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PANEL III

Achievements, Gaps and Challenges
in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action
in the Arab Region

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* The paper has been reproduced as submitted.

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held the Arab Regional Conference Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace at United Nations House in Beirut during the period 8-10 July 2004, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 58/148 of 22 December 2003 in which the General Assembly recognizes the importance attached to the regional and sub regional monitoring of the global and sub regional platforms for action and the implementation of the outcome of the twenty-third session by regional commissions and other regional or sub regional structures.

The conference comprised three meetings, namely, the second session of the Committee on Women, the Expert Group Meeting to Follow Up on the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing + 10) and the second meeting of the Consultative Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations at ESCWA.

The conference was organized around four seminars on the role of women in Arab parliaments, women in executive and decision-making positions, women in civil society and women in the media and intellectual and cultural life. The seminar concerned with women in civil society constituted the second meeting of the Consultative Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations. The three other seminars constituted the Expert Group Meeting to Follow Up on the Fourth World Conference on Women. Each seminar resulted in a set of conclusions and recommendations that form the basis of the Beirut Declaration on Arab Women Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace.

BEIRUT DECLARATION ON ARAB WOMEN TEN YEARS AFTER BEIJING: CALL FOR PEACE

1. We, the participants in the Arab Regional Conference Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace, gathered at ESCWA headquarters in United Nations House in Beirut from 8 to 10 July 2004, recalling General Assembly resolutions 52/100 of 12 December 1997 and 52/231 of 4 June 1998 on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, 58/142 of 22 December 2003 on women and political participation and 58/148 of 22 December 2003 on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, in addition to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000 on the role of women in peace-building and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in the year 2000, in particular the third goal, namely, to promote gender equality and empower women,
2. Note that the Arab Regional Conference "Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace" is convened pursuant to the United Nations resolutions that stipulate the need to assess the accomplishments achieved during the ten years following the Beijing Conference in order to present the findings to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at its forty-ninth session, to be held in New York from 28 February to 11 March 2005, for their inclusion in the comprehensive document to be prepared by CSW and submitted to the General Assembly in order to provide information on the circumstances and needs of the region.
3. We also note the continuing instability in the Arab region, which has suffered for decades from conflicts and tensions and is one of the regions of the world most exposed to wars and armed conflicts. This situation not only slows the pace of economic and social development but, also, undermines the progress that has been achieved. There is evidence to indicate that the

gravity of the regional dangers, the decrease in investment rates and the persistence of the disparity between physical and human capital are all factors that contribute to reducing levels of growth.

4. Our conference today is held in extremely difficult and intricate circumstances, at a time when the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, is experiencing a decline at all levels, including the political, social, economic and cultural levels, which has a negative impact on the living conditions of Palestinian women and the Palestinian people as a whole. The continuing occupation by Israel persists, with the confiscation and settlement of land, demolition of homes, razing of agricultural lands, partition of Palestinian territory and construction of the wall. Circumstances such as these are also being experienced by the people of Iraq, which now suffers from occupation as it suffered from repeated wars and lacks security and stability, as well as the peoples of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, parts of the territories of both of which remain under occupation.

5. The theme "Call for Peace", chosen as the theme of the present conference, embodies the circumstances and particular conditions of the region and expresses the desire of its peoples to live in peace and stability and for a better life, in particular since emphasis in past years has been on equality and development while peace has not been accorded sufficient concern. In this regard, we consider that the action required for the achievement of equality and development cannot proceed without the establishment of peace based on the rule of law, justice and international legitimacy and, consequently, human security and social stability.

6. It is a cause for optimism that the status of women is a topic addressed by the majority of regional and national reform initiatives. At the Arab summit held recently in Tunis, the Arab States made a commitment to support the rights of women and broaden the scope of their participation in the political, social and economic spheres. During the deliberations and in the declarations of Alexandria, Sana'a, Doha and Beirut, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with women, in addition to academics and representatives of various different political parties emphasized the importance of the empowerment of women, which demonstrates that this issue has become a fundamental element in the Arab vision of reform.

7. This conference has highlighted the progress achieved by the countries of the region towards implementation of the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, according to the responses of those countries to the questionnaire sent by the United Nations to governments.

8. In this context, we note that these accomplishments have included the promulgation of new legislation for the benefit of women, the establishment of mechanisms concerned with women's issues, including ministries, councils, bodies and commissions, the attainment by women in some countries of their political rights, the allocation of quotas to women in the parliaments of some countries and the ratification by 17 countries of CEDAW.

9. We recognize that the findings of the questionnaire have also highlighted the existence of challenges that require further work and effort, including illiteracy, the school dropout rate of girls, violence against women including the negative impact of terrorism on the advancement of society in general and women in particular, discrimination in legislation with particular regard to penal codes, in addition to social traditions and customs. The findings have also made clear that women in the Arab region continue to suffer from the problems of poverty, unemployment, budget restrictions on programmes for their advancement and the absence of accurate, gender-disaggregated statistics.

In the light of this analysis, we consider that the vision that needs to be implemented in the coming ten years in order to empower women, improve their conditions and increase their participation in political, economic and social life requires the following:

10. Urging governments to formulate strategies and programmes for the empowerment of women in conjunction with public policy priorities and variables at the national level, in order to achieve MDGs during the coming ten years;
11. Action to increase budgets and human resources allocated to policies, programmes and national mechanisms concerned with women and linkage of these budgets to the public budget;
12. Analysis and treatment of the indicators that demonstrate the existence of a gap between equality under the law and actual equality with regard to parliamentary representation since, although the fundamental right of women and men to political participation is recognized, the representation of women in parliaments remains token or non-existent;
13. Continuous review and updating of national legislation and amendment of discriminatory legislation, action to invigorate and apply laws in force, review of laws and legislation on political parties and electoral systems in order to promote the role of women, in particular the requirement to assign a proportion of political party nomination lists for women, allocation of quotas for women in public institutions and, in particular, legislative institutions in order to guarantee an increase in their participation in political activity;
14. Establishment of a gender-disaggregated information and database covering projects and programmes concerned with women's issues in the Arab countries in order to facilitate the exchange of information and comparison with the situation of women in other countries;
15. Establishment of observatories and early-warning mechanisms for follow-up and analysis of the social phenomena particular to the situation of women and girls so that social problems can be remedied before they become severe;
16. Elimination of the political obstacles and security concerns that hinder the advancement of society and women in some areas through linkage of women's issues to public policy issues, the utilization of positive political rhetoric in favour of women and emphasis on clarification of the influence of these policies on their interests;
17. Emphasis on the role of women in strengthening the concepts of peace and dialogue to which the Arab countries aspire, since equality and development cannot be achieved in the absence of peace, and emphasis on the need of Arab women for peace, security and stability as the political obstacles before them are occupation, settlement and menace;
18. Interlinkage of the efforts of men and women to achieve democracy and human rights and mainstreaming gender in development policies;
19. According the necessary attention to the education of girls and women and encouraging them to enter the field of applied sciences, in addition to the removal of discriminatory pictures and ideas that endorse a negative image of women from schoolbooks;
20. Habilitation and training of women to assume positions of leadership and career advancement;
21. Finding solutions for the problems that cause girls to drop out of education, in order to eliminate the illiteracy, poverty and unemployment from which women continue to suffer;

22. According rural women the necessary concern through the provision of the basic services necessary for their lives, the formulation of health awareness, illiteracy eradication and vocational training programmes and the provision of soft loans in order to enable them to support themselves and their families;
23. Concern with the issues and needs of elderly and disabled women, changing their image in the eyes of society and encouraging their participation in development activity;
24. Formulation of awareness programmes in order to acquaint men, women and youth with the human, statutory and legal rights of women and the importance of the role that they play in society;
25. Continued action to increase awareness and change the prevailing mentality of different social groups, in particular youth, with regard to the necessity of achieving gender equality and causing change in cultural concepts, with the participation of all stakeholders and the assumption by NGOs of an important role in such action;
26. Strengthening the network of Arab women parliamentarians by the issuance of a publication for the exchange of experiences, facilitation of communication and achievement of solidarity between them and between them and their counterparts in other countries with the objective of raising awareness of Arab women's issues and achieving mutual support in this regard, in addition to action based on cooperation and constructive competition in an effort to improve participation in political life;
27. Encouraging women and women's unions to acquaint women with their rights and duties under the law, the constitution and relevant conventions and boldly pursue their cases before local courts in order to stop violations of women's rights;
28. Requiring professional unions, labour syndicates and other professional associations to ensure the involvement of women in their activities and assumption by women of positions in these institutions and urging women to participate in these institutions and make a positive and effective contribution;
29. Amendment of the existing laws and enactment of new laws regulating the work of NGOs in a manner that guarantees them freedom in their activities, provides the necessary political support and contributes to the creation of a climate of confidence between them and the government parties concerned;
30. Continued efforts to build confidence and partnership between NGOs and government institutions, based on integration, cooperation and statement of views with regard to strategies, plans, bills and programmes related to women and monitoring and following up on their implementation, calling on these organizations to participate as members of official delegations to regional and international conferences and in the preparation of reports and working papers for these conferences;
31. Support of NGOs, invigoration of their role in serving society and women and elimination of the administrative constraints that prevent them from assuming the role required of them, in order to achieve a qualitative shift in their activities so that their role is not confined to the provision of pastoral social services but includes missionary activities and awareness programmes in development projects;
32. Establishment of networks between NGOs concerned with women's affairs in order to exchange experiences, make Arab women's issues known at the local, national, regional and international levels, eliminate duplication and derive greater benefit from their work;

33. Change the negative image of Arab women in the media through the formulation of audio visual media programmes and direct means of communication;
34. Promote media coverage in order to raise awareness of the rights of women and rectify the flawed perceptions that distort the image of Arab women to the broadest audience, including rural and remote areas, and accord the necessary concern to the media rhetoric directed to the world at large in order to change this image;
35. Monitoring, highlighting and making accessible the successful experiences of women in the media and, in particular the difficulties encountered with regard to the experience of Arab women in satellite channels and coverage of armed conflict zones and wars and the allocation of the necessary resources;
36. Establishment of an association for Arab women in the media in order to facilitate communication among them and with other parties;
37. Establishment of media colleges and centres for training women in countries without such institutions;
38. Call on governments to formulate programmes for raising awareness in schools, media, public institutions and local administrations in order to eliminate wrongful customs and traditions and illegal practices and laws that hinder the advancement of women, prejudice their rights and equality with men and distort their image;
39. Holding workshops and seminars at ESCWA that bring together women in the media, women intellectuals and civil society organizations;
40. Undertaking by ESCWA to prepare a comprehensive directory of the names of women intellectuals, media figures and researchers, in order to improve media coverage of women's issues;
41. Coordination between ESCWA, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the League of Arab States, the Arab Women Organization (AWO) and the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) with regard to the preparation of the report of NGOs on evaluation of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, for inclusion with the report of governments;
42. Undertaking by ESCWA to organize meetings with Arab parliaments, unions and national associations and organize an international Arab forum that includes Asian women, in order to benefit from their experiences and attainment of key positions, in addition to giving women the opportunity to make their viewpoint known at the hearings held in European parliaments.

Achievements

1. Laws and Legislation
2. Accession to International Conventions
3. National Strategies and Plan of Action
4. Political Participation
5. Institutional Development
6. Education, Health, and Employment

Laws and Legislation

- Amending and Issuing Family Law (Morocco);
- Modernizing Personal Status Code, including divorce and nationality (Tunisia);
- Employment Laws in favour of women;
- Amending Social Security nets and benefits to include women;
- Reviewing Penal Code relating to Honor Crime;
- Implementing Compulsory Primary Education Act for boys and girls (most of Arab countries);
- Introducing the Quota System for Women's Seats in Parliament (Jordan).

Accession to the International Conventions

- 17 Member States have Ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- Reviewing reservations on CEDAW.

**Arab Countries that Ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of
Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
As of December 2004**

Algeria	22 May 1996
Bahrain	18 June 2002
Comoros	31 October 1994
Djibouti	21 December 1998
Egypt	18 September 1981
Iraq	13 August 1986
Jordan	1 July 1992
Kuwait	2 September 1994
Lebanon	21 April 1997
Libya	16 May 1989
Mauritania	10 May 2001
Morocco	21 June 1993
Saudi Arabia	7 September 2000
Syrian Arab Republic	28 March 2003
Tunisia	20 September 1985
United Arab Emirates	January 2004
Yemen	30 May 1981

National Strategies and Plans of Action

- Formulating National Strategies and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women;
- Adopting Policies for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality;
- Gender Mainstreaming.

Political Participation

- Doubling Political Participation of Arab Women from 3% (1995) to 6% (2005) in Parliament

Parliamentary Seats Occupied by Women in the Arab Countries in 2005

Country	Total Number of Seats	Women in Parliaments
Algeria	389	24
Bahrain	0	0
Djibouti	65	7
Egypt	454	11
Jordan	110	6
Kuwait	65	0
Lebanon	128	3
Mauritania	181	3
Morocco	325	35
Saudi Arabia	120	0
Sudan	360	35
Syrian Arab Republic	250	30
Tunisia	183	21
United Arab Emirates	40	0
Yemen	301	1
Total	2970	176
Percentage	100	5.9

Political Participation 2003

- Women 5.9%
- Men 94.1%

Political Participation

- Adopting a Quota in some Arab countries, such as 30 seats in Morocco and 6 seats in Jordan;
- Appointing Women Ministers for the first time in some countries: Health Minister in Bahrain, 3 ministers in Oman, Minister of Human Rights in Yemen, 6 ministers in Iraq;
- Appointing women for the first time in the Judiciary System in some countries (Egypt), and an increase in the percentage of women in other countries (40% in Lebanon);
- Establishing National Machineries for Women such as ministries for women (as in Iraq and Palestine), supreme national councils and, high level bodies, to co-ordinate, monitor and, follow-up;
- Enhancing Role of Civil Society and Women NGOs and Promoting Partnership and Cooperation to Empower Women.

Education, Health and Work

- Improvements in relative shares and percentages.

Equality Indicators between Women & Men According to the Net % of Enrollment in the Educational Phases

Country	Elementary Phase 2000-2001	Secondary Phase 2000-2001	University Phase (Total) 2000-2001
Algeria	0.97	1.05	...
Bahrain	1.00	1.07	1.17
Comoros	0.78	...	0.72
Djibouti	0.77	0.63	0.72
Egypt	0.85	0.96	0.84
Iraq	0.80	0.66	0.52
Jordan	0.95	1.07	0.97
Kuwait	0.95	1.02	2.20
Lebanon	1.00	1.10	1.15
Libya	0.93
Mauritania	0.93	0.78	0.20
Morocco	0.91	0.83	0.78
Morocco	0.91	0.83	0.78
Oman	1.00	1.01	1.11
Palestine	0.99	1.08	0.90
Qatar	0.92	1.10	2.72
Saudi Arabia	0.92	0.95	1.05
Sudan	0.83	...	0.89
Syrian Arab Republic	0.99	0.90	0.81
Tunisia	0.99	1.05	0.93
United Arab Emirates	0.92	1.13	...
Yemen	0.56	0.40	0.32

Health

Life Expectancy at Birth by Sex, 1990-2005

Work

Percentage of Women and Men in the Labour Force, 2003

- Women 29%
- Men 71%

Gaps

- Women's issues are not placed on government's list of priorities;
- Decision-makers are not strongly committed to serious, systematic follow-up to the implementation of policies, plans and strategies, despite that governments have officially accepted their requirements;

- Women's national machineries are not allocated adequate human and financial resources;
- Coordination, observation, monitoring and accountability mechanisms are weak, not to say non-existent;
- Paucity of sex-disaggregated statistics needed for gender planning and policy formulation
- Gender awareness levels are still weak at both official and grassroots levels;
- Misinterpreting religious teachings
- Prevailing economic, cultural, social and political conditions are unsatisfactory
- There is a wide gap between the de jure and de facto application of laws and legislations
- Spread of Illiteracy, Poverty and Unemployment among Women, especially in Female-Headed Households: illiteracy rate has reached 50 per cent in some countries, there are 65 million illiterates in the Arab World

Percentage of Illiteracy for Adults (15+) in the Arab Countries in 2003

Illiteracy Rates in the Arab Region, 2003

- Men 27%
- Women 49%
- Rural women are not accorded sufficient attention;
- Discrimination Against Working Women with regards to Pay, Promotion Opportunities, and, Training, especially in the Private Sector;
- Projecting negative images for women in the Media;
- Non-adherence to implementation of CEDAW and retention of reservations thereon;
- Norms and Traditions, such as Honour Crimes, Female genital mutilation, Domestic violence, Early Marriages and Marriages of Kins;
- Impact of globalization, structural adjustment policies and reform, public budgetary constraints on social programmes and reduction of social services offered to middle class and the poor;
- Political instability in the region due to armed conflict, wars, occupation, economic sanctions and foreign intervention in internal affairs, which negatively affects growth and welfare of people especially women.

Challenges

- Urging governments to formulate strategies and programmes for the empowerment of women in conjunction with public policy priorities and variables at the national level, in order to achieve MDGs during the coming ten years;
- Action to increase budgets and human resources allocated to policies, programmes and national mechanisms concerned with women and linkage of these budgets to the public budget;
- Analysis and treatment of the indicators that demonstrate the existence of a gap between equality under the law and actual equality with regard to parliamentary representation;

- Continuous review and updating of national legislation and amendment of discriminatory legislation;
- Establishment of a gender-disaggregated information and database covering projects and programmes concerned with women's issues;
- Establishment of observatories and early-warning mechanisms for follow-up and analysis of the social phenomena particular to the situation of women;
- Elimination of the political obstacles and security concerns that hinder the advancement of society and women in some areas;
- Continued efforts to build confidence and partnership between NGOs and government institutions;
- Support of NGOs, invigoration of their role in serving society and women and elimination of the administrative constraints that prevent them from assuming the role required of them;
- Establishment of networks between NGOs concerned with women's affairs in order to exchange experiences;
- Formulation of awareness programmes in order to acquaint men, women and youth with the human, statutory and legal rights of women and the importance of the role that they play in society;
- Continued action to increase awareness and change the prevailing mentality of different social groups;
- Habilitation and training of women to assume positions of leadership and career advancement;
- Emphasis on the role of women in strengthening the concepts of peace and dialogue to which the Arab countries aspire;
- Interlinkage of the efforts of men and women to achieve democracy and human rights and mainstreaming gender in development policies.