

On the occasion of International Women's Day: Appeal condemning violence against women

Voices from the Arab world decry violence against women

This appeal is launched by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), on the occasion of International Women's Day. It was circulated in member countries undergoing political transition (Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen) as well as in the ESCWA host country, Lebanon. Arab figures from various intellectual backgrounds have signed it, cognizant of the challenges faced by women in the process of democratic transition in the Arab region.

Every year on this date, the world observes International Women's Day. This year, Women's Day is particularly significant for the Arab world as Arab countries and societies are undergoing historic changes laying the foundation for a better future; a future that guarantees human rights, human dignity, individual freedoms and equal citizenship for all. We hope that these changes will lead Arab countries away from oppression and dictatorship, toward freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

Women have been at the forefront of the masses claiming freedom and dignity side by side with men sharing their firm resolve to realize that dream and put an end to longstanding suffering and pain of which they bore the greatest burden. They have long suffered from physical and sexual violence, discrimination within their families, denial of their right to health and education and exclusion from economic and political decision-making.

Today, amidst promising developments in the region, women remain subject to new forms of violence that threaten their safety, affect their physical integrity, endanger their lives and deny them the right to realize their aspirations and fulfil their potential. Violence against women is not a new phenomenon, but it has taken on a new and alarming dimension and has become a means to obstruct change and hinder democratic transition.

On this day, our thoughts go to Palestinian women who suffer all types of abuse, displacement and violence, under an illegal occupation that aims to uproot and replace them through settlement expansion. They are to be upheld as an example in resilience and the never-ending struggle for justice and life.

We, the signatories of this appeal, value the courage and determination of Arab women to fight all types of violence against them, and admire their resolve to reject tyranny and to hold others accountable for their deeds;

We condemn all types of violence against women and all threats to their right to lead a decent and safe life and to fully participate in all aspects of society. We consider violence against women as an affront to fundamental moral and religious values and to the aspirations of all members of the society;

We reaffirm that violence not only harms women, but also the society as a whole, undermining the credibility of all systems and preventing people from living in harmony. Violence hinders progress, in a world which needs the full potential of men and women to realize human development and prosperity;

We reiterate our commitment to protect the human rights of women, to empower them to seek justice and to defend their role and value as active members of society;

We call for stringent rules and procedures to identify the perpetrators of crimes of violence against women, to hold them accountable and to end impunity;

We declare our resolve to enshrine the right for physical integrity and respect for human dignity as a fundamental principle of law, in political, social and cultural life. There is no acceptable justification to denying any individual the right to a safe and decent life and the aspiration to a better future guaranteeing justice, equality and human dignity for all, a future in which no one suffers discrimination on the basis of race, colour or gender.

Signatories: Abdallah Bouano, Abdallah Saef, Abdallah Shahata, Abdel Kader Helal, Abdel Karim Al-Eryani, Abdel Moneem Aboul Foutouh, Abdel Wahhab Al-Ounsi, Abu Yaareb Al-Marzouki, Albaji Kaed Sabsi, Al-Habib Al-Shoubani, Ali Fayad, Ali Nasser Mohamad, Ali Oumlil, Amat Al-Alim Al-Soswa, Amina Nseir, Amro Moussa, Bahia Hariri, Basimat Al-Hakkawi, Essam Sharaf, Ezzedine Al-Asbahi, Fahmi Howeidi, Farida Allaghi, Fathalla Walaalou, Fathi Al-Jerbi, Ghassan Saleme, Gouda Abdel Khalek, Haidar Abou Bakr Al-Attas, Hamdin Sabbahi, Hani Fahs, Houriya Mashhour, Kamal Abdel Latif, Klovis Maksoud, Mahmoud Gebril, Maya Al-Jeribi, Mervat Tallawy, Mohamad Al-Baradei, Mohamad Al-Magharief, Mohamad Al-Mekhlafi, Mohamad Oujar, Mohrezia Al-Obeidi, Mostafa Al-Ramid, Mostafa Ben Jaafar, Mostafa Kamel Al-Sayyed, Moulay Ahmad Al-Iraki, Nader Bakkar, Nader Fergany, Rabab Al-Sadr, Ramzia Al-Eryani, Rashida Ben Massoud, Saad Eddine Al-Othmani, Salwa Boughaisis, Sami Brahem, Samir Dilo, Samir Morcos, Sultan Al-Otwani, Tawakkol Kerman, Yassin Sayed Neeman, Rima Khalaf.