to build alliances between the women's movement and progressive and democratic men. There were some suggestions to form a network in order to benefit from and build on each other's experiences - a network based on solidarity, equality and non-stereotypical perceptions of Arab and "Western" women with a different type of structure and taking into consideration that solidarity is needed for all women, including in the West.

International solidarity was seen as important for the rebuilding of solidarity structures at the national levels and helping prioritize advocacy work towards the governments to implement the international conventions.



Alternative Agenda for Enhancing Democracy: Report to the Plenary from the Working Groups

Moderator: Ms. May Shalabieh, Program Manager Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty

Following the discussions, this session was set aside for work in groups over identifying the most urgent recommendations to the governments in order to build alternative agendas to the present ones, agendas comprehensive and reflecting human rights for women and men, full citizenship and social justice. The working groups considered the analysis, challenges and good practices discussed in-depth during the roundtable and focused to identify the most urgent priority recommendations in three areas of democratic intervention. These main recommendations, if adopted by the governments would bring about social change favouring the rights and freedoms of both women and men. The three areas are civil society, political, and economic. Facilitators were appointed and the results were presented by each group's rapporteur. Discussion followed each group's presentation, adjusting and approving all recommendations from the working groups.

Recommendations from the Working Group 1

Civil Society – a Space for Action

Facilitator: Joumana Mehri

The working group came up with twenty four recommendations from which four were identified as urgent priorities. These are:

- 1) Adopt legislation and develop mechanisms that enable the independence of the civil society organizations, especially those working with monitoring of human rights of women and men, to play an advisory, accountability and monitoring role on the performance of the Governments and the elected assemblies. These mechanisms should enable civil society to participate in the policy-making processes, especially through monitoring of the implementation of international instruments and conventions on human rights and in particular on women's rights and gender equality, such as CEDAW.
- 2) Recognize the need for and develop effective mechanisms for women's rights and human rights organizations to address complaints and negotiate for cases of violence and discrimination against women, against women's rights and against women's rights defenders.
- 3) Develop mechanisms that enable civil society to hold a constructive dialogue with governments, and organize public hearings in parliaments on violence and all forms of discrimination against women.
- 4) Enable the election of representatives from the civil society to the national bodies working with women's rights and human rights as opposed to them being nominated or appointed by the State. Call for the institutionalization of these bodies and cease all forms of political patronage or State authority over these bodies.



Recommendations from the Working Group 2

Strengthening of Women's Participation in the Political Sphere

Facilitator: Asha El Karib

The working group discussed seventeen recommendations from which six were put forward as priorities for needed measures to improve women's participation in the political sphere. These are as follows:

- 1) Adopt, ratify and activate the international references of women's universal human rights without reservations and selectivity, enabling women's equal representation and participation. Harmonize national legislations with international conventions and resolutions that the States have ratified and that enhance women's political participation, such as CEDAW, BpA, UNSCR1325, and Istanbul-Marrakech Framework for Action (IFA).
- 2) Adopt mechanisms to enable civil society to monitor the implementation of the States obligations towards the international and regional conventions on women's participation to which it is a signatory.
- 3) Adopt mechanisms that aim at promoting women's political participation, such as minimum 30% quota as agreed by the UN in Beijing in 1995, as a temporary measure to address the lack of democracy and improving the status of gender equality.
- 4) Enact enhanced political analysis based on MDG indicators on gender equality and implementation of women's rights.
- 5) Adopt electoral systems and design electoral institutions that enhance developing of party systems and promote women's political participation at the national and local levels, such as adopting list proportional representation.
- 6) Engender the national budgets, especially the political budgets and introduce gender- based statistics.

Recommendations from the Working Group 3

Improving Women's Rights and Participation in the Social and Economic sphere

Facilitator: Afaf Marej

The working group discussed twenty two recommendations from which nine were put forward as priorities for needed measures to improve the women's rights in the social and economic sphere. These are as follows:

- 1) Introduce legal, economic and social rights based on the international conventions, allowing the equality in wages for the same value of work (pay equity).
- 2) Harmonize national laws with international conventions, especially in the sphere of economic and social rights.
- 3) Introduce an ongoing information mechanism that updates decision and/or policy makers on the economic and social international conventions and instruments.



- 4) Enable women's entrance into the labor market to non-traditional fields, roles and positions.
- 5) Adopt policies and mechanisms such as gender quotas to ensure women's participation in economic decision and policy-making and implementation.
- 6) Develop policies that facilitate women's access to loans and national programs for management and marketing.
- 7) Make provisions for public transport enabling women's mobility.
- 8) Develop policies and mechanisms that ensure the fair distribution of work between women and men in the private and public sectors; For this purpose, develop social state services as kinder gardens to enable women's participation in the public and economic life and production; introduce mechanisms to encourage and enhance men's participation and sharing of responsibility in the private sphere; adopt international best practices and legislations that address sharing of responsibilities in the families.
- 9) Protect micro-credit institutions from donors' external pressures with regard to lending projects for women.

Conclusions

Ms. Boriانا Jönsson, European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI

Ms. Joumana Mehri, Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering RDFL Lebanon

Ms. Boriانا Jönsson and Ms. Joumana Mehri presented a summary of the major challenges and opportunities that emerged as a result of the panel presentations and during the debates, emphasizing the high quality of the work. Arab uprisings have created new conditions for women's rights and gender equality. Women witnessed a new exclusion from political life, from decision-making, as soon as political power debates started. Political and religious debates concerning the new limitations of women's rights started receiving more space. Democracy, in the name of which the uprising started, was very soon seen as a legitimate space for men only. The development of new constitutions excluded women but also the principle of non-discrimination based on gender and the value of gender equality while legislation that discriminates against women continues to persist.

In the Euro-Med region, implementation or adoption of laws with regards to women's right is not yet considered a priority and therefore, has not been included as a priority in the political changes sweeping the MENA region. Nor has gender equality been considered a political priority, including in the ENP and the ENI, despite the numerous declarations. Some indications of this are evident, such as the difference between wages for women and men, the low representation of women in political and economic decision-making, the gender stereotypical representation of women in media and society, the persistence of violence against women, from rape to verbal abuse, to name a few. The EU has been weak in demonstrating a firm stand for human rights of both women and men. Double talk has become more and more of a natural state in confronting uncomfortable realities for women and cultural relativism has become one of the ways to clear consciousness in the North or West.

In this challenging context, international and regional women's rights instruments remain reference for the women's movement. Elimination of discriminatory legislation and harmonizing national law



with international conventions is a condition for achieving justice for women and recognizing them as full citizens. Political and legal reforms incorporating women's rights should be the core of building democracy. However, ratifying of international conventions is not enough, as the real work starts with lobbying for implementation without delay. Adopting quotas of a minimum of 30% of the underrepresented is a meaningful mechanism to address discrimination and structural exclusion and has become an urgent necessity. Building political will is a major factor for achieving gender equality and therefore multiple strategies and unifying efforts are needed to change mentalities not only of society but of political decision-makers. The political parties - still mainly men and patriarchal - have to adopt gender equality on their agendas especially if they define themselves as progressive and democratic.

The support of the EU is badly needed, but the EU should invest in the Euro-Med region with the values of gender equality and human rights for women and men as pillars for democracy and not compromising women's rights. The neo-liberal economic policy is detrimental first and foremost for women; therefore, the role of the welfare state should be recalled while all religions should not interfere in politics or legislation.

Solidarity on the national, regional and international level is women's rights strongest tool to confront rising conservatism and extremism. Networking, cooperation, building strategic alliances, nationally, regionally and internationally and entering into advocacy dialogue with the governmental sector, security institutions and political decision-makers is among the major strategies to address the ever changing context.



Annex A Opening Session Speeches

Ms. Leila Al Ali, Executive Director of Najdeh Association

Ladies and Gentlemen, honored guests and audience,

We are a coalition of feminist, non-governmental organizations from the Arab countries, from the east to the west, along with the European Feminist Initiative, which represents ten European countries. We are a coalition which believes in the cooperation that is based on a mutual respect to our differences, and on our high awareness of the power of our principles and common values. We worked and we are working together for the full implementation of women's rights as universal human rights, and a necessary condition to achieving sustainable democracy. So we launched a regional project over two years to contribute in "Promoting a Joint Program for Equality between Men and Women through Istanbul Action Plan" funded by the European Union.

The project aims to "create a friendly environment filled with gender equality, and contribute to promoting democratic development in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and strengthening women's rights as an integral component of sustainable development". We are working to contribute to creating an interactive space, and activate a positive dialogue in favour of social changes and implementing women's rights.

We have launched our program of work in October 2011, and we have developed a common methodology to use IAP in the context of the Arab uprisings and transitions towards democracy. We have chosen the slogan "Equality First" as a central message in our regional campaign to enhance equality and women's rights, which must be a priority in the social development agendas of the governments, and as an issue of great importance for sustainable democracy. The meeting in Cairo has linked the IAP with the other international conventions and recommendations that promote equality and women's rights. For us, we consider Istanbul- Marrakesh process a valuable and unique opportunity for a joint action that contribute to reaching democracy and social justice, from a perspective that achieves equality between men and women.

In Lebanon, we – European Feminist Initiative, Najdeh Association Democratic Women Gathering (RDFL), with the support of the European Union, REEWP/Oxfam-Québec and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty- are organizing this third event of discussion to promote dialogue between the actors in the civil society, state and politicians to improve women's rights, and to contribute in strengthening women's position in the society, within the three major fields: civil and political, economic, cultural and social.

We will gather here for two days, women and men, activists from Arabic and European countries, to discuss the challenges, opportunities and developments which contributed in addressing women's rights, and how can we benefit from the international conventions and regional tools for gender equality in the transition periods the region and the countries are experiencing. Together, we are from the civil society, the actors and politicians in the state, will work on discussing the different feminist alternatives to reach the full citizenship for women and economic empowerment, in light of the growth and the increased impact of the conservative trends to obtain this full citizenship and rights.



The support from the European Union has enriched this work, especially since its work aims to promote gender equality, and considers women's rights as an integral part of democracy. In this context as well, comes the innovative commitment from the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty and Oxfam-Québec, which stems from the commitment and the joint vision to ensure greater impact and to reach to gender equality and women's rights.

Ms. Elsa Fenet, Head of the Political, Economic, Commercial, Press and Information Section at the Delegation of the European Union

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here today at this roundtable in order to exchange opinions, ideas and experiences on the status of women in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The European Union considers that the involvement of women is required at all levels, on an equal basis with men, in order to secure peace, social development, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Women, alongside men, participated in the Arab uprisings in 2011, demanding freedom, equality, justice and democracy. The changes sweeping the region present a valuable opportunity to push for women's rights. Yet these times of change also present a risk of regression. There is therefore a crucial need for women today to participate in public and political life on an equal basis with men, and to play their full part in building democratic societies in their respective countries around the region.

Gender equality is a principle, an objective and a task for the European Union that strongly endorses "gender mainstreaming" as the main global strategy for promoting gender equality. The European Union also defends the importance of incorporating gender equality issues into all areas of human activity.

In Lebanon, many women participate actively in public life. Many women are active in universities, in businesses, in social networks, and their professionalism is a tribute to their society. Unfortunately, women are largely under-represented in positions of responsibility at the highest level, especially when compared to other countries in the region. Striking evidence is the absence of women in the current government. Similarly, women continue to be inadequately represented in Parliament and make up only about 3% of Members of Parliament. A quota for women in the next election law could serve as a temporary measure to encourage women to run for elections. Challenges nevertheless persist because of political, social, economic and cultural factors; and we look forward to seeing more women being granted senior administrative positions, including that of ambassador, in the next round of appointments.

In terms of legislation, discriminatory laws governing marriage, inheritance, divorce and custody continue to exist. Violence against women persists and a draft law on domestic violence is still being debated, since 2007. Lebanon has signed numerous treaties aimed at improving the situation of women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), but with several reservations. Equality cannot be obtained with reservations. The European Union will continue to call to have all reservations on CEDAW lifted, as was done in several countries in the region (Jordan, Iraq and Morocco), to ensure the eradication of gender-based discrimination in Lebanon also.

More should be done in practice as well. More concrete measures are required to achieve gender equality, namely through institutional reform, commitment of resources and fundamental changes in behaviours and attitudes. Government policies and legislations need to address those social structures and customs which are major barriers and have a negative impact on women's lives.



This will not happen overnight or by itself, but through the concerted efforts of Members of Parliament, officials, business circles, human rights activists, women's groups and international partners.

Gender equality is an important dimension which was mainly addressed in the previous years as a "cross cutting issue" in EU funded projects in Lebanon. Currently, gender equality is also considered as an objective in its own right that is being addressed through the various EU instruments. Since 2009, Lebanon has benefited from 6 different projects for a total amount of 3.5 million Euros focusing on increasing women's participation within local development processes as well as on involving men in combating violence against women.

In Lebanon and the region, and in Europe, there is still much to be done in order to achieve gender equality as part of the sustainable human development goals.

Lebanese men and women can count on the European Union's commitment to gender equality. We will continue to support the civil society and the authorities so that women and men can reach their rightful place.

Let me thank once again the organisers of this roundtable and wish you all interesting and fruitful discussions.

Thank you.

Ambassador Mansour Adballah, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lebanon

Ladies and Gentlemen representatives of International organizations, non-governmental organizations, university professors, experts and specialists in women issues, and the friends representing the media,

Allow me to start first, and on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants Dr. Adnan Al-Mansour, to greet you and welcome you in Beirut, and I wish you a fruitful and enjoyable stay

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet today to discuss ways to "enhance democracy through the promotion of women's social, political and economic rights"... Is democracy equated for a single team only?

The most important angle of democracy: the state obligation to promote and protect the rights of all citizens, young, old, and children, men and women...

Lebanon cannot as a country, which participated in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but to support the right of women to be equal with men in all fields, and their right to participate effectively in all the activities of the society.

Women's rights in the society, and on the society, are sacred, provided by the God Almighty and they must be protected, and it is not allowed by any human to take them, not for a need, predominance nor punishment.

To face the lack of justice and rights, we must take clear steps, applied with convention, love, courage and confidence, to strengthen the role of women in the society, and the state is obliged to protect these rights and promote them in the face of the social, political and economic changes.



The most important things we can do to help women protect their rights, and enhance their roles are:

- Develop the laws and legislations that protect their rights and the prosecution of their application, and that goes to all fields, educational, health, social, development, economic, politics and media.
- Combat poverty in our societies, because women always pay the price of crises in the societies.
- Combat violence against women and girls, and this is not to be considered normal in the society.
- Protect women in conflicts, wars and natural disasters
- Provide women a larger role in building the institutions in both the private and public sectors, and to provide fair opportunities in labor market.
- Educate: education and education, because education is the ladder of progress and advancement of individuals and communities.

The road is not drawn, but we draw it by our hands.

The climate might not be helpful, but women working in the field of change know that they will find themselves at the end an important and radical factor in change.

I would like to add that all societies suffer from discrimination in all its forms: racial, ethnic, religious or social discrimination between men and women, but societies have evolved and changed, and superiority is the engine of change.

I call women first, to work and excel in the fields available for them, so their superiority will be the door for them, for their advancement and development in this society, and the society must be obliged to respect them and their roles.

The slow and graduate change becomes after a while, a revolutionary and radical change if we know how to follow and preserve it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have learned that the intent of this meeting is to promote democracy in the community, and I'm confident that our mothers, sisters and daughters once they are cherished, they will be the largest pillar of democracy.

In the end, I thank you all who contributed in organizing this seminar, and who contributed in supporting and financing it, and shall not forget the media who's covering the event.

Finally, I wish you on behalf of H.E. the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants success in your conference, and I welcome our guests and wish them an enjoyable stay in our capital.

Long live Lebanon.



Dr. Bashaer Esmat, Advisor to the Minister of Social Affairs, Lebanon

First I want to convey to you the greetings of his Excellency, The Minister of Social Affairs Professor Wael Abu Faour, and I am pleased to be among you today, participating in the roundtable “Enhancing Democracy through Promoting Women’s Political, Social and Economic Rights, to Enforce a Joint Action Plan to Achieve Equality between Men and Women through the Istanbul Action Plan.”

I’m glad to know, through you, what is considered by the people supporting this cause in collaboration with the international experience, to develop the women’s fight for their cause and society and its prosperity. This fight concerns me, coming out of my intellectual convictions and out of my relation to the cause and its important impact in my being and my exercise of my daily duties in the Ministry of Social Affairs where I work.

Women’s cause, out of all its aspects, is primarily a human and social cause on one hand, and a private cause involving persecution of women and what they are exposed to, from injustice, exploitation, oppression, and violence, and what they suffer from all types of sexual and legal discrimination. It is an issue for both men and women equally, the cause for the whole society, meaning the cause of the nation, humans, democracy and progress. Half of the society does not progress without the other half, and the issue is not quantitative, it’s about the essential integration between the two sexes, where the position and role of women within the society and the state does not differ from the position and role of men in them. Social development will not work if not directed toward developing both sexes equally. To talk about the individual freedom and human rights if for males only, is a meaningless talk.

First I will try to define security, which is a form of protection, even immunity, and why only the political or social? Does the lack of security makes women more vulnerable? Is it related to the lack of social and political security, or is it related to the inherited cultural behavior, reinforced by a patriarchal system, mixed with a lack luster political system that appears democratic, but indeed it is an autocratic religious system. Is it the lack of social and political security that makes violence directed more towards women?

I do not think so, as I believe that violence against women is institutionalized in our concepts, as for the weak are more vulnerable like women.

Violence embraces within it forcing the other to do something, or believe in something against their will, and violence is abusing someone by hand or tongue, speech or deed, and it’s either:

- 1) Abuse by an individual using the hand or speech against the other
- 2) A group of humans (collective violence) with common characteristics using violence and force as means to achieve their own aspirations.

In this context, I have to make an observation that putting an end to discrimination and violence against women is a matter of cultural, moral, economic, social and political not legal, not legislative in the naïve meaning of law. It is an expression of the political and social power dynamics, either to be reflected in a legislative amendment or not, and not as a charity from the legislative authority, but as preponderance of the forces supporting women’s cause.

The phenomena of violence against women draws international attention, as it has been recognized globally that all forms of violence against women, which takes the stereotypes in the private and public lives, are violations of fundamental human rights.



Due to the exacerbation of violence against women phenomena, it was obligatory to intervene to protect women from all forms of violence directed against them. And hence the General Assembly of the United Nations approved the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979, and the convention stated that the United Nation's Charter reaffirms the faith in the fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of each individual, and the equality between men and women in all rights.

Women in Politics:

We do not have in Lebanon legislations forbidding women from participating in politics in general, but on the other hand we do not have specific legislations to encourage them to participate in politics. But what has been done in this field are some initiatives from local and international agencies and in collaboration with the local authorities, whether municipalities or the Ministry of Social Affairs and its centers, to strengthen governance and women participation in local governance.

There are experiences in terms of women's participation in decision-making, through the representation in ministries and the parliament, but the previous and current experiences are timid and ineffective and even not supported by women themselves. These experiences should be evaluated and expanded. Related to drafting laws to enhance women's quota in the parliament and other authorities, these projects are still under discussion and research.

Women and Economy:

Women participation in moving the economic wheel witnessed a significant development in Lebanon, where women now are an important economic player. It is a role that is not lost, even if they are susceptible to exploitation through work without any wages at home and serving the husband and children, and the work in agriculture, and often women work in the education and administrative sectors, and in medicine, nursing, engineering and computers.

Women Facing Violence and the Lack of Social Security:

Violence and the social and economic insecurity are fundamental issues that continue to threaten women's security and livelihoods. These values still exists within the local culture and are some of the inherited traditions and customs, and are reinforced in the daily practices of men towards women in general.

Lebanese women, through their long struggle, have been able to obtain their rights in terms of financial independence and the freedom to work and move, but they still suffer from harassment in all its forms in the labor market or in public transportation and other places, and still suffer from inequality in several areas. However, women in poverty have the least access to food, health, education and training, employment and among others.

There is no doubt that women's issue is acquiring the support of large segments of the society. However, the range of support varies from people who say that justice in the society between men and women is the requirement, not equality, justice in terms of rights and duties, justice in the individual, whether in work or economic participation, justice in civil laws and personal status laws, to the people who demand absolute equality between both sexes, and the more we approach equality the less supporters of women exist.

It is true we are living in the time of major shifts in politics, economy and sociology, and in Lebanon



we are living in the midst of these shifts, along the conflict in the Middle East, as well as our persistent problems, no doubt that all these transformations and conflicts have different impacts on the different social dynamics, regardless of gender perspective. In many aspects they concern women specifically, and concern men in other aspects. And I see an opportunity for women to have their cause among the first in the changing issues.

The state's obligation to provide the basic rights for women, to promote them and to protect women from the current social, political and economic changes, is the same obligation towards its citizens, but providing the basic rights for women is a path of struggle, and is subjected to the state's commitment to the international conventions and translating that commitment in their behavior politically in the national culture, legislation, media, development, general human rights, achieving democracy and public participation and promoting the civil society role, and that will not be unless we achieve a political power balance that support the society cause; women's cause.

The issue of women is included in every policy and democratic approach for development, and is tied closely to the concepts of participation, freedom and combating hunger and poverty.

I renew my thanks to the organizers of this pioneer activity, and to the international experts for their support and care to this important cause.

I wish you success in your workshop and I carry to you the wishes of his Excellency Minister Abu Faour with success and thanks for your kind attention.

Address by Ms. Anna Kapellas, Chargé d'affaires, Embassy of Canada

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Distinguished Guests

I am honoured to be among you today in support of this very timely roundtable and in support of the Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project, funded by the Government of Canada through the Canadian International Development Agency.

The project is managed by a Canadian NGO Oxfam-Québec in cooperation with its four implementing partners in the region, JOHUD in Jordan, the Collective for Research and Training in Development-Action (CRTD.A) in Lebanon, CAWTAR in Tunisia, and Asala in the West Bank and Gaza. I wish to thank the representatives of these organizations who are joining us for today's workshop, especially those who have travelled from outside Lebanon.

Canada plays and will continue to play an important role in advocating for and implementing international commitments relating to gender equality. Support for programs aimed at strengthening gender equality, including this project, has been at the heart of Canada's programming for many years. Canada also launched an Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security in October 2010.

Our main objective is to build the capacity of our partners to become effective advocates and actors for women's rights. To translate these abstract rights into strategies that lead to the adoption of laws and policies, and most importantly effective implementation mechanisms, to help countries in the region deliver on their commitments to gender equality.

Gender equality means many things. It means the formal recognition in law and policy that men



and women have equal rights and are able to exercise them fully. It means that women and men can participate on an equal footing in decision-making at all levels, including the political one. And it means that women, like men, have access to the resources necessary for their economic emancipation.

Decades of struggle at the local, national and international levels towards these seemingly mundane goals show that there is no quick fix, and that there are many more steps to be taken for gender equality to become a reality. Many women continue to have fewer rights, lower education, less income, less access to resources and less say in decision-making than men.

While each country's realities are undoubtedly different, women often face common challenges. These common challenges can be met by common solutions. These include sound public policies, a holistic approach to the issue of gender equality and long-term commitment from all actors involved. The workshop that you are participating in today is one such attempt at identifying common solutions by sharing lessons learned and creating national and regional networks to advocate for and implement these solutions.

The necessity of working in synergy to achieve these common objectives applies not only to local organizations, but also to the international donors supporting them. Today's workshop is therefore particularly welcome as it brings together organizations funded by Canada and the European Union all working for gender equality. This should assist in fostering synergies, building on lessons learned and strengthening rather than duplicating everyone's efforts in the region.

It is trite but nevertheless true to say that the Middle East is facing existential changes. At this time of upheaval and uncertainty, it is important that all voices be heard. Amongst the most important of these voices are those of women, from all political and social backgrounds. Many of you have been fighting for gender equality for years. The events of the Arab Spring have made activists of others. The veterans of this struggle and the newly-minted warriors share a common demand – they all want to see a tangible improvement in their daily lives. There can be no such improvement without economic and social empowerment for women. Today's workshop is one more step towards ensuring the active and meaningful participation of women in the in the exercise of power and in the public decisions that affect their lives.

I wish you fruitful discussions and every success today.

Ms. Maryse Guimond, Project Director of the Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project (REEWP) / Oxfam-Québec

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project (REEWP)/Oxfam-Québec is pleased to join efforts with its partners in the Euro-Med Initiative to take part in this important gathering today to reaffirm our commitment to women's rights and to accelerate progress on women's full and equal participation. Experience has shown that sustainable development cannot be achieved without the full and equal participation of half our population. The project that Oxfam-Québec is implementing- the Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project (REEWP) - effectively advocates and contributes to promote and enhance women economic rights, gender equality while also promoting regional and international co-operation and partnership.



We at REEWP do believe that the goals of inclusive development and effective implementation of women economic empowerment programs will not be achieved by organizations working in isolation but by joining efforts.

Successful transitions in the Euro-Med Region will depend on women's ability to shape their countries' futures. They are critical in driving positive change. Progress has been made, notably on social indicators. Yet, critical gaps remain between men and women, especially at the political and economic levels.

Unless we address the barriers women face—whether for decent work, freedom from discrimination and violence, or inequality in decision making-economic growth will stall, and poverty will become entrenched. Strengthening democracy without protecting and promoting women's rights simply does not work. We need a comprehensive and coherent approach that pulls together institutions, policies, and legal frameworks to support women's equal and full participation. Women's rights are human rights- be they social, economic or political. Protection and promotion of women's rights should be on the priority list of every government's agenda.

With this promise in mind, we are hopeful that our gathering for the coming two days in the roundtable discussion will lead to alternatives for women's full citizenship. This is critical in these uncertain times.

Ms. May Shalabieh, Program Manager at Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty

On behalf of the Country Representative of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty, Mr. Ralf Erbel, allow me to welcome you to the second joint activity between the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty for Freedom and the European Feminist Initiative (EFI), where the first joint activity was held at the end of 2011.

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty is a political, liberal and German institution caring for political and socio-economic development through providing political counseling, and through activating political dialogue and civil culture. The foundation office in Amman, Jordan works for Lebanon, Iraq and Syria, in addition to Jordan.

In all of these countries, in the whole region, the developments make reform a top priority, hence comes the importance of our meeting today. Participation is a fundamental pillar for the reform, which is impossible to be realized without a real participation, and without the participation of women.

There is no doubt that this meeting, and within this remarkable partnership, will make us closer to realizing the vision which was developed at the end of the last year, with regards to promoting women's political, social and economic rights, and activating the legislations governing these rights, and amending them to comply with the international standards.

We are sure that at the end of this meeting, we will be closer to achieving the goals we agreed upon, with the existence of you as key players in this field.

At the end, let me thank the organizers of this meeting, and the presence of H.E. Ambassador Mansour Abdullah, and H.E the Advisor of the Minister of Social Affairs Dr. Bashir Esmat.

Thank you for coming, and I hope to have a successful meeting for you and us.



Annex B Speakers' Presentation

Positioning Women's Human Rights and the State Obligation to Promote and Protect them in the Current Social, Political and Economic Processes

Mr. Fahed Suleiman



Fahed Suleiman is a Palestinian politician and has been active since 1969. He contributed to the establishment of the Palestinian Community Pool, Gatherings and the Democratic Front in Germany. Mr. Suleiman was elected as a member of the Political Bureau and Central Committee of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine in 1971. He became a member of the Palestinian National Council and PLO Central Council member in 1973 and 1996 respectively.

Many of his contributions and writings reflect national and intellectual topics and include: Reading in the Palestinian Constitution, in the Secularism, Upbringing and the Track, The Road Map to Where? Presidential of year 2005, etc.

Presentation

Palestinian Democracy and Women's Rights - Obstacles and Prospects

I. Obstacles to the Development of Palestinian Democracy

Three indicators play together - in varying levels - a decision-making role in appointing the site and content of democracy in the Palestinian context; the occupation, and division; and the quality of established leadership in the Palestinian national movement based on the structure of the movement itself.

We say this with the emphasis on the discrimination between the quality and the impact of each of these indicators on Palestinian democracy: Occupation is the enemy, which is the origin of the subsequent evils suffered by our people and our nation. And division is the rival produced by a national movement, which did not manage and resolve their differences democratically. The quality of the established leadership in the Palestinian movement (and its extension the political system) is a democratic challenge as the outcome is still conservative, leading to monopolizing power, which explains the careful apprehension and dealing with democracy.

These indicators hinder the development of democracy, and hinder even democracy itself, in either the relations prevailing in the community, or in the political system with its ruling structure. Thus, the quest for the development of the Palestinian democracy in its various dimensions (political, economic, cultural and social) is linked to the progress of the struggle against Israeli occupation and its evacuation, and against the internal division to overcome it. It is s linked to the struggle for development - that is, democratization and modernization - the leadership and structure of the national movement with its components and institutions within the Palestinian political system.

The following is an analysis of these indicators in reference to their obstructive role against the development of democracy:

1 - The obstructive role, even the anti-democratic role practiced by the occupation, is the result of the occupation settling on Palestinian land and expelling the original inhabitants, and gathering



them into ghettos, enslaving them and if possible politically execute them (*politicide*).

Occupation with its irreconcilable hostility to Palestinian nationalism, raised several issues, including: attacking the Palestinian democracy and its potential to guarantee freedom and human rights. Also occupation disrupts the democratic practice by preventing the legislative elections of all Palestinians (not including occupied East Jerusalem). Palestinian democracy collides primarily with the hostile policy of the occupation. In our specified context we refer to two related struggling axis:

- First is to defend civil rights and political freedom of the citizens and the inviolability of Palestinians in the face of the occupation's violations and the implementation of arbitrary actions, in order to compel the occupation authorities to respect and apply the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of the rights of the population in the territories under occupation, and the suspension of the mandatory emergency laws and all the military orders, which deprive the Palestinians of their human rights, and for the prohibition of all forms of collective punishment.
- The second is the struggle for the release of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in the prisons of the occupier, and to expose the Israeli violations of their rights guaranteed by the Geneva Conventions, and to stop the practice of solitary confinement, torture, maltreatment and denial of health care, educational opportunities, and visits, and the abolition of administrative detention.

2 - The negative consequences of the internal division on the Palestinian democracy, which appear in more than one field. This is represented in the clear eradication of the public freedoms in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the decline of women's rights and freedom in Gaza Strip, the result of the rule given to one team, which uses political power for the religionization of the social, political and legislative structures, not to mention Education and Higher Education, the cultural sectors, media and others.

Noting that in the case of the current division, the seriousness of the accelerated decline in the case of civil liberties, civil rights and democracy for the citizens, especially in Gaza, but also in the West Bank, we emphasize the following:

- Reject and condemn, even prohibit the political arrests, torture, and restriction of the freedom of the press, demonstrations and public gatherings, and the attack on the trade unions and organizations of the civil work, the restrictions on the right to travel and movement, house arrests, and the adoption of the recommendations of the security institutions as a condition to access public offices or civil services, contrary to the principle of equal opportunities recognized by the Basic Law.
- The use of the division as a pretext to justify violations of freedoms and rights guaranteed to citizens by «the basic law» of the Palestinian Authority and «the Declaration of Independence» threatens to undermine the pillars of democracy for the Palestinian political system, and to slide toward authoritarianism
- These practices are tearing the social fabric of the Palestinian people and undermining its cohesion in the homeland and the diaspora, and weakening the struggle against the occupation. Just as the Palestinian women are paying the price twice by the practices of the political and economic occupation, and in the area of public freedoms, they are subjected to the same prejudice due to the division policy, resulting in the decline of the public freedoms affecting women's rights- before and more than others.
- To break the problem of the division there must be a commitment to apply the reconciliation agreements (signed repeatedly), which states on conducting a comprehensive re-elections



that reproduce and formulate the democratic Palestinian institutions.

3 – The conservative trend is to monopolize power and is cautious in approaching democracy. However, there are clear distinctions, and sometimes qualitative, between the poles of the leadership structure of the Palestinian movement in a number of core issues, including democracy - the subject of our research - in its heart the women's rights.

In this context, we note, if we start from the program made by Hamas to the Legislative Council elections in 2006, as well as their practices after having exclusively the power in Gaza since June 2007, that Hamas does not seek to establish a civil state where political authorities are independent from religion, but they strive to «make Sharia the main source of legislation in Palestine», from the premise that «Islam is a comprehensive system for everything in life».

The reflection of that on the status and rights of women is leading to the creation of a gap between woman as a «citizen» applies to the principle of «citizenship», like any (male) citizen has the same rights and duties, and to be exposed to consequences of the saying «the legitimate rights of women», which leads to inequality.

The only way to overcome this situation created by this vision, alienated from our era, is through the inclusion of the reconciliation efforts within rebuilding the Palestinian political system, as a parliamentary, pluralistic and democratic system under the umbrella of the «Declaration of Independence», a system based on the rule of the proportional representation in elections, subjected to the executive authority overseen and accountable by the legislative authority, having a maintained independence of the judiciary system, and respect the rule of law, human rights and full equality before the law for all citizens.

Such a system should be at the forefront enabling women to attain their rights in freedom and equality in various areas of economic, social and cultural life; and enhance their role in the political affairs; and in decision-making institutions through the development of laws and electoral systems according to the rule of positive discrimination; the purification of the Palestinian legislative laws from all forms of prejudice and discrimination against women, and the enactment of modern laws for the family and personal status protecting women's rights and guaranteeing equality with men.

II. Inseparability of the Two Tracks: the National Liberation and Democracy

1 - The development of Palestinian democracy is based on overcoming the occupation, division and the conservative structures in the national movement with their extensions in the existing political system. It is a comprehensive and public struggle engaging the entire Palestinian people, i.e., all social categories at home and abroad. But also, it's a struggle with specific features derived from the nature of the social forces that bear the main burden: labourers within the class scale, youth within the age scale, and women within the gender scale.

These features are not visible in the course of the practical movement of the conflict, unless moving to the content and priorities of the program of the struggle, which reflect the interests and aspirations of the social forces and the their representatives - and thus those expressing their interests - influential positions in the structures of the national movement and the institutions of the political system, meaning acting positions in the directions and decisions.

2 - The experiences of national liberation movements in the Arab region - and the Palestinian movement is not an exception. Lessons learned indicate that progress and triumph of their goals



does not automatically lead to the progress and the triumph of the goals of democracy, politically and socially.

How many of these movements after having achieved its objectives in the national independence, set up their political systems and open with exposing the interests of the large landowners, traders, brokers, contractors for the majority of the people and improving the role of the political and social role to their representatives? . How many of these movements - having stabilized and sustained in positions of power - have put the people before the fact of the new conditions, including the authoritarian regimes, populist-authoritarian, distorted neoliberal systems, and sometimes dictatorial regimes difficult to be classified for being bizarre, and due to the absence of precedents.

3 – The progress towards the objectives of the national liberation struggle should go hand in hand with the strengthening of political and social democracy, deepen its course during the stage of national liberation, and an extension in the process of national construction that follows.

In this context, we cannot fail to emphasize that the correlation between the national and social tracks should avoid fuelling the social conflicts – based on any background: class, ideology, religion. This contrasts with the priority of maintaining the unity of the people between the various sectors in the face of the occupation.

The inseparability of the two tracks from this angle as it means upholding issues related to the social justice, it requires the focused attention on the interests, rights and status of women and young people. Taking into account also - with regard to young people in particular - that the Palestinian movement today is aging, with clear signs of aging leadership, leading urgently to the need for rejuvenation of these bodies.

4 - Giving the accounts of the above and confirming them, we refer to the Oslo agreements, which renewed the structure of the occupation and raised the pace of settlement and Judaization of Jerusalem. It also failed in putting the Palestinian people on the road to completion of their national rights to independence and the right to return home.

The establishment of a Palestinian Authority self-rule under these conventions, deprived from the elements of sovereignty, even if they have broad powers in the management of the internal affairs, is putting the Palestinian movement in front of national and democratic duties all at once, in that, the functions of anti-occupation, and the functions of liberation from the constraints of the Oslo agreements overlapped in order to re- build a self-governing authority (PA). The PA was to meet the job of strengthening the steadfastness of the community in the face of the occupation, gain independence toward the establishment of a democratic political system that respects political and party pluralism, preserve public freedoms and citizenship rights, guarantees equality between citizens, and between women and men, all leading to a secular state, a democratic civil state.

III. The Rights of Women and their Role in the Heart of Developing Palestinian Democracy

1 - The linking of national liberation to democracy (political and social) and to issues of human and humanitarian development, and the issues of the societies' development include women's issues. This is leading to the mobilization of equal and effective participation for all the segments of people in the national process, including the integration in the daily struggle and the rights of all sectors (particularly women and youth), which are excluded in practice from participating in the formulation of the active policy in the community, and in the Palestinian movement in general, to a level that



commensurate with their social weight and their struggling role.

The contradiction experienced by the Palestinian movement with knowing - in theory - the importance of the national women's issues and women's rights in general, they tend to deal with these issues and those rights not as the core of the daily political life of the Palestinian people, not interlocking with it, and not integrated with it.

In this the Palestinian movement does not take into consideration that the development of the structures of the Palestinian society requires institutional, legal and cultural development. Based on the integrated participation of «half of the society» in the daily political struggle, not as higher commands where women are absent, but out of active democratic stations, where women, fairly and without discrimination, take their full responsibilities in parallel with their duties. It also requires the democratization and unification of laws between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, especially the personal status laws that guarantee the promotion of women's rights based on recognition of equality between women and men provided by the «Declaration of Independence», and in line with the international conventions, which represents a guaranteed stands, references and values in the widest terms in the dedicated human rights and women's rights in particular.

2 - We do not have sufficient data on the ratio of women's participation in the governing bodies of the first Palestinian political parties, and perhaps the highest participation rate of women is in the political bureau of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (17%). The available data on the participation of Palestinian women in the political institutions of representative and official character are rising slowly though, and they are as following:

- In the governing bodies of the first PLO: the total membership of women in the Palestinian National Council, 65 women (about 10%), and 10 women in the Central Council (less than 8%), and one woman on the Executive Committee (out of 16).
- In the governing bodies of the first Palestinian Authority: Adoption of the women's quota by 20% in the electoral lists of the second Legislative Council (2006) was the main reason for the high rate of participation of women in the legislature, reaching to 12.9%, after it was 5.6% in the elections that preceded it (1996).

As for the participation in the Palestinian government, it has reached the highest rates in the last government (the fourteenth), having 6 women out of 24 ministerial seats (25%), while it was limited to 5 seats in the ministerial posts in the government that preceded it (thirteenth).

So women reached 15% in senior government positions, and the percentage of their presence in the public sector reached 37%. And finally, the number of women ambassadors was 5 (2008).

- In the judiciary system: the proportion of the representation of women is between 9 to 12% (2008).
- In the local governorates: at the level of the local governorates in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon (the Public Committees), the rate of 7% of women's representation (20 out of 286).
- In the Palestinian territories, the adoption of quota for women (2 minimum in village councils and municipalities) has contributed to increase the proportion of women in local councils (18% in the elections of 2008) after it had been 1.8% in 2000. However, this percentage dropped in 2012 to 14% at local councils.

3 - In the area of legislation and accession to international agreements, we can monitor the following



in recent years:

- In 2005, a law was approved on the alimony fund, as a concrete step towards the empowerment of Palestinian women to have access to their stalled alimony in the Palestinian civil and legal courts.
- As for the so-called – as a camouflage and mitigation: «honour killings», the President of the Palestinian Authority has issued a decree to amend the two paragraphs of the Penal Code in force in the Palestinian territories, and issued a decree amending the text of Article 240, with its two paragraphs, of the Penal Code No. 16 applicable in the northern provinces. As well the decree amended the text of Article 18 of Law No. 74, by adding an exception of the killing of women based on what is known as «honour».
- In March 8th (2009) President Mahmoud Abbas ratified the «Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women» - CEDAW. And thus Palestine became the 19th member which approves this agreement among the members of the League of Arab States (22) with the number of those later to reach 20 (after Qatar entered the Convention, with Sudan and Somalia refraining). All of these countries (except Comoros) attached their ratification of CEDAW with reservations based on opposing some articles to Shari'a and violating the provisions of national constitutions and laws.

In our view the Palestinian ratification of CEDAW, despite including as «what does not conflict» with the Basic Law of the Palestinian Authority, what is read by some based on article 4, paragraph 2 of this law («the principles of Islamic Sharia a main source of legislation»), this add-on does not make the Palestinian ratification the same as of the Arab ratifications, which clearly linked their reservations to specific articles in the Convention (Articles 2,7, 9, 15,16, 29). The Palestinian President has not only ratified it, but called the Palestinian government for the harmonization of the laws with CEDAW.

- The specific conditions of the reality of the Palestinian movement highlights the importance of the Democratic approach in parallel with the national liberation, especially after Oslo agreements, which deepened the relation between the two approaches. We emphasize in this context that the issue of the Palestinian democracy lies in the burning field affected by several factors, starting from the occupation, through the division, ending with the quality and structure of the leadership.
- The issue of women's rights lies at the heart of the issue of Palestinian democracy and the erosion of these rights affect democracy, while promoting them reinforce the pillars of democracy in the society and the political system, and strengthen them in face of the occupation on the road to progress toward the national goals.
- The title of the struggle for women's rights is "equality", by devoting its legal position, in the public life with the real political participation and attendance at the decision making levels, and in private life within the family, which is still ruled by patriarchal values, and with respect to personal status laws placed under the patriarchal authority in the society. In all this we shall not miss the priority of combating the organized violence against women which increases, especially in times of war, turmoil, conflict and chaos as in our situation in the Palestinian territories and in most of the refugee camps.
- The approach to the rights of Palestinian women is multi-faceted in multi levels. They are moving in the field of civil and political rights on one hand, and social, economic, and cultural rights, on the other. This in turn requires a combination of demanding equality in all these areas based on the legal status officially approved, and the existing social practice, which is



supposed to provide the conditions to enable women to be at the level of filling these positions in the civil and political societies. The combination of the position and empowerment, the tight relation between them, is paving the way for the progress of women's rights in the Palestinian society and the political system at the same time.

- Taking into account the differing political and social conditions between the West Bank, Gaza and the diaspora, and within these divisions, we can provide a record on equality between women and men with an increasing line, even slowly, in the participation of Palestinian women in the institutions of political and civil societies. The quest to upgrade, at higher rates, the level of participation of women in these institutions and strengthen their presence in the decision making, is through the following :
 - Legalization of equality (from personal to political and economic rights ..) with clear texts immune to the interpretation against women's empowerment and rights, and that starting from a clear choice to build a civil and democratic state based on the independence of political institutions from the religious institutions.
 - Starting from the principle of gender equality (socially speaking), devote a positive discriminatory base in women's representation in political, social and civil institutions, through adopting the quota (based on realistic, but increasingly rate), including all the mentioned institutions, whether their bodies are formed by appointment (Palestinian Authority positions) or election.
 - Deepening the practical commitment to the international conventions, which endorse a framework for women's rights based on equality through the harmonization of laws and regulations (in the official governmental areas, as well as in the private sector).
 - Promoting and spreading the culture of democracy and equality, to the wider Palestinian society, which includes the educational curricula at various levels, including universities, and the development of organic culture in the society for this field, and improving the role of the official and private media in this area.

Ms. Joumana Mehri



Joumana Mehri is a Lebanese feminist activist and since 1995 has been advocating for the rights of women as human rights. She is the President of The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL) from 2009, the Director of The Office Branch of the Arab Institute for Human Rights in Lebanon, the General Coordinator of Arab Women's Forum –AISHA Network (September 2008- November 2011). Working with regional and international organizations, she also trains on human rights and international conventions, combating violence against women, as well as on mainstreaming gender.

Presentation

In the beginning of the speech, a reference must be made to the active and positive women's participation in all revolutions, and political and social movements in the Arab spring and the spring of democracy. Women are practicing their full citizenship regardless of the marginalization, exclusion, violence and discrimination against them. It is to be noticed, all of the cultural and social barriers and stereotypes women have broken with their participation, and raising their voices with the equality issues that are associated with freedom, and women's rights as essential and integral



part of human rights, freedom and democracy.

Despite the pioneer role played by women, the emerging reality still imprisons them and deprives them the recognition of rights. The reality of women in this period can be summarized as follows:

- Threats by the advancement of religious forces and their access to power. In other words, the societies are currently in a religious tyranny phase, with the continued political tyranny, along with the decline and the fragmentation of the political powers, parties and democratic powers.
- The increase of intolerance and the sectarian, tribal, familial and regional formations, with the decrease of the civil formations.
- The increased intolerance accompanied with the increased violence and the use of force, including militarization that increase the militarized societies and the advancement of militia forces and practices.
- We are in the process of rewriting constitutions and drafting legislations concerned in organizing the citizen's relation with the state. Women are paying the price of the weaknesses and the absence of the civil, secular and democratic civil society powers. Where religious forces are pressing to "constitutionalize" the adoption of religion as a main source for legislations, and terminating women's achievements in the previous stages.

The impact of this emerging reality on the situation and rights of women:

- 1) The considerable efforts of the feminists are focused in order to bring women's issues within the public issues. Especially that the reality makes women's issues as non-priority issues (marginalizing women's issues).
- 2) Restriction on women's freedom and the set back on the level of their rights, especially that the main entrance of the religious tyranny on the society is directed on women, through the physical, mental, sexual and social violence on them. Here we must refer to the increased symbolic violence perpetrated by the religious forces, especially the Salafists, against all the components of the society, through practicing all forms and types of direct violence against women.
- 3) The growth of women's organizations' which have a religious and Salafist background, holding the religious intellect that stresses the withdrawal of women's demands (the state of *Khilafah*, *Sharia* and *Fatwas* instead of laws and religious *Ejtihad*, the return of polygamy).
- 4) The decline and weakness of the state's commitments to all their obligations towards women's issues and rights.
- 5) The weakness of tackling women's issues by political parties. If they have addressed them, it's only done as folklore, not as a production of a real awareness and belief in the feminist cause, which aims for a change based on achieving gender equality as a prerequisite for democracy and democratic change.
- 6) The continuation of the confused status and the foggy vision, and the feminist discourse that feminist organizations have in demanding joint references both the international and the religious.
- 7) Increase in women's participation with the decline of women's demands. Women's participation in the political and social movements for change are characterized by lifting and adopting the general national demands for freedom and democracy isolated from the equality between men and women demands. We are back to the predominance of the national over women's



demands.

Feminist Movement Strategies:

- Activating the role of women and the feminist movement in building the democratic powers, and the placement of women's issues on the national issues and the democratic change, and building the position and enhancing the role of the feminist movement within the democratic power.
- The growing of our role in building a democratic and civil state, the state of law, equality and justice, where religion is separated from the state and laws, and where the civil society plays an active role.
- Adherence to the international reference for women's rights, without compromising with the religious authorities, in order to have stronger and active demands on the state to achieve equality between men and women.
- Networking as a strategic option to strengthen the feminist movement, increase its momentum and activate its role.
- Strengthening alliances especially with the democratic forces, trade unions and putting the pressure on the political parties.

Our Demands:

- 1) Emphasizing "Equality First": putting women's issues as priorities in all fields, from amending constitutions to all the different demands.
- 2) Adopting an approach of activating women's role in the political life is fundamental in the democratic change. The quota is currently an important requirement (to the level of parity as in Tunisia). Not only at the level of the government or the parliament, but as well the political parties, trade unions and at the level of public life.
- 3) Increasing the demand of protecting women's rights from all forms of violence against them, especially domestic violence, considering violence as discrimination, and protection means correcting the laws that discriminate against women and introducing new laws for protection.
- 4) Full citizenship for women, the other face of "Equality First" idea. Equality and full citizenship for women constitute the main and basic entrance to raise women's issues as women are citizens first, and the state is the protective, caring and responsible for them, and laws are the norms, not customs, traditions nor religious interpretations and *fatwas*. Citizenship is an entrance that concerns everyone, and highlights the interest of the society in promoting and activating women's rights.



Economic and Political Insecurity and Violence against Women

Ms. Marguérite Appel



Marguerite Appel is a Social Development Advisor based in the Netherlands and has carried out advisory work for various organizations and international agencies in Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East & North Africa, South & East Asia and Central & South East Europe. Women's rights, gender justice and rights-based approaches in development have been key to her work over the past decades, with a focus on gender, citizenship and governance, social inclusion and women's economic and political participation and empowerment. Her experience in the region includes leading a South Mediterranean Regional Program on Women's Economic Participation and Empowerment (2006-2009). Recently she was involved in the development of the UN Women Regional Strategy for the Arab States 2012-2013.

Presentation

My presentation will focus on women's economic security and rights in the Arab Region, based on insights gained from a 3-year Regional Programme on Women's Economic Empowerment covering 10 countries in the MENA region (2006-2009) and an assessment of selected Arab States (13 countries), focusing on lessons learned for women's rights, including 7 gender assessments, undertaken by an expert team² during 2011 in preparation for the development of a regional strategy for UN Women. I will first highlight the main insights on women's economic participation and conclude with some entry points for women's economic rights and gender equality.

I - Insights on Women's Economic Participation

Despite increases, women's labour force participation remains the lowest in the world (26.3%, against a global average of 51.7%), while women's unemployment in the world remains the highest (17% against a global average of 6.5%). The prevailing belief – protected by law in most countries – that only men bear financial responsibility for the household is a core factor. A related factor is that women are still assumed to be primarily responsible for the domestic sphere. Other factors include the reality that much of women's work is in the informal sector and remains unprotected and uncounted.

Economic growth in many Arab countries has been largely jobless, privileging elites and leaving men and women without economic opportunity, especially the young. The stereotypes about women and men's economic roles also play out in Arab national planning documents. Some are gender neutral, others make an effort to identify the special issues that disadvantage women and men (Iraq), some continue to insist on the importance of balancing women's work with family life (Qatar, Saudi Arabia). In these documents, women are often coupled with youth as well as with vulnerable groups, including the disabled, and thus in need of protection rather than empowerment.

Women are almost invisible in planning for the environment except for occasional mention as a vulnerable group that could benefit from small income generating projects. By contrast, women have made real progress in education in many of the region's countries, although literacy remains a challenge in poorer and/or conflict-stricken countries (Egypt, Yemen), leaving women vulnerable

² Nadia Hijab, Camillia Fawzi El-Solh and Evelyn Bazalgette



to economic insecurity and limiting their power at work and at home. Education is one of the areas where stereotypes badly affect men's human rights. In several countries, large numbers of boys and men are falling behind because of laws and traditions that require them to provide for the family, often leaving education at the high school level. This has revealed some unexpected gender dynamics, especially in Gulf countries, with families demanding higher dowries for highly educated women, and the mismatch in education levels is seen as a factor in rising divorce rates.

For both women and men, there is a serious mismatch between educational qualifications and labour force needs that has been underscored for decades but remains unresolved. This is multiplied for women by stereotypes about "appropriate" jobs for women, and in some countries professions traditionally more associated with women (especially teaching like in Jordan), are over-supplied. At the same time, throughout the region, there is a growing shift by women to non-traditional areas of study in science, technology, medicine, and banking. There are also efforts to revise vocational training to bring it more into line with market needs and to break with stereotypes that too often limited women to traditional handicrafts – including building women's skills in operating and maintaining equipment.

Arab labour laws in general provide equal treatment for women and men as well as a generous provision for maternity leave. However, the laws still discriminate in some areas in order to protect women – for example, from night work as well as hazardous work, although men should also be protected from hazardous work. With some notable exceptions (Jordan's labour code), laws do not yet offer protection for informal sector workers, housewives, agriculture and migrant workers, including women domestic migrants, refugees and victims of violence.

There remains a significant gap between the wages earned by women and men across the region, even in the wealthier states of the Gulf. In countries with welfare states, generous provisions are seen as pushing youth and adults out of the workforce, as do retirement regulations that enable women to retire earlier than men. Based on the same stereotypes, employers continue to prefer hiring men, unwilling to bear the costs of hiring women, including maternity leave and family leave. Some states have sought to address this by sharing the costs of maternity. Although trade unions in the Arab world still do not have the rights, recognition, and power they have in some other parts of the world, Arab women do play a role in the trade union movement in some countries. The relatively new engagement of Arab women in this area is significant, not just to advance women's economic rights, but also their place in the public sphere. Also important to note are the still small counter-currents to the trends, with women breaking into domains such as the judiciary, and being charged with non-traditional ministerial portfolios such as commerce and industry.

One of the biggest challenges in assessing women's access to the economic arena compared to men remains the scarcity of gender-disaggregated data, an area in which some governments are investing and which remains in need of support. Another challenge is to ensure that women's labour force participation does not stop at one or two factors, but considers the entire range. This may include: high fertility rate and early marriage; high unemployment rates; cultural barriers, beliefs and norms; gender-based wage gaps and lower return on employment; gender-based occupational segregation; low female representation in decision-making jobs; and the gap between available skill level and labour market demand.

II - Some entry points for women's economic rights and gender equality

The economic empowerment of women will directly contribute to their political and legal empowerment. The cornerstone of discrimination against women in the Arab sphere lies in the fact



that men by law and tradition are seen to bear sole financial responsibility for the financial support of the family whereas women have no such obligation. Highlighting women's actual contribution in the economic sphere as well as men's actual contribution to the domestic sphere will go a long way to addressing this cornerstone, which underpins much of the different rights accorded to women. In addition, there is a need to underline the realities of a family's need for two or more incomes (except for the wealthiest Gulf States), as well as women's invisible but extensive economic activity in the informal sector. Evidence of women's work is needed to inform national plans as well as international development frameworks. Data collected in gender-responsive budget initiatives can play a crucial role in this regard. Economic empowerment of women needs to begin in school and higher education as well as vocational training, to orient women away from traditional roles and towards the needs of the market. At the same time, the education system as a whole needs to be re-oriented to market and livelihood demands for women and men, a major issue that has been well-known for years but has yet to be resolved. Useful experiences in Arab countries as diverse as Jordan, Qatar and others, of non-traditional vocational training can be tapped as experiences for other countries in the region.

While labour laws are generally supportive of women's rights or gender neutral, the underlying assumption is that women are solely responsible for the domestic sphere and for child-rearing and there is no recognition of men's actual and potential roles within the family. This has been reinforced by women's rights activists calling for additional maternity rights without consideration of the impact on women in the work force given that most private sector employers' reluctance to pay the cost. Evolution in labour and social security laws in non-Arab countries can be tapped into, recognizing men's roles in the family through paternity leave and other measures, thus also equalizing the cost for women and men in the labour force.

To conclude, a comprehensive approach to women's economic empowerment would comprise:

- Addressing gaps in the law to cover informal, part-time, agricultural and migrant workers and protect the rights of refugees and victims of violence;
- Equalizing access to benefits and rights to eliminate discrimination against women and against men and children in social security legislation as well as in nationality legislation;
- Reducing women's domestic burdens and establish family leave funds and other mechanisms to deal with the costs of child rearing and care for ill or elderly family members, and ensure good, affordable childcare facilities;
- Move beyond the informal sector to support women's economic empowerment by investing in market system development; facilitating access to land and other assets and resources; and promoting formal sector enterprises;
- Revisit vocational training to ensure market relevance and eliminate gender stereotypes.

Finally, we all know that women have played a key role in the uprisings that continue to this day, helping to lay the groundwork while challenging conventions about their participation in the public sphere. Yet the outcomes for a more democratic system that promotes equality and women's human rights remains uncertain. Parallel discourses throughout the region, on the one hand challenging the status quo, and on the other hand, conservative elements even more determined than government to sustain if not reverse it. The overall lesson is similar to other liberation movements globally, including the Arab region (e.g. the Algerian and Palestinian Liberation Movements): democratic change will not on its own empower women, no matter how active their participation. The fight for women's human rights must continue alongside and beyond the struggle for political representation



and economic justice.

Ms. Asha El Karib



Asha El Karib is a Sudanese women activist and researcher. She received her Ph.D. in Development Economics in the UK in 1984 and then worked as researcher in rural economy and development at the Agricultural Research Corporation of Sudan. She also worked as a lecturer at the University of Khartoum. She then joined ACORD international organization as Country Director and Researcher. Asha cofounded the Gender Center for Research and Training in Khartoum focusing on women's rights and gender equality. She cofounded the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development and is currently its Executive Director. Asha El Karib is a member of the Sudanese Women's Union and is a pronounced advocate for women rights in Sudan.

Presentation

Sudan after the CPA

- The Split of the Country
- The on-going conflict in Darfur
- Eruption of conflicts in other areas
- Hegemony of the Salafists
- The Constitution (religion and state)
- Current Political situation
- One party system
- National security forces (Immunity and impunity)
- Lack of Rule of Law, freedom of expression and assembly (closing newspapers, pre-censoring, detaining journalists, brutal attacks on demonstrations)

Current Economic Crisis

- The Loss of the Oil Revenue (more than 70%)
- Complete Destruction and Negligence of Agriculture
- Mushrooming of Unproductive Projects
- Rising Unemployment Rates
- Internal Displacement and Migration



- Devaluation of the Sudanese pound and inherent increase in inflation and uncontrolled Prices

Sudanese Women: A Historical Analysis

- 1950s -1970s; the Promising Period, the Rise of the SWM - Common strategies; Synergy and Togetherness
- Securing Political and Socio-Economic Rights - Regional Influence; Generally the Graph was Progressively Rising
- 1980s -1997...the Setback Phase - Imposing Separate Sharia laws; Lay-off of Women from Civil Service; Enforcing Discriminatory Laws (Public Order Law; Criminal Law, Family Law); Dismantling Women Unions, Trade Unions, Political Parties; Escalation of Conflict Resulting in Displacement, Sexual Violence, and Loss of Lives and Livelihoods
- The Comeback Period (Post Beijing) - The impact of the 4th IWC, Bringing Hope and Solidarity; Sudanese Women Diversifying Strategies and Innovation ; Formation of Women's Groups and Networks; Seeking Regional and Global Support and Making Alliances; Working Towards a Minimum Common Agenda; Women Peace & Security:
- A SWOT Analysis:
- Strengths - Credible work on Women, Peace and Security (SuWEP, Women Solidarity Group); Organized Resistance to Discriminatory Laws and Human Rights Violations (organized lobbying, rallies, demonstrations).; Advocacy for CEDAW, AP; Addressing Sexual Violence and VAW; Providing Evidence to Rape as Weapon of War (Darfur) ; Analyzing CPA, DPA and others from Gender Perspective; The Quota System in Election Law; Forming Alliances; Educating Women on HR
- Weaknesses - Division along Political and Ethnic Lines; Co-opting by the Ruling Party; Lack of Strong Feminist Analysis or Clear Conceptual Framework; Demand Driven Initiatives (Donor Driven as well); Weak Horizontal and Vertical linkages; Backward rather than Forward Looking; Absence of Good Articulation and Positioning of Women's Agenda within the Political and Social Agenda; Failure to have Women at the Peace Negotiation Tables; Limited Result / Outcome-oriented Work in Favour of Women; Elite Driven and Relatively Central

Challenges

- Unfavourable Political Context; Legal / Constitutional Framework; Continuation of Conflict; Institutionalization and Normalization of Discrimination and VAW; Deterioration of Economic and Environmental Situations; Displacement (informal sector, family disintegration and work load on women); Shift of Donor Support to South Sudan; Women Parliamentarians Failing Women Agenda (quota questioned); Import of New Norms and Practices (dress code); Ideological Influence of the of Education System (to reinforce gender stereotyping); Providing Space for Salafist and Conservatives hammering on Women Subordination and Inequality; Women Rights are always used to Compromise Political Agenda

Opportunities

- Standing on Strong Ground of Experiences and Successes; Learning and Exposure with the Rest of the World; Support from Progressive and Democratic Structures; Women at Grassroots



levels (especially war affected women) are gaining awareness about their rights; Activism among Young Women is Increasing; UN resolutions (1325, 1820) are helping to Challenge Existing Policies and Practices; Regional Mechanism and Instruments (AU, IGAD and Protocols (AP) are Facilitating Women's Work as Compared to "Western UN Instruments"

Recommendations

- Coordination and More Coordination among Women & Gender based Organizations; Encouraging Regional and Global Linkages and Experience Sharing; Work more on issues of Protection and Prevention (Advocacy, Awareness and Mechanisms); More Evidence- based Research on VAW and SVAW ; Capacity Building and Training on Feminist Theory and Analysis; Work towards Building Strategies based on Clear Vision and Anticipated Milestones and Results; Linking Sudanese Women Efforts to Others in the Region and Globally to Challenge Patriarchy Mentality and in Action

Labour Market, Social Protection and Women's Rights: Feminist Perspectives in the Context of Economic Crises and Political Transitions

Dr. Magdy Abdel-Hamid



Magdy Abdel-Hamid holds a PhD in Construction Economics, Organization and Management. For over a decade he has worked as a consultant on political development policies, civil society and human rights policies and training programs, including working as a consultant with UN organizations, IDEA, DRI, EPD and EU. He has coordinated and edited monthly and annual analytical reports on the status of democracy in Egypt and has participated in developing a number of research studies, papers and training manuals on education, citizenship, participatory democracy and monitoring elections. He is a co-founder of many networks and coalitions in the field of human rights, democracy and development on both national and regional levels. Dr. Abdel-Hamid is a coordinator of the Egyptian Euromed Civil Platform (EEMCP), a President of the Coalition on Child's Rights in Egypt (CCR) and of Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement (EACPE).

Presentation

We are living in the midst of so many events which gave birth to many opinions and thoughts; therefore, I will try to be concise in the political ideas I would like to introduce. Firstly, I have a feeling that we are all discussing the issues and working in the same manner and using the same mechanisms and means as if there is nothing going on around us; this is making me a little bit worried because in my point of view, around us, I mean in the Arab region, there are so many changes taking place which require different and new ways to deal with our issues including women issues in the region. We are discussing that we are before democratic changes in this region and we are dealing with this as a true fact and thus sharing ideas of what we shall build after this phase of building democracy. But to sum up because of lack of time, I think that even if the region is living a change we cannot be certain if this change is a democratic one or not. Having a democratic transition in the region is an idea to be discussed and then we can build on it and ask



whether we are going towards a democratic transition and therefore what the consequences are, or are we heading to a totally different direction?

I will take Egypt as an example. Many revolutions took place and some other revolutions started and exploded, yet were not complete, we still have a long phase ahead of us, and here I would like to remind the audience that the French Revolution kept going, I think, for more than 17 years. In Egypt, we can see now that the political Islam powers are gaining authority, now there are two Islamic powers; one is the Muslim Brothers and another one, which was not present before, that nobody is talking about yet, but now is very present and has obtained 25% of the parliament seats in Egypt - the Salafist Movement, known as the most reactionary movement in its agenda regarding the different issues including women issues. Let us deal with this as a fact and not pretend that this is not happening, this is what we are facing here in Egypt and what is happening in Tunisia and what will happen in Yemen soon and what seems will happen in Libya. This means that the region will soon be an era of political Islam control which will remain for 5, 10 or 20 years or even more. This political system will witness radical changes in many matters; including women's situation.

I will also give an example to demonstrate how the political islamists think when they form ideas related to women and their role in the society. They think that women can work because it will not make a difference whether they do or not yet on one condition: women shall not compete with men when earning their living which means that women shall not take any opportunity from men. As well, they say women shall work in jobs that meet morals and ethics; for example they can work as nannies or in the medical domain in order to be able to treat other women so that they do not have to uncover before men. This is concisely the way political islamists think when discussing women's position, they also add between brackets: "taking into consideration that the right place for women is home raising her kids and taking care of them and of their husband". I am not making fun of these thoughts yet this is the way political islamists actually present their ideas and these are the terms and phrases they use. This is the reality we are living or we will be living in the near future.

When we deal with women rights, we criticize the stereotyping but we deal with stereotypes in every case or issue we work on. I hope we change and start dealing with the reality as it is. As well we deal with things in a traditional way and I will give an example using numbers; in Egypt, all the numbers show that around 60% of women's employment is in the official sector, 75% who work in the non-official sector work in the agriculture sector; around 8 to 10 million women work in agriculture and women contribute in this sector with about 40% of the agricultural production. As well, 32% of the Egyptian families are being maintained by women, I don't know what the Political Islamists are willing to do with these issues and how they are going to solve them. Are they willing to keep women at home? If you were from these 32% of the poor families and the Political Islam kept you home and paid all your needed money and expenses for you and your family then you would be glad. All the women who work in the non-official sector are deprived from all forms of social protection, and this is what I want to discuss. There are many details that I will not get into but I need to mention an important point: we are saying that the majority of the working women in Egypt work in the non-official sector and therefore they are not subject to any social protection in the Egyptian law (law no. 12, year of 2003) which regulates work in Egypt. This means that the 60% of the working women are not subject to law, so what are we discussing exactly?

Not to forget the middle class which we always work on whether the middle to high class or the middle to low class, yet we are dealing with poor working women who constitute 2/3 of the working women in the second world and who work in the unorganized economy. The majority of those work in farms, houses and streets where there is no security or protection and where the salaries



are too low. When we link that with the fact that 70% of the poor are women, then we are facing a phenomenon called oppression and exploitation of women on the world's level, and this is a result of the patriarchal mentality and is applied on class basis and it uses religion as an instrument. Therefore, I am in front of a triangle called the patriarchal mentality, class-based repression and oppression and the use of religion. It is worth mentioning that this happens all over the world including the west and the east but in different levels and percentages.

I think before these two facts, we are facing a problem, thus we are requested afterwards to change the traditional means, ways and mechanisms and we need to work with women in the feminist movements in our Arab region. We have started with this yet we haven't accomplished enough, so we are determined to work more and develop more organizations.

Ms. Lilian Halls French



Lilian Halls French is a researcher and a feminist activist, the co-founder and a Co-President of the European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI. She holds a PhD in Sociology. She has held high level positions in the French government including advisor on women's rights to the Minister of Youth and Sports. She was the recipient of the prestigious "Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur" for long term involvement in the field of women's rights and gender equality. Ms. French is currently a lecturer and a consultant on women's rights in the Euro-Med region.

Presentation

It is not by chance that we are here together. European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI, Aisha Network and the partners of our campaign **Equality First** build together strong and sustainable links of mutual cooperation, support and solidarity and this is very precious because we need them more than ever to face the present situation in our Euro-Med region.

In the Arab world the uprisings that involved women and men together were followed by the systematic exclusion of women from the decision making processes. Women are still facing strong patriarchal structures and a persistent lack of democracy. In Europe the economic, financial and political crisis leads to a severe backlash for the fundamental rights affecting first, most and especially women who remain confronted by a lack of implementation of the legislation and an increasing gap between formal and present rights.

I will share with you some perspectives on women's economic and social rights in a context of crisis having in mind that these rights are a core issue in all the changing political and economic contexts. In the whole Euro-Med region increasing political conservative trends contribute to hindering women to enjoy full and equal citizenship rights. Citizenship implies the right to work, to have the control over one's own body, one's own life. Predominance of patriarchal structures sustaining unequal distribution of duties within the family and household, society's general tolerance of discrimination and violence against women, pressure on women to perform socially accepted roles as well as discriminatory laws and/or practice deprive them of their full citizenship.

The streets of the European countries are still echoing the claims for fundamental rights and international solidarity of the people in Europe who face the tragic consequences of ultraliberal choices for their rights, for their lives, for their societies, for the future of their countries. Poverty,



unemployment, deregulation, structural precariousness, flexibility on behalf of “competitiveness”, forced labor, fear, uncertainty about future, social exclusion and social violence are the new faces of economic oppression. In spite of the increasing popular resistance all over Europe, governments continue to care more about the “anxiety of financial markets” than for the sufferings of the people who elected them. This economic and social disaster favours the expansion of populisms and fundamentalisms and leads to a severe step backward for democracy. The last two very recent examples are the coming back of the far right representatives in the Greek and French parliaments.

Increasing cuts in the public sector and privatizations are leading to a weakened welfare system for the sake of growth. But instead of growth, we face political and financial crises. Women are the first and most affected by the policies of austerity, dismantling of public services, increasing of social inequalities, decreasing of salaries and social protection. They form the main body of the flexible and cheap workforce and face the worst wave of regression of their status, gains and rights since the 2nd World War. They are the first victims of generalised job insecurity that establishes a culture of fear, generates new forms of exclusion and social violence and has turned into social insecurity as a new form of oppression: uncertainty about the future, lack of autonomy and stable resources, inability to plan one’s own life, dependence on the family, loss of rights.

Especially affected by these policies are the women who affront multiple discriminations: migrant, young women, single mothers, elder women and women from ethnic or religious minorities. Thousands of them are living as sub citizens remaining submitted to the laws of their country of origin, due to bi-lateral country agreements. Thousands of others, intra-European “neo Bolkenstein” workers coming from Eastern Europe, are the modern slaves, deprived of rights, protection or social security. This is acknowledged by several international organizations: the consequences of the crisis are especially heavy for women, but it is seen neither in the official statistics, nor in the governmental policies and never present on the front page of the newspapers. In many countries women are going out of the labor market because of the lack of employment and the impact of the crisis on women’s employment remains underestimated.

The over representation of women in the low paid, precarious and non-qualified employment is a universal characteristic of the labor market. This is hampering their rights, perpetuates inequalities between sexes and limits perspectives of sustainable economic improvement. The non-declared work is massive; the number of women non-declared in the domestic sector without having social protection or insurance in case of accident has increased a lot. The over representation of women in precarious jobs is tightly linked to the unequal sharing of the domestic and parental tasks, care of children and of the elderly or ill members of the family.

Applied massively to all the European countries, under the pressure of the financial markets, the austerity policies have increased the recession while decreasing the means allocated to the public sector which doubly penalizes women, as major part of the workers in the public sector and as main beneficiaries of these sectors. During Beijing conference the decision was taken that no policy would be taken on the national, regional or international level without preliminary gender analysis of its impact but this decision is still not implemented.

Meanwhile, the fundamental rights of women to control their own bodies and own lives are increasingly threatened by the growing intrusion of the religions in the public sphere. When it comes to women’s rights, each country in the European Union is free to apply gender equality recommendations and resolutions according to its own criteria.

In these times of crises all the forms of structural violence against women are exacerbated. In



spite of numerous resolutions and declarations condemning violence against women and abuse of women's rights, women's movement faces a persistent lack of political will to adopt a common European legal framework punishing violence against women in private and public sphere, curbing it and ending the impunity for perpetrators of all women's rights violations. Women continue to suffer and die just because they are women.

So what to do?

European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI together with other feminist movements work for bringing forward alternative propositions for a better Europe, enlightening the link between neoliberalism and militarism with one of the most ancient and toughest systems of domination: the patriarchy.

We need a different Europe structured by the political will to meet the basic human needs; a Europe free from the straightjacket of the markets and its menacing consequences. We claim for the right of women to have a job, the right to social security, to lodging, to decent income and to decent pensions. We need a Europe which develops and invest in the public services; in particular services for people, which in the majority are taken by women. We demand that sanitary and social protection become a priority sector; that structural measures are undertaken in order to reconcile family life with professional life. The historical Feminist slogan "Private is political" is still ours and women refuse to go back home. It has been said several times this morning: women back homes is a general tendency. We oppose the present revival of the reactionary patriarchal model: father at work, mother at home and demand a real equality in all aspects of life.

Our feminist analyses underline the prevalence of patriarchal gender power structures that sustain women's subordination all over the Euro-Med Region. With the partners of our campaign **Equality First** we uncover the connections between conservative political regimes, ultra liberal economic systems that are supporting them, growing militarism and increase of religious fundamentalist movements to confront the equality between women and men and the right of all but especially of women to full citizenship, a decent life and a life free of violence.

We question the classical concepts of citizenship and democracy in the light of women's freedom, dignity, physical and psychological integrity, access to resources, health, education and power of decision over their own bodies. Which/whose democracy in a context characterized by an economic, social and political crisis precariousness, flexibility, imposed part-time jobs, low salaries or economical dependency, pornographization of the public space, prostitution and human trafficking, gender apartheid prospering together with the modernized concepts of "freedom" and "free choice" of women to sell their bodies, to stay at home, to wear the burqa. Many women have to "choose" to leave their jobs and to take part time jobs in order to be able to come back home to take care of the elderly and children. The cultural relativist offensive is pushing the notion of "individual choice" in the forefront of the debate as ideological tool in order to make invisible the gender power structures in the society.

There were some references this morning to the gap between the law and the resolutions and its implementation. IFE-EFI asks for binding laws on the European level, with dissuasive financial penalties in order to finally achieve what is inscribed in the founding texts of Europe since 1957. More than 30 years after the creation of CEDAW and several years of ENP there is no real progress toward democracy and human development. Women remain exposed to patriarchal discrimination in the family, community and society. Even if governments claim their commitment, women's rights are seldom on the top of the political agenda because other issues are always "more pertinent".



Yes, it has been also said this morning, international conventions and resolutions promoting them should remain a common reference in the whole Euro-Med region, connected with the regional and national tools promoting women's rights. Our fight for a democratic, non-militaristic and secular world has no borders. As long as women's rights are not recognized as a full rank political issue and equality between men and women as a constitutive part of democracy, we will not give up. As long as power remains a male instrument of sexist, economic, or racial domination, we will not give up. We strive to share our feminist perspective with all the components of the democratic movement and claim that equality between women and men and the universality of women's rights should remain a guiding value for the whole human rights movement. How can a society be liberated if women are not liberated?

Knowing that a sustainable democratic alternative cannot be built without the full transformation of the dominant gender power model it is essential to support and exercise pressure on the governments to:

- Abolish discrimination in law and adopt legislation based on respect of women's human rights without intrusion of religions in public, political and legislative spheres;
- Insure full implementation of laws and resolutions **that protect and promote these rights**

For IFE-EFI a Euro-Med feminist cooperation is based on the recognition of the differences of our contexts but also on the recognition of the similarities in our oppression as women. Building a strong common feminist discourse is in the present context more than ever needed in order to put equality between men and women in the heart of the values with which we invest in the Euro-Med: values of solidarity, human rights, and fair distribution of resources, sustainable development and democracy.

Ms. Aouicha Bekhti



Aouicha Bekhti is from Algeria. She first became active in university towards the end of the 1970s, with her membership in the Communist Party (Parti de l'Avant Garde Socialiste), which was also working underground.

As a member of the ETTAHADI-TAFATH party (Défie Lumière) from 1991 to 1998, she participated in the foundation of the MDS (Mouvement Démocratique et Social). In 2008, she co-founded the Parti pour la Laïcité et la Démocratie PLD. She currently leads the secular feminist collective AMEL; AMEL means hope in Arabic and it is also the name of a young girl beheaded by armed Islamists because what was not wearing the veil.

Presentation

Women must always fight for a Status of Full Human Beings

I am very happy to be here with all of you in Beirut and I thank the organizers who allowed me to achieve a dream: to visit Beirut. Lebanon and Palestine are old gaping wounds.



After the previous speeches, I can make the bitter observation that women in the Arab countries are facing similar problem: they are confronted by totalitarian regimes, dictatorships or religious obscurantism, Islamists in particular. Now they have to face the two together. This does not help improving the status of women in our societies, often treated as minors during their whole life. In fact it is for a status of full human being that we have to fight for in our respective countries and to do this we must gather our efforts. For Algeria, in my opinion, the fight for secularism is a preliminary condition. I am part of those women who fought for a long time to have the family code based on sharia abrogated, but we still face article 2 of the constitution that states “ Islam is the religion of the State “ even if the constitution later referred to equality between citizens without any distinction of sex or race.

It is this article that we have to face, especially during these times of increasing religious fundamentalism. We have to be aware that with the confrontation within our societies, between two “projects of society,” one is modern and open towards the 21st century, the other is archaic, obscurantist. This last one is being built on the expenses of the popular levels of the society and especially the women who are always the first to suffer from it, whatever the political regime is, the women are sacrificed.

Therefore women have always been at the forefront in the fights for independency, for progress, for equality, democracy. In Algeria women have courageously resisted fundamentalism while denouncing the villainous laws that structure personal status.

Islamist fundamentalist ideology which is spreading thanks to the popular uprisings in the Arab countries and countries of Muslim majority will only aggravate the situation of women. This requires an international feminist mobilization for secularism to call upon the international institutions for preserving and strengthening women gains and benefits, where they exist and for support of the women’s fight for their rights and the respect of their dignity.

Common Agenda for Implementation of National, Regional and International Mechanisms Promoting Women’s Rights and Gender Equality

Leila Al Ali



Leila Al Ali is a Palestinian feminist and political activist since 1982. She is a promoter of Palestinian national and human rights, with a particular focus on women. She was the Vice-President of the General Union of Palestinian Students in Lebanon (1990-2004). She has been the Executive Director of Association Najdeh since 2004 and also became its Vice-President in 2008. Najdeh is a development NGO that works with women and children in refugee camps and gatherings in Lebanon.

Presentation

Today I will talk about the European Neighborhood Policy from a critical perspective. The European Neighborhood Policy agreements were made in y 2004 with 16 countries and address general major issues and commitments called the values and principles obligations. These were included on the basis of the partnership especially in the fields of democracy, human rights, good governance, and



principles of the economy (the market economy in particular). Development and climate change, deepening economic integration was later crystallized in the agreements with many countries in the region. The latest initiative is called “The response to the new changes in the neighbors” that was unleashed last year on May 25, 2011 and that called for the necessity and commitment to building democratic communities. The so-called program of the Spring was allocated huge amounts of money exceeding \$ 77 million. The most important point of this, as other partnership agreements, is that it was built on a purely economic basis. We must underline that the Spring initiative is also unjust, speaking foggy on Democracy, but never clearly and explicitly on equality between women and men; it lacks mechanics of control and follow-up which may not lead to transparency.

It is important to note also that the ENP is contradictory in dealing with neighboring countries. While the EU allocates or/and is launching calls for gender equality and equality programs at the regional level, in response to the Arab Spring it initiated programs to support democracy especially the so called “More for More” without mentioning neither clearly nor explicitly equality between women and men. It also did not link the issue of democracy with the participation of women in decision-making positions and at all various community levels. It deals with democracy in classic and traditional ways which will not serve other related and different programs that neglect or ignore the subject of gender equality or gender equality.

The second point that we have to highlight is also connected with democracy: which type and content of democracy the EU is talking about? A consensus for the Union? Remembering that at the end of 1990s the United States with the support of the European Union both launched what they called the “reform process in the Arab region”. It started with Tunisia and then Egypt and in the current context, the shadow of all these developments taking place in the Arab region, especially in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia, where people doubt that what is happening is non-democratic phases to some extent and much more transition processes need to be completed. While those who are trying to hold the power are the remains of the former regimes alongside the Islamists, the EU talks about democracy and the need to stabilize the region with allocating millions of dollars for it. Within this context, it’s not accurate to say the EU financial support is not politically motivated since it goes along to serve the goals and interests of the EU regardless of any other economic or political interest. This is obvious that as long as the purpose will be to promote regimes that believe in and share the interests of the EU, the interest in stabilizing the Arab communities in the region will remain highly politicized.

At the level of new agreements we have to highlight that there are issues that the EU admitted as a series of obstacles for partnership and actually are not documented. Among them : the lack of consistency between instruments and implementation, non-clear and consistent work of the EU with partners along with non-cohesion of external oversight and monitoring mechanisms.

Finally it is necessary to highlight two major problems concerning the new ENP. This new convention and the new mechanisms are not linked to the previous mechanisms and agreements from this new instrument were isolated from any context especially without any link with other programs of the EU related to improving women’s status and achieving gender equality. Last but not least the international conventions on women’s rights and the MDGs were not used as references to these new agreements.



Ms. Touria Taj Eddine



Touria Taj Eddine is a professor by training and a Moroccan women's rights advocate. She is a member of the board of the Union de l'Action Féminine (UAF), President of Espace de Citoyenneté Tanger and member of the Gender group of the Euro-Med Human Rights Network.

Presentation

I start my presentation with a question: How can in the context of the so-called Arab spring, which is correlated to the values of the conservative rule, can we protect the gains we have made in the field of human rights?

This raises the question of dealing with the rising powers. We are supposed to develop a vision about a working strategy as democratic men and women with the political actors. We know in advance that the meaning of democracy for them is reduced in the voting process as a way to reach authority, and women's rights – though they are leading most of the moves – are reduced to the voting process only, and are not involved in the construction process in any of the countries that are having the rise of "political Islam". This scene is not uncommon to the region: while women participated in the liberation war in Algeria and Morocco, they were marginalized in the construction phase in both countries after independence.

If the movement known by the region provided opportunities for change, it' at the same time poses challenges, mainly related to promoting gender equity, political participation and economic empowerment.

The importance of the international conventions, which are the universal uniting references and the framework for the achievement of equality, are more relevant now, but it is not a priority on the agenda of policy-makers.

How do we deal with this situation?

In my opinion there are two delusions (and relying on them is a mistake):

The first is relying on the support of the West, which was once based on gender as an indicator to classify countries, however, it seems now more preoccupied with ensuring the region's economic interests rather than respecting the regulations of the emerging universal principles.

Second: it's an illusion to assume that the right wing religious authority will adopt universal principles urging for equality and opposing all forms of discrimination against women, or even take into account the national laws adopted as a reference for public policies.

There is a scenario on the horizon that will reverse the gains, and to bend them in the name of privacy and we have to prepare to face this fact.

I give an example from Morocco, where the polls produced a majority of political Muslims. When



distributing the ministerial portfolios – and although the Constitution is written on the principle of equality and the State's obligation to create mechanisms and positive measures to achieve it – these requirements were not activated and one file has been assigned to a woman belonging to the Justice and Development party with an Islamic trend. None of the other parties forming the coalition suggested any woman as ministers (this is a retreat, as the previous government women have taken the responsibility of seven ministries).

So as not to dwell, I will go directly to the proposals on government policies and actions to activate CEDAW.

There are countries in our region that have ratified CEDAW, and there are reservations related to the so-called privacy, and they mainly affect personal status and religious liberty.

I consider that the ratification is not enough if the national laws are not appropriated with the international conventions, and that's because the national laws are closer to women's needs and ambitions, and can be translated into public policies, and to assign special budgets to activate those policies called "Gender Responsive Budget".

The duties of the women's movement in our region are:

1 – To work on tracking the status of countries in the region with regard to the ratification of the international treaties, especially CEDAW and resolution 1325 on the protection of women during conflicts.

2 – To continue writing parallel reports in addition to those governmental reports provided by the countries of the region at the level of the United Nations.

3 – Conduct exchange of experiences and lessons learned with regard to the advancement of national human rights of women.

Undoubtedly, the countries of the region produced positive experiences with regard to the creation of mechanisms for the activation of equality between women and men. An example of this is from Morocco where there is the experience of the gender responsive budget, and the National Committee for the activation of parity, as well as at the local level creating committees of equality and equal opportunities. These are experiments that can be generalized for our benefit.

4 - Coordination and the forming of pressure in order to participate in proposing amendments to the national laws and their harmonization with the universal laws, and to textualize their superiority in the constitutions of the regional countries, in order to avoid the inconsistencies in our laws that in the name of cultural specificity selectively deals with the international conventions, especially at the implementation level.

- Our responsibility as a civil society is to create reform and monitor mechanisms of the activation of the conventions (note the weakness in this aspect).
- It is a must also within the framework of solidarity and support for women's rights, to convince donors not to support programs and strategies that do not take women into consideration and do not respect their rights.
- We are supposed to unite our concepts and approaches by focusing on the human rights approach and the gender approach.



The debate yesterday invoked some of the weaknesses in the performance of the democratic movement in general, and the women's movement in particular for being the dynamo of the democratic modernist transition. I stress in this context that our movement has to work more on communication tools to pass the principles and requirements of the international conventions, especially CEDAW; while also , taking into account the importance of the diversity of the communication tools, and the simplicity of the language in the speech according to the target group, with evoking that in this area the competition is not just; as the conservative forces in all their power are devoting satellite channels to spread the culture of the Petro-Dollar creating the economy of rent.

The deficiencies in the communication can be solved by addressing young people the sole guarantor of the continuity of the fight for modernity, and this requires the development of a speech that highlights the relationship of the religious with rights, and the role of secularism to protect religion from being politicized.

As for the resolution 1325, it has become the most relevant today in the context of the movements known in our region, where women threatened in their safety and security, and the Nordic countries bear the responsibility for promoting and selling weapons without considering the consequences on civilian men, women and children.

And proposing the final resort, the movements fighting for equality must invest the United Nations mechanisms for women, and to pressure for a wider horizon of representation of our region in the United Nations rapporteurs, and also to demand the clear and transparent criteria for the selection of the representation in order to achieve the principle of sharing.

Ms. Layla Naffa Hamarneh



Layla Hamarneh is the Director of Projects, Arab Women's Organization AWO Amman, Jordan since 2000. A feminist and a political activist; she spent 27 years as a Trainer at the Teacher Training Centres in UNRWA. In 2007, Ms. Naffa Hamarneh participated in the NGO delegation to the United Nations in New York to present the First Jordanian Shadow Report. She has also been involved in the establishment of a Jordanian Women Network under the name: "Alliance for the Recognition of Women's Rights"; the Alliance encompasses 80 Jordanian women grassroots NGOs.

Presentation

With so much of women issues at stake, it is essential to take a moment of deep reflection, which is being made available in this roundtable. And with so much of rapid political developments sweeping the Arab countries, it is wise to question the bottom lines and hopes. Women activists and women NGOs are pressed to redefine their priorities even at this transitional period with much of unclear vision. It is difficult to stop seeing beyond the horizon as we are the kind of people who learnt to seek what is beyond the beyond. New courses are dictating their logic and we are supposed to respond to this logic. We have been lucky to listen to each other in an effort to exchange experiences and listen to actual stories from several Arab and European countries. It is time to readdress our own methods at this critical period in our history, which is reshaping our path towards democracy and human rights.



Women in our region are witnessing intense confrontations and are working hard to cope and reach a real and integral vision of women's rights. Women should keep in mind that the Arab societies are ruled by a gender-based traditional and universal system of patriarchy that generates and perpetuates violence against women, discrimination and inequality. Gender related concerns are shaped by the juridical, political or social interpretation of the dominant religious paradigms. The persistence of discriminatory practices against women interacts with surging domestic violence and economic dependency. Since women cannot enjoy their rights and their security, they cannot develop their capacities to contribute fully to the social development.

Gender equality is hampered by the weight of culture and traditions. Women are the vulnerable part of the society, they are the most affected by poverty, they represent the larger part of the unemployed, they are almost absent from political life and from the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Their participation in the public life is increasing very slowly.

Challenging the status quo in Jordan

There is little to celebrate when it comes to women's rights in Jordan and much to debate and advocate to in the fight for gender equality. We should remember that the social and political system is largely influenced by male-dominated structures, ideologies and values. In such a context, where traditions and culture, social taboos, interference of religion in the public sphere, lack of awareness, discriminative legislation, the role of the NGO's is crucial to combat the model of strong patriarchal dominance.

As highlighted in AWO Shadow Report to CEDAW Committee in Feb. 2012, women in Jordan are losing and the policies within the political and legislative reforms are ruling women out. Specifically, Jordanian women were denied change in the Constitution to preserve their rights against discrimination. Article six paragraphs one within the 2011 Constitution remained as in 1952 Constitution without adding "gender" when numerating basis for non-discrimination.

Jordanian women are under-represented in social and political decision-making processes, and have less access to the labour market, institutions and resources.

Women NGOs involved in the fight for women's rights constitute only 2.6% of the total number of civil society organizations (CSOs). The majority of the women CSOs has, either a charitable character or function as cooperatives, aiming at profitable income-generating activities. Unfortunately, these constitute up to 48% of the total number of the CSOs. All and above, the CSOs "Law" that was changed a couple of times remained in its final ratified version as a legislation that does not provide a favorable environment for developing the nature of the work of CSOs towards promoting social, legislative and political changes.

Due to the new developments in the Arab region and after the long standing demands and continuous recommendations from the civil society and women NGOs, there have some minor changes in the legislation. In the recent Constitutional changes, there has been the establishment of a Constitutional Court and an Independent Election Committee. Some minor steps have been also made to ease the environment for organizing as part of the recent efforts to promote democratic reform in the areas of freedom of assembly.

However, the successive Jordanian governments underestimate the vital importance of implementing the international standards as obligated in a group of ratified international, regional and national conventions, instruments and strategies. This is true if we are talking about commitment to CEDAW,



as being declared in the discussions over Jordan's case in February 2012 or even while preparing for Jordan's stand for the Universal Periodic Report (UPR) in front of the Human Rights Council in the autumn of 2013. Gender equality is being neglected and women's empowerment is falling down in the scale of national priorities though it is named as one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and a Mother Goal for succeeding in the other 8 goals on top of which is the eradication of poverty.

At the Ministerial Meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean countries on "Strengthening the Role of Women in Society" in November 2006 in Istanbul, Jordan committed itself to a 5 year Framework for Action to: "strengthen women's role in political, civil, social, economic and cultural spheres, as well as to fight against discrimination". The IFA was strengthened at the second Ministerial Meeting in November 2009 in Marrakech, where the State Ministers underlined the Conclusions for the need to "actions at national, sub-regional and regional levels, targeted towards improving women's status, strengthening the role of women in political, civil, social, economic and cultural life, and combating all forms of discrimination against women and girls". Moreover, The promotion and protection of women's rights is a key priority outlined in the EU-Jordan ENP Action Plan, where it is stated that: "In a country like Jordan, where, on the one hand, a number of educated and skilled women participate in the political, social and economic life of the country, and on the other, many women are still subject to the traditional patriarchal power relations, the gender perspective will assume particular interest and relevance."

With more than 120 women's NGOs, Jordan has developed a strong women's civil society network that has been active in many spheres of public life: from humanitarian assistance to economic development. The action of the NGOs is acknowledged as a major factor to raise awareness, to develop women's rights and to change the society as well as to preserve these rights from conservative attacks.

Traditional social attitudes towards women especially in rural areas are an obstacle to achieving equality within the family. Rural women's ability to access economic resources, particularly for land ownership and finance is always challenged. Women's rights to inheritance are governed by the *Shari'a* law which is one third of the male's share. However, and in many cases, women are even pressured to waive their portions in favor of male family members. There are no legal procedures in place to protect women from such pressure, and many women in rural areas may not be aware that they can refuse to waive their inheritance or know how to defend their rights in court.

To improve livelihoods of the poor, several national programs are implemented by the government and especially by the Ministry of Planning. These projects, although they target women with intended activities to empower them, do not challenge the status quo and do not incorporate gender equality as an objective. Projects include income generating, micro-credit programs that target rural households, credit funds for CBOs and local community centers.

There is an urgent need to make justice work for women, through:

- Continue to consider the full and equal participation of women and men as the basis for democracy.
- Carry on with the call for political and legislative reform at this insecure and unstable transitional period.
- Pay more attention and put special emphasis on advancing women's economic empowerment to face the impact of the financial crisis and combat poverty.



- Strengthen coordination among feminists in the Euro-Mediterranean region to promote gender equality and amplify women's voices.
- Implement international and regional conventions as the reference for the universality of women's rights in the face of cultural relativism that is used to undermine the concept of gender equality.

Solidarity and International Cooperation between Feminist Organizations as Essential Precondition for Real Democracy, Just Peace and Full Equality: From International and Regional to National and Local Cooperation Promoting the Principle of Women's Rights as Universal Human Rights and Gender Equality

Sama Fayez Aweidah



Sama Fayez Aweidah holds MA degree in Management from City University in London and a BA degree in Business Administration from Birzeit University in Ramallah, West Bank. She is one of the founders of the Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (Palestinian grass-roots organization established in 1989). She has been the general coordinator of AISHA Arab Women's Forum between 1995 and 2002 and is currently the director of the Women's Studies Centre (WSC) in East Jerusalem. Ms. Aweidah is a gender expert and a writer. She has conducted many trainings for local and international organizations and has written extensively on women's rights, life in Palestine and has published 11 children's books. She has contributed to many local, regional, and International conferences and workshops.

Presentation

Women's concerns have no geographical boundaries

We have deemed it appropriate to use the term 'women's concerns' because the defence of women's rights and the extraordinary and extensive challenges that face women are a cause of concern for both women and society.

The international community has recognized women's rights as an indispensable part of human rights and experts have revealed the negative impact of denying women's rights on economic, developmental, social and cultural development. In addition, several religious interpretations by scholars and representatives of the various religions confirm women's rights, albeit in a limited manner. Nevertheless, there are still obstacles and challenges that prevent serious action to enable women to fully enjoy their rights. Moreover, denial of these rights continues to exert a considerable negative impact on comprehensive and sustainable development throughout the world.

International statistics demonstrate several negative phenomena resulting from denial of these rights, notably in relation to world poverty. Poverty is widespread among women all over the world and female-headed households are particularly fragile sectors to the point that the phenomenon is now described as the "feminization of poverty". This phenomenon is usually described in simple terms; if we were to draw a diagram that embodies poverty, the drawing would surely take the form of a woman. Other forms of negative developmental phenomena have emerged as a result of the failure to engage the participation of women or to target them in a just and equal manner.



Social justice cannot be achieved without first achieving equality, especially as inequality does not stop with women (almost half of the population), but extends to the marginalization of other members of society under the care of women i.e., the members of households headed by women. There is also the problem of children born to women who suffer from malnutrition as this has a long term impact on the health of children. There are children of women who are victims of violence suffer psychological problems that will accompany them all their lives if there is no clear intervention. There are also the children born to women without citizenship rights in their countries as this leads to their children being denied basic rights, such as access to educational resources, training, labor, health and other services, which will have an impact on their families in the future. The phenomenon of social underdevelopment resulting from inequality also affects the course of justice and equality in communities and families. If these problems and other related phenomena are neglected, it leads to further marginalization and exclusion from social justice. The absence of social justice prevents the achievement of social, economic and political security in any area of the world.

Failure to bring about equality is an international phenomenon without geographical boundaries. Although levels of inequality may vary from one country to another, women all over the world still suffer from either discriminatory legislation that curtails their full rights to citizenship and other human rights, or from outdated social customs and norms that legitimize the exclusion of women and the use of violence against them, even their death. Such norms might not be sanctioned by the law, but are considered as legitimate in the community. Violence is not limited to physical violence; violence may assume other forms that prevent women from enjoying community resources. This has clear ramifications on the physical and mental health of women and on society in general. Almost certainly, there is not one country that is not affected by these phenomena or whose national statistics do not register clear gaps in development and human rights, whether in relation to education, labor, access to decision making posts, or even poverty levels and other issues.

Gender and Politics and the Impact on Progressive Gender Mobility

The issues discussed above cannot be separated from the political will. The presence or lack of political will to achieve gender equality is considered one of the most important factors in achieving equality. In this field, the following factors must be taken into consideration:

- 1) The achievement of social justice in every country usually faces obstacles related to political interests and these can obstruct justice for various reasons related to discrimination on the basis of race, religion or gender. In simple terms, social justice means the sharing of wealth and participation in decision making and creation of policies. Those who enjoy these rights are opposed to losing or sharing them and this leads to political conflicts of different forms and description. Such conflicts reflect the efforts of these interest groups to defend their economic, political or social rights.
- 2) The political transformations that have taken place globally following the demise of socialism and the emerging new political order have fed these conflicts and even legitimized them under different pretexts, such as maintaining or preserving security, or fighting the proliferation of nuclear weapons. This was the case in Iraq, which still faces serious problems, and where the destruction was inflicted under unjustified pretexts; the real intention was to win control of an important source of energy i.e., petroleum. Such acts serve economic interests in countries where certain sectors are in control and seek to serve their own interests, even at the expense of other populations. This may take the form of intervention in the internal affairs of countries to protect human rights, as in the case of Libya.



Some conflicts have adopted economic names, such as globalization and privatization, which are marketed under slogans like fighting unemployment and creating job opportunities. The end result of all these efforts is to concentrate wealth into the hands of a small percentage of the world population, while poverty and exclusion are increasing in poor countries. Recently, poverty has reached countries previously viewed as superpowers, as in the United States, which has been in a state of economic crisis for some time.

3) These facts cannot be isolated from the gender arena since gender equality cannot be separated from the struggle to achieve social equality. Any struggle for equality might spark other types of struggle once women analyze the real obstacles that prevent them from enjoying their rights. This is not only a question of gender discrimination, but is related to discrimination on the basis of social class, religion or other considerations. For example, we cannot say that the rights of poor women can be achieved if there is equality between them and poor men. There is a need for all women and men in poverty to have access to and enjoy the resources available in society and enjoy all their rights as stipulated in human rights charters. This in itself may raise opposition to women's rights since these interests might be threatened.

4) In order to avert this risk, reactionary forces in ruling systems or political parties may create a new reality represented by reactionary women's movements that espouse women's rights from a reactionary perspective limited to charity (pre-women and development phase), or in the best scenario, to women in development – fighting poverty. This means that they deliberately ignore the real struggle of women and women's issues are isolated and excluded from other social issues.

5) Where countries and societies face problems, especially those related to armed conflict and occupation, women's issues are usually deferred because they are considered as a lower priority. This is either due to a failure to analyze the situation or is a deliberate policy to set aside the issues of women by specific political sectors with their own agenda.

Women's Rights within the International Human Rights Framework: Accomplishments and Challenges

There is no doubt that the international community has exerted substantial efforts to include women's rights within human rights. The following are accomplishments in this field (although not a comprehensive list):

- The Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations stipulates: "We, the peoples of the United Nations, are determined to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small."
- The third clause of the first Article in the Charter of the United Nations declares: "to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion."
- Article 55 of the Charter of the United Nations stipulates: "universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."
- The second article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social



origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.”

- The first clause of Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates: “Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.”
- The second clause of Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates: “Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.”
- The second Article stipulates: “Each country member in the charter shall commit to respecting and securing the rights as stipulated in the charter for all individuals within its jurisdiction without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinion or other status...”
- The third Article stipulates: “The countries shall commit to guaranteeing equality between men and women in enjoying all civil and political rights as mentioned in the charter.”
- The fourth clause of Article 23 stipulates: “The parties have to take the appropriate steps to secure equality in rights and responsibilities upon marriage and upon its dissolution.”
- Article 26 stipulates: “All individuals need to be equal before the law and must have equality in access to legal protection without any distinction of any kind on the basis of race, colour or sex.”
- The agreements and special declaration on the status of women.
- The Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – 1967.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was endorsed in 1999 and became effective in 2000.
- The Convention on the Political Rights of Women, which was endorsed in 1952 and became effective in 1954.
- The Declaration on Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict – 1974.
- The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women – December 1993.
- The international conferences on women held by the United Nations.
- International Women’s Year in 1975, which witnessed the organization of a conference in Mexico; this conference launched the United Nations Decade for Women as of 1976.
- Copenhagen Conference in 1980 (mid-decade).
- Nairobi Conference in 1985 (end of decade).
- Women’s Fourth Conference in Beijing in 1990.



- Beijing + 5 (New York 2000).
- Beijing + 10 in New York in 2005.
- Despite all of the above, the status of women in the world has not improved. As explained earlier, women are still the victims of exclusion and marginalization in all societies and many challenges remain, as listed below:
- To have all countries ratify the aforementioned agreements.
- To annul the reservations of countries that signed the agreements subject to reservations.
- To translate the agreements into national laws and policies.
- To activate a system of accountability with regard to the application of the agreements at international and national levels.
- To develop the agreements in a manner that clearly recognizes women's rights as human rights and to tackle all forms of discrimination and exclusion in a detailed manner and set up proposals to overcome these obstacles.
- The special challenge in relation to political Islam which considers these agreements as alien documents that must be opposed, including women's organizations established by political Islam and which are opposed to these charters and agreements.
- It is important to stress that the issue of women's rights must be extended from the framework of an issue that concerns women's organizations to become one that concerns the general community and all democratic forces that aspire to achieve freedom, dignity and social justice, including gender equality.

Regional Experiences in Building Solidarity: Example of the Aysheh Experience – Arab Women's Forum

In light of the discussion above, we need to reiterate the following points:

First: The concerns and rights of women are not restricted to geographical borders.

Second: The obstacles that prevent the activation of women's rights are not linked to the fact that women are marginalized as women but because the whole issue is linked to the political economic struggle.

Third: Women everywhere face the same challenges, but to different degrees.

Having said that, it is clearly important for women to show solidarity in order to confront and change the current reality since the challenges are interrelated and cannot be resolved without a united framework of action.

In 1993, a group of Arab women from various women's organizations in seven Arab countries (Palestine, Egypt, Tunis, Morocco, Lebanon, Algiers, and Sudan) met at the margins of an international conference and realized the importance of common action; they established the Arab Women's Forum – Aysheh. This forum expanded to include organizations from Jordan and Syria.



The establishment of this network emphasized the importance of solidarity in confronting common challenges and exchanging experiences accumulated by the organizations in the Forum to learn from experience. The Forum highlighted common action in order to develop working strategies to deal with the increasing challenges.

It is clear that solidarity is important in terms of the following:

- 1- There is a common concern and challenge and this cannot be faced through individual and dispersed efforts.
- 2- Some issues that are concealed in a country can only be exposed by efforts from outside since the country may feel that its interests are threatened.
- 3- Countries have common interests with each other. When national movements or organizations are subject to oppressive measures, solidarity from members in other countries can exert pressure on their governments to intervene with that country where there are common interests.

The Aysheh network worked to establish a solidarity center based in Tunis and hosted by the Tunisian Association for Democratic Women. The center was able to raise and publicise several issues, such as the case of Palestinian women refugees in Lebanon, or solidarity with the Tunisian Association for Democratic Women in its struggle against the political system, which restricted its work and seized its funds, or solidarity with individuals such as Dr. Nawal Sa'dawi, who faced a court case calling for her to be separated from her husband for failing to follow Islamic teachings according to al-Hisbeh law. Another case involved the general coordinator of the network, who faced a campaign of slander. She received substantial solidarity from prominent Arab women, led by the Aysheh network, and several Palestinian political parties were forced to intervene and declare that there is no distinction between private and public matters in terms of human rights.

The solidarity promoted by the Aysheh network provoked many reactions despite failing to achieve any major goals. Restrictions imposed on the Tunisian Association for Democratic Women were lifted. There was success in registering the new Women's Studies Center in Egypt and in the case of Nawal Sa'dawi and others. We do not claim that the success stories were all due to the efforts of the Aysheh network, but the solidarity resulting from the network or other bodies did publicise issues and force parties to deal with them. We therefore need to revive the issue of solidarity and networking and develop clear strategies to promote these.

It is clear that networking with European women's groups will give us more scope for action and greater opportunities to achieve victories, especially since the European countries have worked on implementing international agreements (even if on a theoretical level). European countries have various links and interests with Arab countries and can raise issues relating to Arab women in Europe, actually exerting pressure on Arab regimes. This is especially important in light of measures facing women from political Islam. Even if political Islam has internal power in a country, it can be influenced by external solidarity and lobbying from outside and this is a safety valve for Arab women.

Towards a better future

A better future means broader partnerships - partnerships based on common principles and visions in order to confront all common challenges. We have to realize that these challenges are not limited to specific borders. If we do not act to confront them, the impact will be felt by all women



and will diminish the human rights of all people in the world.

Let us work together in order to develop and implement partnership strategies to face challenges and work towards a future of freedom, dignity and equality.

Ms. Suzan Aref



Suzan Aref is a Kurdish graduate of the Technical Institute Department of Management, and also completed the Executive Program for Private Enterprise Development at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. She is the Founding Director of the Women Empowerment Organization (WEO) and the Deputy Chairperson of the Kurdistan Women Business Association. She was the Assistant Advisor for Sustainable Development to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Office of the Prime Minister. Currently Ms. Aref is a consultant in organizational development, capacity building and activities that strengthen disadvantaged women. Among her achievements is the establishment of a business center to support start-ups in developing businesses and training women from government in drafting the Iraq Constitution.

Presentation

We need solidarity and cooperation among the international, regional, national and local feminist organizations, in order to develop the principles of human rights and gender equality.

Although discrimination and all forms of violence are faced by women locally, they are common problems and challenges, and stem from the patriarchal system based on domination and control deployed in our countries and our communities and around the world. What I want to refer to is the phenomenon of inequality as a global phenomenon, even if there was a disparity in the laws, customs and traditions and the challenges faced by women, but there are many similarities in discrimination and inequality among women in the world.

It is necessary to develop joint work between women's movements on the basis of solidarity and the common feminist analysis and to address the patriarchal power structures that hinder the full enjoyment by women of their human rights, locally and globally.

The Feminist Movement in Iraq:

For many years the feminist movement reversed because of the difficult circumstances in which passed during the wars and the sectarian and nationalist conflicts. We have been occupied with our causes internally and we did not feel a lot of solidarity from the Arab countries.

The conflict, insecurity and violence in the home, and the lack of implementing the limited legal protections have made Iraqi women more vulnerable to violence, and they are still deprived of the simplest services to live in peace, dignity and freedom. There is still considerable neglect and disregard for women's issues in the socio-economic and health aspects, there is a complete absence of assurances, which led to a marked increase in the issue of social deviations and trading in women.



But we have to point out that the most weapons or means of violence used against women are adopted by men, when they commit violence against women (law or legislation), there are a significant number of laws and regulations that constitute violence and discrimination against women, and allow men to exercise their violence against women, or are justified for them. As well there is the absence of legislative provisions criminalizing the acts practiced by men against women, which constitute violence and a violation of women's rights, humanity and dignity.

The issue of violence against women has taken a prominent place because of the work of women's organizations and movements at the grassroots level.

As for political aspect, things are moving too slow, women's participation and representation in sovereign positions and decision-making are very little, only a percentage of women in the legislature under the quota, and we cannot say that they form the optimal representation of women, because a large proportion of them are not qualified for these positions, and are selected on the basis of patronage.

In the absence of any quota on the Executive authorities, we find that the participation rate is very small and only in the Ministry of Women, which is a Ministry without portfolio.

Also, there is a lack of women's participation in the negotiations and the diplomatic corps.

All of this gives us a clear image on the extent of male domination and power, and the lack of convention in the participation of women.

Our work as organizations and activists at the local and national levels, to establish alliances and different networks, to lobby, defend and advocate our issues and the issues of the society in general, and to disseminate the culture of human rights and the right to participate and claim human, political and civil rights. Certainly we cannot say that all these networks and alliances have been successful, but at least part still continue to work and were able to achieve a lot of gains and achievements in this regard.

Achievements that have been achieved during the change phase:

- 1) Women's quota for participation by at least 25% in the legislature and local councils and in Kurdistan Region not less than 30%.
- 2) The change of personal status laws and the penal code in the Kurdistan Region and also the adoption of the law against domestic violence in order to build peace in families.
- 3) Convert the Ministry of Women's Affairs to the Supreme Council for Women in Kurdistan Region.
- 4) A special committee of women from different parties and women's organizations was formed for reconciliation and peace-building, conflict resolution and resolving the differences between the parties and is already achieving positive results.
- 5) Stabilize the security after the attacks and the regional problems and interventions, but the problem so far is in the perception that the authority have higher power than people. It is difficult to change society and mentality from a totalitarian to a democratic system, and that the power is serving the citizens.

Challenges we face in Iraq until now:



- The patriarchal tendency restricting women (one woman as a minister)
- Extremism and religious and tribal fanaticism
- Aggressions within the scope of family and community
- Restraining the role of women
- Weak networking among women's organizations

Available Opportunities:

- 1) The presence of local, Arab and international expertise.
- 2) Noting that some Arab countries prevent the access to Iraq or to Kurdistan, and also the Arabs lack the understanding of the rights of the Kurds, and that the people's right to self-determination within a federal system to reproduce the rule contributes effectively in building the country. Yet we are open with this, and we hope that our experience is integrated into the regional and international experience and become a case study.
- 3) A major conference conducted in Erbil on the role of women in peace-building in 2011, and with many participants from Arabs and non-Arabs participated.
- 4) Significant efforts are being made by women in the world to take measures to address these violations at the national and international levels.

We all need to work together and create solidarity in order to put an end to the extent of the new Political Islamic intolerance, in the face of apostasy to the new early marriage and many forms of marriage in different names, and the *fatwas* that undermine women's dignity and prevent their enjoyment of their legal legitimate and human rights. The international reports play a major role in making the pressure on the national authorities to move towards reforms, so we must seize these opportunities to focus on this aspect of international solidarity with women's issues.

So we need to develop joint work between women's movements on the basis of solidarity, and also benefit from the experiences of others, and to open the horizons of cooperation and dialogue to develop ideas and prepare programs in order to address the patriarchal power structures and also to mobilize efforts on activating the Security Council resolution 1325, which emphasizes the role of women in peace-building and also to protect women in conflict and post-conflict. Certainly this is what we are looking for in the periods of transition in most of the Arab countries.

We are trying to take advantage of the possibility of creating partnerships and build bridges across borders, in order to strengthen alliances for the development of our global human rights, we must have our networks and alliances at the local, national, regional and international levels. This is the force required to give a strong voice and a strong movement for the cause of women and to make changes at all levels.

And we must not also forget the role of international organizations in supporting the feminist movement, and the development of women's capabilities and experiences gained from the experiences of women in other countries. All of this makes me optimistic for the future of women in Iraq. It is important that the Iraqi women have broken their silence and they have the power and the voice to respond to anything hurting women.



Annex C - Roundtable Agenda

“Promoting a common agenda for equality between women and men through Istanbul Process”

ROUNDTABLE

Regional Dialogue on Enhancing Democracy through Strengthening Women’s Social, Political and Economic Rights

20th - 21st June 2012

Hotel Four Points by Sheraton Le Verdun
Club Venue Hall

DAY ONE 9.30 – 17.00	Changing contexts: New opportunities and challenges for women’s rights in the region and State obligation to protect promote and respect them in democracy building
9.00 – 9.15	Registration
9.15 – 9.20	Welcome: Ms. Leila Al Ali, Executive Director Najdeh Association Lebanon
9.20 – 10.20	Opening Mrs. Elsa Fenet, Head of the Political, Economic, Commercial, Press and Information Section at the Delegation of the European Union in Lebanon Ambassador Mansour Abdallah, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lebanon Dr. Basheer Esmat, Advisor the Minister of Social Affairs, Lebanon Mrs. Anna Kapellas, Chargé d’affaires, Embassy of Canada in Lebanon Mrs. Maryse Guimond, Project Director Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project (REEWP) Oxfam-Québec Mrs. May Shalabieh, Program Manager Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty
10.20 – 10.50	Positioning women’s human rights and the State obligation to promote and protect them in the current social, political and economic processes Mr. Fahed Sulieman, Member of Central Council of PLO Mrs. Joumana Merhy, President of RDFL Lebanon Moderator: Mrs. Layla Hamarneh, Director of Projects AWO Jordan
10.50 – 11.30	Open Discussion
11.30 – 12.00	Coffee Break
12.00 – 12.40	Economic and political insecurity and violence against women Mrs. Anne Marguerite Appel, Development Advisor the Netherlands Mrs. Aisha El Karib, Executive Director Organization for Research and Development Sudan



Moderator: Mrs. Suzan Aref, Director of the WEO Iraq

12.40 – 14.00

Open discussion

14.00 – 15.00

Lunch

15.00 – 15.45

Labour market, Social protection and Women's rights: Feminist perspectives in the context of economic crises and political transitions:

Mr. Magdi Abdel Hamid, Consultant Political Development Policies Egypt

Mrs. Lilian Halls French, Co-President IFE-EFI

Mrs. Aouicha Bekhti, Co-founder Parti pour la Laïcité et la Démocratie PLD Algeria

Moderator: Mrs. Borianna Jönsson, Euro-Med Program Director IFE-EFI

15.45 – 16.30

Open Discussion

16.30 – 17.00

Wrap-up

DAY TWO

Common Agenda for implementation of national, regional and international mechanisms promoting women's rights and gender equality

09.00 – 14.00

09.00 – 09.40

International Conventions, Regional and National Documents –part of the same frame of reference for forwarding women's rights and equality between women and men as a priority on the political agendas; the new ENI

Mrs. Leila AL Ali, Executive Director Association Najdeh Lebanon

Mrs. Touria Taj Eddine, President of Espace de Citoyenneté Tanger Morocco

Mrs. Layla Hamarneh, Director of Projects AWO Jordan

Moderator: Mrs. Afaf Marei, Director EACPE Egypt

09.40 – 10.30

Open Discussion

10.30 – 11.00

Solidarity and international cooperation between feminist organisations as essential precondition for real democracy, just peace and full equality: From international and regional to national and local cooperation promoting the principle of women's rights as universal human rights and gender equality

Mrs. Halima Jouini, Board Member ATFD Tunisia

Mrs. Nivine Hussary for Sama Aweidah, Gender expert WSC Palestine

Mrs. Suzan Aref, Director of the WEO Iraq

Moderator: Mrs. Rahmeh Mounsur, Communication Coordinator Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project (REEWP) Oxfam-Québec



11.45 – 12.00	Coffee Break
12.00 - 13.00	Alternative agenda for enhancing democracy Working groups (political sphere, economic and civil society)
13.00 – 14.00	Report from the working groups Moderator: Mrs. May Shalabieh, Program Manager Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty Wrap-up and conclusions Mrs. Borianna Jönsson and Mrs. Joumana Merhy
14.00	Lunch

Association al-Najdeh

Association Najdeh AN seeks to empower Palestinian refugee women to play a more active role in community development and to promote the social, economic, civic and national rights of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. It promotes respect for basic human rights, social justice and equal human rights for men, women and children and is committed to respect of human dignity and equal value for all people without discrimination. Established in 1976 Association Najdeh provides income generating embroidery projects, vocational training, women's empowerment activities and pre-school education. In response to the complex difficulties facing the Palestinian community in Lebanon, Association Najdeh focuses on educational, social and economic interventions from a gender-based perspective. Using an integrated developmental approach between and across programs and services, it seeks to 1) empower the most vulnerable girls and women to challenge patriarchal social norms, 2) promote human rights values and good practices at the community-level, and 3) campaign for the implementation of the community's fundamental rights.

Democratic Gathering of Lebanese Women RDFL

Democratic Gathering of Lebanese Women RDFL is a secular non-governmental women organization which works with the democratic forces to promote women's status and participation and empower them, aiming at achieving full equality between both sexes. RDFL is a part of the advocacy secular democratic women's movement, on the basis of international pacts and treaties, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Universal Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women CEDAW. RDFL network and coordinate with women and civil society forces to enhance democracy and equality, to protect and promote the culture of women's rights within the human rights movement towards full equality between woman and man. RDFL works for lifting of all reservations on CEDAW and for implementation of all international conventions that ensure equality between the two genders and lobby for amendment of unfair legislation. Moreover, RDFL strives to involve women in all decision-making levels.

European Feminist Initiative (IFE-EFI)

European Feminist Initiative (IFE-EFI) is a feminist network represented in 15 countries in Europe. It works for the mobilization of organizations and individual activists and develops solidarity cooperation with feminist organizations and activists from the Middle East and North Africa in order to contribute to making the feminist voices in Euro-Med region heard and to bringing visibility of the feminist movement against oppression and discrimination. IFE-EFI uses feminist critique and analyses to underline the links between structures of subordination of women in peace and war, between economic system, war and patriarchy, between the front march of the neo-liberal rhetoric and the reduced role of the social movements as well as the reduced possibilities for egalitarian redistribution of resources and statuses in such a context. IFE-EFI also makes the link between theory and practice by providing a gathering space for academic women and grass root activist; a space for generating feminist power through articulation and connection of women's experiences during war and peace and across the different political, geographical, social and cultural contexts.

Promoting a common agenda for equality between women and men through Istanbul Process Project

European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI in partnership with eight advocacy women's rights NGOs from six Arab countries from Mashrek and Maghreb implement a two-year project funded by the European Union. It aims to a more friendly gender quality environment that contribute to strengthening of the democratic development in the Euro-Med region and the promotion of women's rights as a constitutive part of sustainable development. IFE-EFI and the partners formed a democratic coalition, developed a common methodology for building capacity to utilize Istanbul framework of Action in the context of the Arab uprisings and transitions towards democracy and launched the regional campaign Equality First advocating decision makers to put gender equality and women's rights as a priority on their agendas as it is an issue of crucial importance for sustainable democracy. The coalition consists of European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI and the partners in Jordan: Arab Women Organization (AWO) and Sisterhood is Global Institute (SIGI); in Lebanon: Association Najdeh and The Lebanese Democratic Women Gathering (RDFL); in Egypt: The Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement (EACPE); in Tunisia: Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD), and in Palestine - The Womens' StudiesCenter (WSC).

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty (FNF) is an independent, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization. It is committed to promoting freedom as the most important and essential element of liberalism. The Foundation promotes liberalism in cooperation with her local partners through civic education, international political dialogues, and political counseling. The Foundation has a network of institutes in Germany and also numerous offices in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, America and Asia. It also enjoys close links with Germany's Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Liberal International (LI).

While the Foundation's activities in the field of civic education consist of seminars, conferences and publications aimed at promoting liberal values and principles, the international political dialogue program provides a discussion forum for a wide range of liberal issues. The Foundation's counseling programs focus on candidates for political office, liberal political parties and other democratic organizations.

Oxfam-Québec

Oxfam-Québec is a Canadian non-governmental organization dedicated to supporting its partners and colleagues in developing countries in the design and implementation of sustainable solutions to poverty and injustice. The organization also mobilizes the people of Québec in order to allow the expression of their solidarity. Oxfam-Québec has been working in the Middle East since 1989 and has developed a strong network of national and regional partners. Oxfam-Québec is based in Montréal, Québec. Oxfam-Québec is a member of the international confederation Oxfam. Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations working together in over 90 countries to find lasting solutions to poverty and injustice.

Regional Economic Empowerment for Women Project (REEWP)

The Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project (REEWP) is a bilateral project managed by Oxfam-Québec and funded by the Canadian Government through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Its regional office is based in Amman, Jordan. The project started in March 2009 and will end in December 2013. The project aims to contribute to providing an enabling environment for the sustainable economic development of women and economic empowerment opportunities in the region. At the end of this period, the full participation of women (including young women aged 18 to 35) in the economic development should have increased in the targeted areas: the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. The duration of the Regional Economic Empowerment of Women Project (REEWP) is four and a half years.

The project is being implemented with four key partner-organizations in the region: The Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD) in Jordan; the Collective for Research and Training Development Action (CRTD.A) in Lebanon; the Centre for Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) in Tunisia, and the Palestinian Businesswomen Association (ASALA) in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Through the concerted efforts of partner organizations in the region, the project aims to: i) improve women's economic empowerment in target areas and in the MENA region, both at the advocacy and networking levels; ii) promote the adoption of more effective, evidence-based interventions for the economic empowerment of women, both at government and nongovernmental levels and iii) provide better financial and non-financial services to support women's economic empowerment.

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