

Press Release

Meeting on Women and the Media Opens in Beirut

Beirut, 12 November 2002 (**UN Information Centre**) – Women media experts and journalists converged on the UN House in Beirut today for the opening of an expert group meeting on Women and the Media. The objective of the four-day meeting is to assess how the media can play a pivotal role in improving the image of women worldwide and in empowering women at the local, regional and international levels. The meeting will also tackle the participation and access of women to the media. It was organized by the UN's Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), in collaboration with the UN's Department of Public Information (DPI), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

In an opening statement, Lebanon's Minister of Information Ghazi Aridi said the media has an important role to play in influencing public opinion, which is why the media should be used to shed light on the problems that women face around the world. However, Aridi warned of any one-sided reporting of events or of attempts to use the plight of women only to promote state policies. A case in point: Afghani women were oppressed for over 20 years under the regime of the Taliban. It was only when a war was being planned in Afghanistan that the plight of women there was highlighted and used as one of the justifications for war. In his speech, Mr. Aridi also touched on the plight of Palestinian women living under Israeli occupation.

In another opening statement, ESCWA's Executive Secretary Ms. Mervat Tallawy said the media, with all the technological advancement within its reach, could help in transforming the traditions and customs which have greatly hampered the advancement of Arab women. "We hope the media will change ... the negative and stereotypical image of women," Ms. Tallawy said. She hailed the numerous UN conferences organized at the international level since the 1970s and which have helped promote the revival of women and the improvement of their conditions. She said media should begin according priority to women's issues in addition to political and economic ones.

"The nature and scale of women's continued marginalization in the media, allied with the difficulty of establishing effective systems of accountability in an increasingly commercial and globalizing media marketplace, mean that no single strategy can accomplish a great deal on its own. Ideally, a variety of approaches is needed which support and sustain each other," said Carolyn Hannan, Director of the UN's Division for the Advancement of Women, in a message read out by Ms. Amina Adam of DAW. She highlighted the recommendations derived from the 1995 Beijing Conference, the Beijing +5 outcomes and the 1996 meeting of the Commission of the

Status of Women where the importance of women and the media was prominently outlined.

Speaking on behalf of the Department of Public Information, Ms. Therese Gastaut, Director of its Strategic Communications Division said, “The UN has identified two strategic objectives under the critical area of women and the media. The first calls for women’s increased participation and access to the media, specifically at the decision-making level. The second objective is to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in mainstream media.” She said DPI will be looking to the results of the Expert Group Meeting as it strives to improve its communication programmes for the advancement of women.