

BEIRUT DECLARATION
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 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 review 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 of the United Nations 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 from conflicts and tensions for decades. It is one of the world regions most exposed to wars and armed conflicts and 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 territory, 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, as a result of the continuing occupation by Israel and its confiscation and settlement of land, demolition of homes, razing of agricultural lands, partition of Palestinian territory and construction of the wall in Palestinian territory. Difficult circumstances such as these are also being experienced by the people of Iraq, which has suffered from occupation and repeated wars and lack 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" has been chosen as the theme of the present conference as it 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 as the focus of concern 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 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 Beijing Conference recommendations that they pledged to accomplish, according to the responses of those countries to the questionnaire sent by the United Nations to governments.

8. 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 the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

9. We recognize that the findings of the questionnaire have highlighted the existence of challenges that require further work and effort, including illiteracy, the school dropout rate of girls, violence against women and discrimination in penalties and legislation, in addition to social traditions, customs and practices. The findings have also made clear that the region continues to suffer from the problems of poverty, unemployment, budget restrictions on programmes for the advancement of women 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. Consistent review and updating of national legislation and amendment of discriminatory legislation, action to invigorate and apply the laws in effect, review of laws and legislation on political parties and electoral systems in order to strengthen the role of women and increase their participation in political activity;

11. Linkage of women's issues with broader issues and the use of positive political rhetoric for the benefit of women, in addition to efforts to remove the political obstacles and security concerns that hinder their progress;

12. Raising awareness among women of the linkages between their issues and broader policy issues and the impact of broader policies on their interests and, also, emphasizing the importance of qualifications and training for women for their assumption of positions of leadership and career advancement;

13. Formation of committees on raising awareness that will familiarize women, men and youth with the concept of human and legal rights for women and the importance of the role that women play in society;

14. Establishment of an observatory for projects and programmes concerned with women's issues in the Arab States;

15. Use of national data on women as a starting point from which realistic strategies for women's development can be outlined;

16. Achievement of communication and solidarity between Arab women parliamentarians and between them and their counterparts in other countries, with the objective of raising awareness of Arab women's issues and achieving mutual support with regard to women's issues, which could be facilitated by the issuance of a publication through which experiences could be exchanged and the parliamentary network strengthened, in addition to seeking to foster cooperation and constructive competition between women in an effort to improve their participation in political life;

17. Persistence in building partnerships between non-governmental organizations and official institutions based on integration and cooperation in the formulation of broad policies, strategies and proposed plans, the formulation and implementation of projects, programmes and proposals for draft legislation, in addition to encouraging the participation of these organizations in conferences, the preparation of reports and working papers, membership of official delegations, monitoring and follow-up on implementation and the exercise of vigorous pressure with regard to the amendment and reform of the laws relating to women, including follow-up on the implementation of these policies, laws and programmes, in an advisory capacity to the League of Arab States;
18. Creation of a climate of trust between non-governmental organizations concerned with women and government authorities, in order to provide political support for such organizations in their work, which calls for the amendment of existing laws and the promulgation of new laws to regulate their activities in a manner that guarantees them freedom of action;
19. Establishment of networks between non-governmental organizations concerned with women's issues at the local, regional and international levels in order to maximize the benefit derived from their work;
20. Assumption by national organizations of a significant role in raising the awareness of the various groups in society, in particular youth, of the need for gender equality and bringing about change in cultural concepts in this regard;
21. Provision of assistance to civil society organizations in order to achieve a qualitative shift in their role, which should not be confined to the provision of social services but should also cover the provision of services in the context of integrated development, and their liberation from the administrative fetters that prevent them from assuming their required role;
22. Facilitation of communication between women media figures and with other parties by the following means:
 - (a) Establishment of an association for Arab women media figures;
 - (b) Establishment of colleges for media and training centres for women, in particular in view of the information revolution;
 - (c) Holding workshops and seminars at ESCWA that bring together Arab women media figures, women intellectuals and civil society organizations;
 - (d) Preparation by ESCWA of a comprehensive directory of the names of women intellectuals, media figures and researchers, in order to improve media coverage of women's issues;
23. Focus on highlighting some of the experiences of women in the media at the base level, their struggles and the allocation of the necessary resources, broadcasting a programme on women migrants and monitoring and sharing successful experiences in the media;
24. Attribution of equal importance to the discourse of media directed abroad and that of domestic media;
25. Efforts to alter the distorted image of women in the media;
26. Efforts to reach a broader population through the media, including residents of remote areas, through the eradication of illiteracy and the utilization of audio-visual media and direct forms of communication;
27. Appealing to Arab women to be concerned with the issues of women affected by wars;

28. Establishment of an Arab information network for gathering data on the situation of women in the Arab region with a view to facilitating the exchange of information on women between the Arab States and comparison of their situation with that of women in other countries;

29. Establishment of a mechanism for 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 non-governmental organizations on evaluation of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, for inclusion with the report of governments.