

31 may 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the Roundtable Discussion on Women Leaders Networking for
Peace and Security in the Middle East**

Thank you, Ursula, for organizing this important conference including the insightful reports of the workshops we just heard.

I would like to touch upon this important topic from a UN perspective.

Gender equality is a basic principle of the United Nations. The Charter of the UN affirms that one of the organization's central goals is "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women". In 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established.

More often, women and children are the majority of victims of today's conflicts. However it is important to recognize that women are also combatants, participants, leaders, negotiators, peacemakers, and activists.

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 adopted a plan of action, the Platform for Action (PFA). One of the critical areas identified in the PFA is on women and armed conflict.

Two critical tools for moving the gender equality agenda forward (also in conflict and post-conflict situations):

1. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the General Assembly in 1979. The CEDAW is an international bill of rights for women. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. 185 Member States are parties (of the 192 member states).
2. The United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in 2000. This was a landmark resolution, integrating a gender perspective in the work of the Council. It emphasized the vital role of women in conflict resolution. It establishes a comprehensive agenda on women, peace, and security by addressing the need for full and equal participation of women in peace processes and peacebuilding activities, as well as gender-sensitive training for personnel involved in peace-support operations, which is needed in the Middle East.

The role of the UN General Assembly is to provide political guidance, including development of a normative framework.

During this session of the UN General Assembly, I organized a high level meeting on the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. It was widely recognized that there still are huge barriers to equal participation of women and men, including in the armed forces.

Women's perspectives to challenges in armed conflict as well as other issues are not biological; they are cultural and historic.

The regional challenges that the Middle East pose are:

Resolving the political disputes in the region, namely the Arab Israeli conflict.
 Educational reforms that foster critical thinking and break these traditional gender roles.
 To succeed (make a difference) in sustainable peace and security, the following is key:

- Ensure the presence of a critical mass of women at all levels in conflict prevention, peace process and conflict resolution.
- Remove barriers to women's participation in the armed forces and increase the number of women in peacekeeping operations.
- Ensure that women participate in the formal peace processes, not "side shows" alongside men.
- Redouble our efforts to fight violence against women.

Thank you.