



Women, Family and Childhood Department

High Level Meeting on

**"Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Women and Girls,
Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
in the Arab region"**

The Post- 2015 Development Agenda for Women

"Opportunities and Challenges"

Cairo Declaration

**Cairo, Egypt, League of Arab States Headquarters
February 23, 2014**

Cairo Declaration

We, representatives of Arab countries governments, participating in the "high-level meeting on Implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Women and Girls, Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in the Arab Region: The Development Post 2015 Agenda– Opportunities and Challenges,”, at the League of Arab States, in Cairo, attended by the Secretary- General of the Arab League and Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), on February 23, 2014,

Expressing our thanks to the Secretariat of the Arab League, Department of Women, Child and Family, the UN Women, and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), for their efforts that contributed to the success of this meeting,

Emphasizing the values, principles and objectives contained in the Arab women advancement Strategy, the Arab Charter on Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and their annexes, the Beijing Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and the UN Declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),

Appreciating the Arab efforts seeking to implement all the agreements for the advancement of women and to ensure women’s rights and ways to promote women’s empowerment at all levels in the Arab region,

Highlighting the work done by the Arab countries in order to develop legislation aimed at promoting political, economic, social and cultural participation of Arab women, and the creation of new mechanisms to monitor the implementation of this legislation and reporting violations, as well as steps taken by a number of Arab countries to withdraw their reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and the implementation of the Beijing Platform,

Recalling the findings and recommendations of the Civil Society Forum, held in Cairo, at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the Arab League on February 17 to 18, 2014 , to prepare for the 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in cooperation between the Arab League, UN Women and ESCWA, attended by experts on the issues of women's empowerment in the region to discuss ways to develop the status of Arab women and gather support for a women's plan of action beyond 2015,

Applauding the constructive and fruitful discussions that took place throughout the working sessions of the meeting, including on women’s empowerment, key challenges faced, and to set milestones and a plan of work for the Arab Women agenda beyond 2015;

Key Messages:

There is consensus and solidarity in the Arab region on the need for a comprehensive stand-alone goal on women's empowerment and gender equality to be included in the post 2015 development agenda, as well as the need for gender mainstreaming in all aspects and goals of the post-2015 agenda;

We will work to ensure the implementation of social justice policies, poverty eradication, and health coverage due to their direct impact on the status of women;

We call on increased capacities and support mechanisms for women's political participation and increased rates of participation of women in all elected assemblies;

The expansion of democratic practices and consultation at the national and local levels to ensure equitable distribution of resources and development aid;

The expansion of temporary special measures to ensure impact in all areas of women's participation;

Support to national mechanisms and councils of women to be more effective and have significant impact in the implementation of women's empowerment policies in Arab societies;

To work on the collection and dissemination of available data and ensure methods of freedom of information, including establishing core databases of information, under the umbrella of the Arab League, in cooperation UN Women, and in coordination with the concerned governmental/non-governmental and civil society organizations.

To call for the adoption of public gender-responsive budgeting as mechanism for social justice;

To push for the adoption of new government standards for gender-responsive indicators, including the adoption of statistics disaggregated by sex to support in determining development priorities;

To increase mechanisms of prevention, protection and compensation for survivors of violence;

The development of cultural systems and social norms to produce more just social patterns, through the development of new strategies in education, media, positive and smart partnerships with religious institutions, and promoting the exchange of experiences between Member States;

Recognize the need to work with men, boys and students, as partners and strategic allies in the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls;

Emphasize the importance of a solid, rights-based post-2015 development framework, including on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Optional Protocol thereto, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and the Outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development;

Women's political participation:

- Ensure a national constitutional umbrella of non-discrimination against women that recognizes and respects the inherent human dignity of all peoples, as included in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Arab Declaration of Human Rights;
- Develop national legislation aimed at bridging the gap between women and men in all political, economic, social fields and eliminate all forms of discrimination;
- Develop national electoral systems that ensure the political participation of marginalized groups, including women, the poor, and minorities;
- Create a more equitable environment in public offices and ensure women's participation in decision-making on the basis of merit and competence;
- Support the development of temporary special measures to enhance the capacity of women and push for their active participation in political parties, trade and labor unions, and elected councils and civil society organizations of all types to ensure the quality and efficiency of participants in the political process;
- Develop databases of national indicators and statistics on gender equality and the integration of women in political bodies.

Women's Economic Empowerment:

- Recognize women's right to work on a just and fair basis with equal pay for work of equal value;
- Provide a work environment where the personal health and safety of employees, access to leadership positions for women, ensuring the protection of women against physical abuse in the workplace, and the right to equal tax treatment and advancement in the work place, including through mentoring programs and technical and vocational training, is considered;
- Ensure equal access for women in the realm of economic empowerment and equal control over productive assets and resources, including access to information, land, property, finance, water and energy;

- Empower women to participate in the development and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies based on the Millennium Development Goals and other policy reform processes;
- Promote women's opportunities in the areas of credit, vocational training and linking these to the labor market and skills development;
- Reduce the negative effects of globalization and any adverse effects resulting from the implementation of policies and programs related to trade and economy so that they do not disproportionately negatively impact women;
- Secure the financial resources required to support gender equality in national and sectorial plans and to ensure that these plans are implemented;
- Recognize unpaid care work and redistribution of wealth through social protection policies and access to basic services.

Social Transformation:

- Implement national action plans to take special measures for capacity building and ensure access to basic services, including sexual and reproductive health and education, for women, children and the elderly, as well as minors, unmarried, heads of households, widows and divorced women, persons with disabilities and all vulnerable groups without discrimination;
- Support women's rights on an equal footing with men's in regards to the standard of living, with dignity for her and her family, and ensure the provision of adequate food, clothing and adequate shelter that meet basic needs;
- Support the right of ownership for women and protect women from arbitrary eviction of their homes, and the right to continuous improvement of living conditions, giving special consideration to vulnerable groups of women, including rural women, women heads of households, migrant female workers, and older women;
- Strengthen equality policies and mechanisms for women and men to enjoy equal protection under the law, and women's effective access to justice, including free legal assistance, and ensure the effective protection of women through relevant courts and institutions;
- Develop protection and social security policies in both the formal - public and private - and non-formal sectors, including social insurance and universal health coverage including compensation in the event of sickness, and maternity benefits, paid vacations, and benefits for pensions and disability, and compensation for

work injuries, unemployment benefits and family allowances, and to ensure universal health coverage, especially for persons working in the informal sector.

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls:

- Develop action plans and comprehensive national strategies in the area of violence against women, and allocate the necessary resources for its implementation, while ensuring comprehensive and integrated legislation that criminalize all forms of violence against women, including amending existing laws and legislation related to so-called honor crimes to ensure that there are no provisions to avoid sentencing or reduced sentences;
- Recognize the importance of referring cases of violence against women to the formal justice system, even if it is dealt within the framework of Sharia (Islamic Law) or customary provisions, while emphasizing that the responsibility to refer violent crimes is primarily the responsibility of the executive and legal institutions;
- Adopt more comprehensive prevention measures by focusing on public awareness, media outreach, and curriculum review and development to ensure women's human rights and duties of the protection of her human dignity at the family and community levels, and provide ways to prevent violence and protect survivors, including offering treatment and rehabilitation facilities;
- Ensure protection from all forms of sexual violence, and the importance of focusing on reproductive health and rights, including the provision of reproductive health services and physical protection, especially for women living in rural and remote areas;
- Identify appropriate indicators to monitor the quality of services provided to the survivors and evaluating the services on a regular basis;
- Pay special attention to the protection of women, girls and refugee women under occupation from all forms of violence and exploitation during unstable periods, armed conflicts and wars, and during displacement and asylum;
- Amend existing legislation and laws on the national level, and work to reconcile them, to ensure that they are rights-based and survivor focused.

Conclusion:

- We, the participants in the "High-Level meeting on Implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Women and Girls, Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in the Arab Region" pledge:
 - To devote our energies and resources to implement what we committed to consider Cairo declaration as the Arab Women agenda for the post 2015.
 - To support a stand-alone goal on gender equality and empowerment of women as independent goal for the post-2015 sustainable development framework;
 - To join forces for the continuation of efforts to raise awareness and to ensure the implementation of commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action in light of the 20th anniversary of the Platform;
 - To hold regular preparatory meetings at the Arab level, and consider this first high-level preparatory meeting as a new milestone in our joint work.

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