



# TUNISIA

**Statement by H.E. Salwa Terzi,  
Deputy Minister for Women, Child, and Ageing Affairs,  
on the occasion of the 54<sup>th</sup> session of  
the Commission on the Status of Women**

**(March 3rd, 2010)**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

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Affairs, on the occasion of the 54<sup>th</sup> session  
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**Mr President  
Distinguished Representatives  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

*Tunisia is honored to take part in the works of the 54<sup>th</sup> session of CSW to celebrate 15 years after Beijing and say that this gathering materializes, in need be, the international community's interest in gender equality with the aim to put an end to all forms of discrimination, violence, and exclusion against women, and highlights an increasing human awareness about this civilizational issue that has been, since my country's independence, included in its strategic orientations, more particularly since the political Change of 1987 within the framework of a national approach that links sustainable and comprehensive development to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's strategy to build a modern society that supports women's rights as part and parcel of Human Rights.*

Following the adoption of the Code of Personal Status in 1956, a piece of legislation that freed women from repudiation and polygamy and that became a pioneering model in our region, national efforts, during the last two decades, were directed towards strengthening these achievements and constantly enriching them. In this regard, numerous presidential initiatives have been carried out since 1997 with the aim to promoting women's rights, thus leading to the elevation of the principles of equality and personal status to a Constitutional level while the Code of Personal Status, mentioned earlier, as well as Codes pertaining to employment, political parties, contracts and also the penal code have all been drastically amended in order to rid them from all manifestations of discrimination against women. A positive discrimination was, on the other hand, followed to reduce the gap between legislation and practice with the aim, among other things, to ensure women's access to decision-making positions.

Also, and for the sake of gender equality and preserving women's interests, a piece of legislation has been adopted regarding the optional sharing of possessions between spouses. Furthermore, laws were enhanced to secure the rights of single mothers and their children to a family allowance and housing, the right of mothers to pass on their nationality to their children, and a total equality between men and women in employment and salary. These laws also set the same minimum age for marriage for both boys and girls while the Penal Code was amended by outlawing all forms of violence against women, especially within the family.

**Mr President**

Since 1990s, Tunisia has adopted an approach based on the notion of social gender by creating the Commission of Women and Development within the framework of development plans in order to put both policies and programmes on the right track. Also, the President's electoral programme 2009-2014 presented the idea of social gender as an approach to produce statistics and research at the national level and, in this regard, a "Center for research, studies, documentation, and information on women" was set up to follow up on their situation and reflect on the requirements of a comprehensive improvement in their condition.

Thanks to these achievements, women's gains were reinforced while all data related to attaining the internationally agreed objectives improved such as those related to health as life expectancy for women rose to 75 years in 2008 compared to 67 in 1987 while the maternal death rate stood at 37.7 per one thousand. Moreover, the infant mortality rate decreased to 16 per one thousand thanks to solidarity-based mechanisms with the participation of civil society.

**Mr President**

Tunisia also gave priority to making women an effective participant in the knowledge society. The rate of girls aged 6 attending primary schools has reached 99%. 58% and 60% of students respectively in college and universities are girls. Women also represent 44% of university professors and 47% of researchers.

On the other hand, and in full conformity with the Beijing objectives, women's participation at the political, economic, and social levels was strengthened as women represent 27% of the Parliament's members as well as of all elected municipal officials. In fact, the Presidential programme for the period 2009-2014 will give Tunisian women more opportunities and perspectives through a stronger presence in leading and decision-making positions of no less than 35%. These initiatives encouraged women to join civil society and political parties.

This approach was even more bolstered by initiatives undertaken by the Honorable Leila Ben Ali, First Lady of Tunisia, and current President of the Arab Women Association, in favor of women, supporting all international efforts to promote women's emancipation and ensure support to all related issues.

Among these initiatives, I would like to mention the one calling for the creation of an Arab Commission of International Humanitarian Law for Women, to examine ways of protecting women in war and conflict zones as well as during natural disasters and that has been adopted by the Arab League in 2009. The Arab strategy to put an end to violence against women will also be launched from Tunis on the occasion of the International Women's Day.

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that promoting the status of women is not exclusively a women's task but one that requires the involvement of men and their true belief in gender equality. It is also an issue that requires educating young people and raising their awareness.

**Mr President**

I am convinced that our meeting and, later, its outcome will give a strong impetus to our common efforts in materializing social equality and justice between men and women and will create a true harmony with the Beijing process and the Millennium Development Objectives as well as with our commitments to all relevant treaties and conventions.

After elevating women's status from equality to full participation, Tunisia will carry on its efforts to further advance women's gains and promoting their status within the family and society.

I thank you.