

LEBANON

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Official report on follow-up of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000)

National Commission for Lebanese Women

Beirut, April 2004

Part One: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

Almost 10 years have passed since the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995 to address the problems, pressures and discrimination facing women the world over. Almost 10 years has passed since the Arab States signed the Beijing Platform for Action. What point are we at today? How much of the Platform for Action to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women has been implemented by Lebanon? What are the challenges and obstacles to implementation and what have we achieved?

Since 1995, the Arab States, including Lebanon, have worked hard to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and have achieved considerable progress in the social, political and cultural fields in attempting to remove the basic obstacles in the implementation methodology. In most of these States, action has focused on the 12 critical areas of concern identified in Beijing.

Ever since Lebanon espoused the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Lebanese State has sought to elaborate a clear plan of action to improve the status of women across the board. Lebanon has achieved substantial progress, particularly in two of the critical areas of concern, namely education and training of women and women and health, as well as in improving the status of women under Lebanese laws.

In a country which is experiencing armed conflict and which continues to suffer repercussions from the occupation of part of its territory by Israel, there are constant problems and obstacles arise in swift succession. Policies are changed and programmes are replaced, with the result that women become a low priority. A group of Lebanese women nonetheless rose in an attempt to create a turning point and mark the beginning of the fight for a single issue, namely the protection of women against discrimination.

Throughout the country, pioneering Lebanese women began to make preparations for the Beijing Conference so that Lebanon might play an active participatory role in this global event. National committees and non-governmental associations were therefore formed to set work on women's issues in motion.

After the Conference, the Lebanese State sought to apply the commitments set forth in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by turning them into practical action plans with parameters which widen year upon year.

Women nevertheless continue to face obstacles and barriers that prevent achievement of the objectives sought. In common with other Governments which have experienced a long period of armed conflict, the Lebanese Government continues to face difficulties in applying the commitments undertaken. The country's economic situation, lack of resources and time-honoured customs and traditions constitute an obstacle to the acceleration of measures to improve the status of women.

Despite circumstances, however, the status of Lebanese women has progressed and the promise of Beijing 1995 has gradually started to emerge; an equal percentage of females and males enter primary education and the State introduced amendments to various laws which it recognized as being prejudicial to women. The Lebanese State is therefore making efforts to achieve equality of the sexes and to promote women's mechanisms in order to attain the desired objective, albeit slowly.

The National Commission for Lebanese Women is the official body for women's issues. Attached to the Office of the President of the Council of Ministers, it is an institution which, pursuant to Act No. 720, may coordinate with various public departments and institutions, with non-governmental and civil bodies and with Arab and international organizations. The National Commission was formed in 1998 and its chairmanship was entrusted to the First Lady.

Since its inception, the National Commission has endeavoured to achieve the objectives agreed at the Beijing Conference by networking with Lebanese non-governmental bodies, ministries and international organizations. As a result of this cooperation, a great many successes have been achieved in improving the status of Lebanese women. The National Commission has also established various projects, such as national, Arab and international forums, in addition to participating in the majority of conferences on women's affairs throughout the Arab world with a view to the exchange of expertise. It has signed agreements with global women's organizations in order to promote institution-building and the advancement of Lebanese women, and has turned its official capacity to good account in influencing the executive personnel involved in decision-making and in programme and policy development.

The National Commission for Lebanese Women is keen to cooperate with women's non-governmental organizations. The 1995 Beijing Conference played an important part in changing the scope of activity within such organizations from service-led to development-led. Meagre financial and human capacities notwithstanding, these non-governmental organizations have successfully worked to empower women by developing their capabilities and skills. Excellent results have been achieved in a variety of areas, such as the participation of women in local politics, specifically in municipal elections, where a higher ratio of female participation has been noted. Lebanese women today are hoping to increase their participation in political life and decision-making centres, particularly since the Lebanese National Assembly comprises only three women.

Lebanese women have aspired to carry out all of the promises made in Beijing in 1995. A number of obstacles, however, have been placed in the way of these aspirations, although noticeable progress can be said to have been achieved in the three areas of education, law and health. In the educational sector, the percentage of illiteracy has fallen and the number of girls at school and in universities and technical institutes has risen. The concentration of literacy programmes has also helped to raise that percentage. In the field of law, amendments have been introduced to various laws, such as the Labour Act and the social security statutes. In the field of health, it is noticeable that women of all ages are now much more knowledgeable about health and that health awareness has spread throughout most of Lebanon. The other sectors have progressed slowly, which may indicate that more steps are needed to attain the desired objective.

Lebanon's economic, social and cultural situation, however, continues to hamper attainment of all the objectives sought in the process of the advancement of Lebanese women.

Efforts are still ongoing to follow up work on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. We shall also later note that, in all sectors, most percentages are improving in comparison with past years.

Part Two: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the further initiatives and actions identified in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

Women and education:

Education is a main focus of sustainable human development and one of the objectives set forth in the recommendations of the Arab Summit for Women, since it is a prerequisite for eliminating discrimination against women, strengthening the role of women and protecting women from exploitation and violence.

During the present decade, the Lebanese State has worked in earnest to raise the standard of women's education and learning, which increased at a noticeable rate during the 1990s, particularly after the Beijing Conference in 1995.

Approved in 1998, Lebanon's Compulsory Education Act stipulates that primary education is compulsory for both sexes and free of charge.

- Lebanon has achieved tangible progress in eliminating female illiteracy by promoting education for all age groups; according to the Central Administration for Statistics, illiteracy fell from 17.8 per cent in 1998 to 15.4 per cent in 2000, with a clear reversal to 1.6 per cent among young people of both sexes (15 to 24 years).
- In basic education, the enrolment rate for the year 1999/2000 stood at 98.3 per cent, with no significant differences between the sexes or among regions. Lebanon has thus achieved a major success in ensuring access to education for all.
- In the secondary stage and above, the enrolment rate in 2000 stood at 67.1 per cent, compared with 46.7 per cent in 1997, according to the figures of the Central Administration for Statistics, thus providing a fresh indication that girls are aware of the importance of education.
- The percentage of girls enrolled in higher education was lower than in the earlier stages; in 2000, it stood at 20.2 per cent, according to statistics from the Lebanese Ministry of Education and the National Centre for Educational Research and Development. This low percentage may be attributable to the socio-economic situation, not to mention the customs and traditions which preclude women from travelling and enrolling in specialist universities abroad.
- The Lebanese Ministry of Education is currently incorporating the vocational approach into its guidance programme for the intermediate stage. This programme has significantly advanced, particularly following the increase in the number of centres and institutes specializing in technical and vocational training. Women's interest in vocational fields has grown; according to the Central Administration for Statistics, the number of women enrolled in vocational education accounted for 40 per cent of the overall total for the year 2000/01. There is still a gap, however, as urban women have a variety of options, whereas rural

women remain confined to specializing in traditional occupations such as nursing, sewing and other simple crafts of a similar ilk. As a result of this disparity, rural women have no incentive to enter vocational education, since it does not provide enough money for them to support themselves, which leads to drop-out.

- Lebanon has achieved qualitative successes in reducing the illiteracy rate and in increasing awareness in general and among women in particular. Further challenges and obstacles, however, must still be tackled in order to attain the desired objectives, in particular:
 - The provision of free education for all by 2015 and full literacy by 2020, in compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
 - The development of educational curricula that are more mindful of incorporating the gender perspective by removing such examples of stereotyped female roles as they may contain;
 - The imposition of penalties for those who refuse to educate their sons and daughters.

Women and health:

Health is the humanitarian aspect of human development, as it affects the work and productivity of the individual that further the progress and prosperity of society. The health of women in Lebanon is perhaps a mirror of the socio-economic situation and the prevailing culture in our society. The Lebanese State has endeavoured to increase the percentage of health care targeted specifically at women by holding women's health seminars and raising their awareness by means of guidance programmes. Lebanon is also keen to establish more regional health centres in order to afford women better access to health care. It has been noted that women are showing an increasing interest in their health and also following the basic guidelines for health.

The health status of women has improved remarkably as a result of the falling mortality rate and increased life expectancy at birth, which was 74.6 years in 2000, compared with 70.1 years in 1995, according to the Human Development Report 2002.

- There is a direct link between health education and health awareness, as reflected in the number of women presenting for prenatal care, although precise statistics are not available. The use of primary health care during pregnancy increased to 87 per cent during the period 1991-1995. For mothers under 30 years of age, it increases to 89.2 per cent, according to the Lebanese Ministry of Health. Post-natal care is also higher among more educated mothers (41 per cent among those with certificates, compared with 11 per cent of those who are illiterate).
- Statistics indicate that the majority of health services received during pregnancy are provided under the supervision of a doctor in the case of 92 per cent of women, while 5.5 per cent opt for midwives or nurses and 2.2 per cent for assistance from a relative or wet nurse. It should be noted that the age, educational attainment and economic status of the pregnant woman

affect her choice of where to give birth. Statistics have indicated that most births (88 per cent) take place in hospital, while 12 per cent are home births.

- Data show that 77 per cent of births are natural and that complications are higher among women aged under 20 or over 35.
- Post-natal health care indicators remain relatively low (only 39 per cent of women received post-natal health care during the period 1991-1996).
- Modern family planning methods are commonly used in Lebanon; the figure is 82 per cent for married women. A relatively high number of women (43.6 per cent) use family planning methods after their first pregnancy. The main reason for using contraceptive methods is to space out pregnancies (70 per cent), whereas 29 per cent use them for birth control. The use of these methods may increase once a family has a number of boys, thus demonstrating the importance placed on male children.
- The number of women who consult their doctor because they have a sexually transmitted disease remains very small indeed, particularly as far as the AIDS virus is concerned. The picture indicates, however, that this disease is on the rise in Lebanon, affecting 21.3 per cent (*sic*) of women and 77.8 per cent (*sic*) of men, according to 1998 statistics.
- The statistics are extremely poor and virtually non-existent in the case of abortion, which is still illegal, religiously unacceptable and punishable by law. It still occurs nevertheless and is a cause of death in women because it is performed in unhygienic conditions.
- According to the survey of maternal and child health, no more than 7.3 per cent of women undergo early screening for cancer of the breast and womb, although X-ray equipment is available in both the State and private sectors.

Lastly, the Lebanese State has no clear-cut laws on family planning, although Lebanese women have benefited from the developments which have occurred in the field of health and health education. It is worth pointing out that the Lebanese State makes no distinction between men and women when it comes to accessing health services. Despite these facilities, however, women continue to face obstacles and challenges in the field of health, in particular:

1. The failure to spread health awareness through training courses and lectures country-wide and across the media, as well as through wider health education;
2. The limited financial allocations for Government spending on public health, in particular the health of pregnant women and mothers, as a result of which it is impossible to provide medical care free of charge or at nominal cost to women of all ages;
3. Health care insurance for all, particularly women, at all ages.

Women and the law:

Article 7 of the Lebanese Constitution states that: "All Lebanese are equal before the law. They enjoy equal civil and political rights and assume equal public obligations and duties, without distinction between them."

The Lebanese Constitution therefore makes no distinction between women and men. Unlike other constitutions, however, it makes no provision for the principle of equality. Women's claim to legal competence will therefore come only after the provisions which differentiate between women and men in that regard are revoked or amended.

1. Main provisions in law for the equality of women and men in Lebanon

- Allowances and end-of-service benefits are equal for men and women.
- Officially, women are treated equally with men as far as their legal competence to enter into contracts and administer their property is concerned. They may receive birth control care without spousal permission, although this is not the case in a number of remote areas where awareness is lacking or where embarrassment may be felt by either the woman or the man.
- Under the Trade Act, as amended, women have the right to enter into contracts involving credit, real estate and other property. They may also engage in commercial transactions without spousal permission and in their own name.
- Women may dispose of their possessions, without male intervention. They therefore sell, buy and relinquish such possessions, whether they became theirs before or after marriage, without the prior consent of a spouse, father or legal guardian.
- Women are equal with men before the courts. Legal proceedings may therefore be brought by or against them and they may also lodge complaints in their own name. Women have the right to testify before courts and Government institutions and their testimony receives the same consideration as that of men.
- Women lawyers have the right to represent their clients before all courts and before special judicial bodies. Women may also work in the judiciary in the civil courts, although not in religious courts, as these remain the sole preserve of men, except in the case of the Evangelist sect, which has one woman in its ecclesiastical court.
- Legal concepts apply equally to men and women; women have the right to free legal aid if they are unable to shoulder the costs of legal proceedings and lawyers' fees.
- Lebanese law makes no distinction between women and men in matters of loans and mortgages.

2. Main provisions in law which distinguish between men and women in Lebanon

- The Lebanese Penal Code makes a distinction as far as honour crimes are concerned; article 562 provides that a person shall have the benefit of a mitigating excuse if, having caught his spouse or one of his ascendants or descendants or his sister in suspicious circumstances with another person, he perpetrates murder or injury. This article, which provides for a lesser penalty, encourages murder and injury and violates the principle of freedom, justice and equality. Moreover, this article contravenes not only the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, but also all international human rights instruments. It should therefore be revoked and not amended, as it was in 1999 by the Lebanese State.
- Lebanese law makes a distinction between men and women as far as the punishment imposed on those who commit adultery is concerned; an adulterous male is sentenced to imprisonment of between one month and one year, whereas an adulterous female is sentenced to between three months and two years. The law is also prejudicial to women, since it considers a woman to be an adulteress, whether the adultery takes place in the marital home or elsewhere. An adulterous man, however, is punished only if the act of adultery takes place in the marital home or if he openly takes a lover.

3. Women and the law: main achievements

- Article 14 of the Social Security Act No. 482 was amended, as a result of which the term "the insured", which appears in the article and relates to the benefits awarded to insured persons for their children, is understood to refer to both male and female insured persons.
- Article 1 of Act No. 149 of 1999 was amended, as a result of which male and female civil servants benefit equally from the facilities and services of the Civil Servants' Cooperative. Further amendments to the Act are, however, required.
- Article 28 of the Labour Act was amended, as a result of which the period of maternity leave for private sector workers now stands at seven weeks. Article 38 of Legislative Decree No. 112, as amended by Act No. 48, was also amended, as a result of which the period of maternity leave for public sector employees now stands at 60 days.
- Laws on partial shift work for women in public and private establishments have been passed, thus enabling women to reconcile domestic and economic needs.
- In conjunction with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the National Commission for Lebanese Women established a legal literacy training programme for 3,000 working women.

4. Women and the law: main obstacles

- The failure, particularly in the private sector and in civil society, to implement in practice the laws which emphasize the equality of the sexes.

- Laws which make a distinction between the sexes, such as the Penal Code, certain labour laws, the regulations of the National Social Security Fund, nationality laws and personal status laws.
- Time-honoured traditions and customs, which are one of the main facets of discrimination against women.

Women and poverty:

The Lebanese war had an enormous impact on the economy, which deteriorated, thus further widening the poverty gap. The end of the military war, however, brought no improvement in the situation; the economic recession persisted and the country's public debt continued to accumulate. Statistics provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs for 2000 show that 7.5 (*sic*) Lebanese families live below the poverty line of US\$ 200 per month for a family of five.

Women in Lebanon are more vulnerable to poverty than men, in which regard wage discrimination against them and arbitrary payment are two key elements. Statistics published by the Central Administration for Statistics, however, indicate that the wage gap between men and women is narrowing; the income of working women has increased and their wages are now approaching those of men (998,000 Lebanese pounds for men and 839,000 Lebanese pounds for women). This wage improvement indicates that more and more Lebanese women are embarking on learning and training programmes. The worsening economic situation, however, has increased the incidence of arbitrary payment, the reason being that employers are unable to shoulder the consequences resulting from the reproductive role of women.

The Lebanese State has not yet pursued an action plan for poverty reduction. Some private institutions, however, are working to improve the status of women by establishing training programmes to enhance skills and promote the use of financial services among disadvantaged women by increasing the number of small projects.

Violence against women:

Lebanon has made a reservation to article 16 of the Convention against the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which is the legal term of reference for violence against women within the family, and no amendments have been made to laws which are inconsistent with the Convention. Furthermore, the male domination of society prevents women from admitting violence against them, since it is regarded as a man's right, even if such behaviour comes from their father, spouse, brother or legal guardian.

The reluctance of women to speak openly about violence against them for fear of scandal is also another main reason for the failure to provide them with assistance.

Given that the number of cases of violence against women is increasing in Lebanon as a result of the psychological pressure produced by the country's war and the worsening economic situation, the National Council to Resist Violence against Women was established, together with a hotline

for female victims of violence. Various non-governmental institutions, such as the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering, are counselling such women. Some homes and centres have also set up shelters for women victims of violence and some female prostitutes.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has worked to implement a training project for large numbers of female social workers so that they acquire the skills needed to run awareness-raising sessions and knowledge of how to intervene in cases of physical violence.

Women and armed conflict:

Although women are far removed from the battle front, they are the ones who pay the heavy and painful price of war. Lebanese women are still suffering the consequences of the Israeli occupation in the south and western Bekaa. As women are essential to development, such conflicts have an adverse impact on their families and on the future of all generations.

As a result of these conflicts, a number of women have been apprehended and abducted as hostages for their spouses or children, an experience which has psychological and physical effects.

The Lebanese war led to the death of 100,000 citizens and the displacement of 90,000 families, while the number of injured, disabled, widowed and orphaned was double the number of those killed. According to statistics for 2001 provided by the Ministry for the Displaced, 12,000 families live in places unfit for habitation, such as industrial plants, burial grounds and roadside areas.

These circumstances have adverse repercussions on the situation of women, as they shoulder a great many unforeseen burdens and responsibilities. In particular, they have little experience and few resources to enable them to shoulder the domestic burdens resulting from the death, disability or migration of a spouse.

In March 2004, the Forum on Arab Women and Armed Conflict was held in Beirut in accordance with the resolutions of the second Arab Women's Summit. Its main recommendations were as follows:

- To invite Arab Governments and civil-society organizations to devise programmes aimed at:
 - Raising social awareness, particularly among young men and women, of the damaging effects of armed conflict on women, children and the family, as well as awareness of the concepts of citizenship, justice and peace based on fairness and the principles of international law;
 - Supporting Arab women with special needs in order to ensure that they receive rehabilitation and training;
 - Establishing the mechanisms needed to disseminate and publicize information concerning international conventions and rules on the protection of women;

- Urging the media to highlight the role assumed by Arab women in armed conflict.

Women and the economy:

The participation of women in economic life has increased worldwide as the number of women working outside the home grows. In Lebanon, the number of women entering the job market has risen, albeit slowly, owing to the unprecedented economic need; according to the statistics for 2000 produced by the Central Administration for Statistics, the figure increased from 16.2 per cent in 1990 to 20.6 per cent in 2000. The National Strategy for Lebanese Women has determined three objectives centred on increasing women's involvement in economic life, empowering women to strengthen their capacities and self-reliance, and securing women's employment rights.

In order to achieve these objectives, it is essential to:

- Encourage women to work for themselves by providing access to easy loan facilities;
- Organize vocational training courses for women in order to develop their capacities and enable them to enter the job market;
- Widen the scope for women's participation in occupational and labour unions with a view to defending their rights.

Women in politics and decision-making:

Although women are increasingly participating in most sectors, they remain marginalized in decision-making centres and in political life. The unified report issued by the Lebanese State on the Beijing Platform for Action in 1999 specified two objectives for which to strive:

- An increase of not less than 30 per cent in women's participation in the decision-making centres and political life of Lebanon by 2005;
- An increase in women's participation in gainful employment and in their ownership and administration of resources with the aim of boosting the influence of women in decision-making.

Women's participation in the public sector is uneven. In 2003, six women held the position of director-general and women accounted for 27.5 per cent of lawyers in the courts of justice and for 19.5 per cent of lawyers in the State council. A leaflet published by the National Commission for Lebanese Women in 2004 stated that the judiciary comprised 434 judges, 124 of them women.

The Lebanese State is not opposed to women's participation in political life and allows them to stand as electoral candidates and join political parties. A lack of participation by women in trade

unions, parties and national assemblies nevertheless remains, possibly because of the traditional mentality. Action should therefore be taken to:

- Amend the Electoral Act and increase the political profile of women;
- Raise women's awareness of the importance of their role in decision-making centres so that they claim their rights;
- Eliminate sectarianism and change the traditional mentality in politics.

Women and the media:

Despite the higher percentage of female media graduates from Lebanese universities and other women now employed in television and in news agencies, women remain absent from decision-making and planning positions in all areas of the media. Neither are there many women working in the political press because discrimination in recruitment is practised. Women are on a virtual par with marketed commodities, since no law imposes penalties on the exploitation of women's bodies in advertising.

- Consideration should be given to the use of media which cover women's issues, highlight their intellectual capacities and spread the idea of equality between women and men;
- Women should be given a variety of non-traditional roles in order to prevent the stereotypical image of women from spreading. They should also be encouraged to undertake their own media productions so that they are no longer targeted exclusively at men.

Women and environment:

Lebanon is distinguished by its beautiful climate and green mountains. Its cedar tree is also a symbol of steadfastness and pride in the face of the difficulties and challenges which have wreaked havoc with the country as a result of the successive wars over the ages. These wars and the planting of landmines have transformed arable land into a wilderness and the environment is polluted by the smuggling and burial of toxic waste in the high and barren mountains of Lebanon, which has led to the contamination of drinking water and to climate pollution. The use of lead petrol, electricity and sand and gravel plants has also polluted Lebanon's fresh air.

Non-governmental associations have long been working with the Ministry of Environment to improve a number of environmental problems. In that connection, women have been notable for their presence; they accounted for 50 per cent of those involved in such work, which they began by planting millions of trees throughout the country and sorting household waste. It should be noted that some associations have a woman at their helm, which is evidence of women's concern for the environment and their sense of the risk posed to their children by that pollution.

As in the case of the previous critical areas of concern, Lebanese women are still absent from the positions in the Government sector where decisions and policies on environment are made.

In order to preserve the beauty of Lebanon and protect all of its citizens, special attention should be urgently devoted to this subject by introducing measures to:

- Step up environmental awareness-raising campaigns through schools, summer camps and training courses;
- Raise awareness among the Lebanese, particularly women, concerning the risks of environmental pollution, and seek to eliminate those risks so that the environmental atmosphere is conducive to their own health and to that of their children.

Women in rural areas:

As in the case of other countries, Lebanon continues to suffer from the problem of the gap between urban and rural areas. Rural inhabitants in general and rural women in particular thus have relatively little awareness of their rights.

Rural women suffer because they have no access to resources, especially land and loans, which may eventually improve their standard of living. Similarly, the lack of interest in the empowerment and vocational and social training of rural women also constitutes an obstacle to their advancement and greater awareness. This situation keeps rural women outside the circle of influence and decisions in a number of spheres.

Rural women are directly affected by the overall recession in the Lebanese agricultural sector; with the tightening of the economy, income has fallen and agricultural work is no longer sufficient to support a family. How therefore is a rural woman able to save enough to pay for her own health care and that of her family?

The Lebanese State has not yet made any practical contribution to improving the status of rural women and meeting their needs, even though this subject is a core concern of Lebanon, in accordance with article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Despite all of these obstacles, which have an adverse impact on the lives of rural women, the statistics on the education sector indicate only a small disparity between rural and urban women when it comes to enrolment in educational programmes. This is evidence that awareness of the importance of educating and training women is starting to emerge.

Part Three: Progress in institutional development

Since the first half of this century, a women's movement has been active in demanding equality. In 1953, Lebanese women won the right to vote and stand as candidates in elections. Lebanese Governments, however, devoted no particular attention to women's issues until the Beijing Conference; Lebanon had an effective role in preparing for and participating in that event, which was a turning point for women's participation in the process of development.

Women's organizations in Lebanon demanded the establishment of a ministry or official authority to cater to the affairs of Lebanese women and devise a national strategy to secure their rights. These women's organizations also urged the Lebanese State to allocate a special budget for the eventual implementation of women's development projects.

The National Council was thus formed by ministerial decree in 1996, followed by the National Commission for Lebanese Women pursuant to Act No. 720 of 12 November 1998. The latter is directly linked to the presidency of the Council of Ministers and has its own official budget.

The National Commission consists of leading figures from the official and private sectors, as well as figures renowned for their activity in the field of women's rights. The National Commission is run by an eight-person executive bureau elected by the general board.

A strategy has been devised for a platform of action for women's affairs and the development of women's capacities, skills and competences at the different levels and in all fields with a view to improving and furthering the status of women.

Through the strategy, the National Commission is aiming to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, update and amend laws which still prejudice their rights, eradicate illiteracy and establish women's centres.

The Commission has embraced work to amend the provisions of the Penal Code concerning honour crimes, as well as the Labour Act and the regulations of the Abu Dhabi Social Security Fund so that all allowances are made equal.

The National Commission is still trying hard to attain these objectives and deter discrimination against women. Its efforts and activities have produced a number of successes:

- In 2001, the National Commission worked with UNICEF and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with support from the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND), on a project called "Know Your Rights", the aim of which was to disseminate information on the rights of working women and the requirement to claim such rights. This project sought to improve the knowledge of legal facts among some 3,000 working women.
- In conjunction with the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the National Commission implemented a post-Beijing follow-up project to build decisions through intensive training workshops. It also aimed to build institutional decisions to empower

women in decision-making by coordinating with non-governmental organizations and integrating the gender perspective into policies and programmes. Funded by the European Union, this project was implemented by the National Commission for Lebanese Women in collaboration with the National Committee for the Follow-Up of Women's Affairs. Together with UNIFEM, these two institutions were able to establish a communication network by appointing a gender focal point officer in each institution or ministry.

- On March 2004, the National Commission for Lebanese Women held an Arab Forum on Women and Armed Conflict for Arab and Lebanese women actively involved in all areas of development.
- On 30 January 2004, having worked on the subject of the institution, the National Commission opened the Lebanese Women's Information Centre, comprising a specialist library which aims to collect documents on Arab women in general and Lebanese women in particular. It also comprises an electronic database containing everything written on and by women in the fields of the humanities, social sciences and literature.
- Some Government ministries devote special attention to women and the elimination of discrimination against women. A Department for Women has been established in the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Central Administration for Statistics is endeavouring to process figures.

In 1997, the Council of Development and Reconstruction instituted a scheme designed to promote women's projects. Entitled "Institution-building for the Development of Women's Projects", the scheme is aimed at improving the social and economic circumstances of low-income women. A total budget of US\$ 482,198 was allocated to this project, in which the Ministry of Social Affairs was an essential partner. Empowerment training courses for women were set up and a total of 883 women benefited from the project.

In 1998, the Council of Development and Reconstruction launched a project called "Reproductive Health and Economic Empowerment", which was funded by the European Union and UNICEF with a budget of US\$ 564,000. This project provided support to small projects run by women and also assisted the Ministry of Social Affairs in developing plans for gender-mainstreaming.

In 2001, the Council of Development and Reconstruction announced the establishment of an economic and social development programme, the intention of which is to institute a project aimed at eradicating poverty and setting up a user-friendly information system in social welfare and financial divisions.

Non-governmental organizations in Lebanon actively cooperate and coordinate with the National Commission for Lebanese Women on women's issues and in working to introduce gender as a term into civil society. These include:

- The Lebanese Women's Council;

- The Non-Governmental Committee for the Follow-up of Women's Issues;
- The Permanent Arab Court to Resist Violence against Women (headquartered in Lebanon);
- The Dar al-Amal Association;
- The Working Women League in Lebanon;
- The Women's Rights Committee;
- The International Institute for Women's Solidarity;
- The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering;
- The Machreq/Maghreb Gender-Linking and Information Project;
- The Lebanese Council to Resist Violence against Women.

Women's issues also form part of the programmes and general objectives of various other organizations which have not been mentioned.

Part Four: Main challenges and actions to address them

1. Main challenges in women's education:

- To eradicate illiteracy throughout Lebanon;
- To encourage young girls to enter special vocational and technical education, and to reduce drop-out;
- To revise educational curricula, remove any elements which discriminate against women's rights and eliminate stereotypes of women;
- To provide compulsory primary education on a universal basis and free of charge.

2. Main challenges facing Lebanon's health sector in meeting women's health needs:

- To reduce maternal deaths during childbirth;
- To provide health services for women of all ages throughout Lebanon;
- To increase public spending on health.

3. Main challenges still facing Lebanese women from the legal standpoint:

- The reservations to articles 9 and 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women concerning the right of women to transmit their nationality to their children and the status of women within the family (personal status). The aim is for the Lebanese Government to withdraw both of these reservations;
- The Penal Code, particularly the provisions relating to honour crimes, adultery, abortion and prostitution;
- The provisions of the Labour Act relating to the protection of women against sexual harassment, family allowances, pensions, payment, medical treatment and cures.

4. Women and poverty:

- To strengthen economic opportunities for impoverished women by facilitating their access to loans;
- To secure for women equal access with men to productive resources;
- To gather accurate gender-disaggregated indicators of the extent and causes of poverty and means of countering it.

5. Women in power and decision-making:

- To seek to increase the number of women deputies in the Lebanese parliament, of whom there are currently three from among a total of 128 deputies;
- To train women for political and trade-union work so that they can be nominated for positions in those fields on the basis of their own ability instead of on the basis of their family background;
- To seek to increase the percentage of women in top positions so that they can take part in developing policies and programmes.

6. Institutional development:

- To strengthen the financial position of the National Commission for Lebanese Women;
- To network with humanitarian organizations in order to coordinate and benefit from the experiences and results achieved with a view to the advancement of Lebanese women;
- To provide incentives for Government ministries and institutions to process information and devote more attention to social gender than is currently the case.

c.c.:

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