



GENDER REGIONAL PLATFORM



DECLARATION

EURO-MED WOMEN'S RIGHTS CIVIL SOCIETY CONFERENCE

From Ministerial Conclusions to Gender Equality Policy Making in the Euro-Med region

22-23 November 2017, Cairo

Since the first Ministerial Conference in Istanbul 2006, the UfM Ministerial Process on strengthening the role of women in society has been approached by civil society as one of the major tools to promote gender equality in the Euro-Med region. Following up on the Ministerial Conclusions, Euromed Feminist Initiative launched in 2015 a women's rights CSOs-led dialogue process between civil society and decision makers with the support of the European Union. The outcome is a Gender Regional Platform, developed by over 600 participants. The Civil Society Conference held on November 22nd-23rd, 2017 in Cairo has been the final step in this process, before the 4th Ministerial Conference.

The Civil Society Conference gathered over 130 representatives from 107 organizations and networks, as well as academia and media from 26 countries. Participants shared expertise and analyses of the situation in the region, exchanged experiences from the ground, and based on the priorities and policy orientations of the Gender Regional Platform, produced recommendations for concrete policy measures, possible to be implemented by the governments before the 5th UfM Ministerial Conference.

Participants reaffirmed that the status of gender equality is a measure of democracy and development, and cannot be dissociated from the wider political, social, cultural and economic trends. They expressed a unanimous concern about the global regression of women's rights and the shrinking space and means for the action of the civil society as a whole, which contributes to limiting the action and influence of the women's rights organizations in particular. Furthermore, the turbulent developments and the resort to militarized solutions to the conflicts in the region are often used by governments as excuses to postpone the adoption of measures and policies leading to strengthened women's rights.

In this context, participants emphasized that priority must be given to sustainable gender equality policies to face the global wave of social conservatism, religious extremism, nationalism and populism, and to favor democracy and development in the Euro-Med region as well as political solutions to all conflicts. This is all the more so, since the rise of violent extremism has led to increased threats to women's lives. It must thus be treated as a security issue integral to the ***Women, Peace and Security Agenda***.

Participants thus urged Ministers to make the 4th Ministerial Conference a turning point, and take concrete and tangible measures towards improving the status of gender equality in the whole region. They also urged governments to allocate the necessary human, material and financial resources to all reforms, to ensure their implementation.

They reaffirmed the role of the Gender Regional Platform as a mobiliser of both local and national women's rights organizations in Euro-Med and a key in furthering the dialogue with policy makers, hence bringing the grassroots demands to policy level.

The Civil Society Conference recommends therefore the following concrete policies in the areas of:

I. Women's participation in public life and decision-making

In spite of the different national contexts, all States face common pattern of exclusion of women in decision-making: even though political parties appeal to democracy and citizenship, they de facto have not included women, women's rights and gender equality in their political agendas. Developing a comprehensive gender equality legal framework in each country, taking the examples of the most advanced in this regard, and ensuring the independence of the women's movement to support its implementation, are crucial means to ensure women's meaningful participation.

1. Adopt proportional electoral systems, combined with binding gender quotas of a minimum 40% presence of either sex in electoral lists and governance bodies in order to overcome deficiencies in democracy. Establish follow-up mechanism on non-compliance through significant sanctions, including disqualifying non-complying lists.
2. Adopt comprehensive gender equality laws to address gender inequalities at all levels (wage inequality, unequal access to resources, gender based violence, stereotypical media portrayal of women), accompanied with means for their implementation to ensure and safeguard women's rights from regressive measures. Such a legal development would have a strong symbolic value and should be a point of departure for the implementation of basic human women's rights, enabling tangible change.
3. Ensure that legislation and public policies give special consideration to the situation of vulnerable women who, for reasons of age, disability or their belonging to some minority group, might suffer intersectional discrimination.
4. Adopt NGOs legislation ensuring freedom of expression and movement; ensure sufficient funding to women's rights organizations on both side of the Mediterranean, to enable their independence and capacity of action so that they can play their leading role in reshaping society and contribute to the fight against extremisms.

II. Women's economic participation

A real change in the field of economic participation requires structural transformation of the economic system, based on the need of human development, and not on the profit of a minority. States should assume their responsibility in this field and develop economic policies that benefit women and men equally. To this end, they must structurally address both the private sphere of reproduction and the public sphere of production.

1. Adopt legislation and provide public services and infrastructures aimed at allowing women's access to, and participation in, the labor market in equal conditions with men, accompanied by control procedures, mandatory equality plans for companies and substantial non-compliance sanctions.

2. Provide a non-transferable, publicly funded parental leave for working fathers as well as for working mothers. Engage in policy making that ensures shared parental responsibility beyond parental leaves, using best experiences.
3. Engage in policy making towards equal pay for work of equal value and equal access to career opportunities and responsibilities. Provide control mechanisms and sanctions for employers that incur salary discrimination of women, both direct and indirect.
4. Provide permanent and structural access to information on women's socio-economic rights.

III. Combating all forms of violence against women and girls

Legal and socially institutionalized discrimination against women enables the perpetuation of violence against them. In all situations, violence against women is caused by normative and institutional denial of fundamental human rights, by lack of gender equality, by oppression and discrimination, often rooted in the law, as well as by the impunity of perpetrators and the absence of legal and social protection mechanisms for victims. Adopting a comprehensive approach requires the implementation of good legislation and resolutions, which in turn requires political will, zero tolerance towards violence, political and financial resources, and training of all institutional stakeholders, accompanied with large-scale awareness raising campaigns on the root causes of men's violence against women. Despite the growing and deepening consensus about the nature and cost of this violence, governments continue to be disconcertingly slow in adopting appropriate and comprehensive policies to address it. Today, there is quantitative and qualitative evidence on violence against women showing that the feminist movement is a critical catalyst for comprehensive policy development.

1. Adopt comprehensive legislation combating VAW that recognizes and criminalizes all forms of violence against women and protects and assists victims and their children, based on the best examples of such legislation in the Euro-Med region, and dedicate human and financial means for its implementation.
2. Establish an inter-sector coordinating body (observatory) and Inter-Ministerial Coordination to follow the monitoring of the implementation of the law and coordinate the governmental efforts addressing all forms of VAW.
3. Institutionalize and provide regular training programs for all professional actors, authorities and services that provide assistance to women subjected to violence.
4. Ensure that NGOs working on violence against women and providing shelter enjoy safe and unrestricted working conditions and are guaranteed sufficient resources to carry out their activities.
5. Organize in all countries, in cooperation with women's rights CSOs, a national campaign of zero tolerance towards VAW. This should include the budgeting of national studies on VAW and the publication of their results, as well as educational activities recognizing and condemning VAW.

IV. Challenging cultural and social norms and eliminate gender stereotypes, particularly through education and media

Patriarchal perceptions of male superiority are still dominant. Within the patriarchal structure of power, women and men are given different roles and allowed to enjoy different rights. Traditional mentalities and stereotypes are reproduced by both men and women. Educational systems and the media play an important role in this, as they contribute to sustain culture, tradition and customs that still depict women as inferior and act as sources of violence.

Opening a public debate aimed at combating prejudice and stereotypes needs a coordinated action in the media, the workplace, the political sphere and trade unions, schools, training centers and civil society, in order to make visible every-day manifestations of structural inequalities. This action requires the involvement of men, who are most often the ones in position of power to make decisions that can bring forward positive changes.

1. Reinforce gender mainstreaming in the ministries as a State priority, in particular in the ministry of education, accompanied with relevant policies and adequate budgeting.
2. Form a multisector committee with the participation of academics, independent CSOs and gender experts to examine all educational curricula and propose alternatives that include human rights and international WR instruments, gender equality, gender stereotypes and VAW.
3. Institutionalize and provide regular training programs on gender equality issues for all educators and teachers; In collaboration with CSOs, organise public broad awareness campaigns and local dialogue processes to address mindsets and behaviours that subjugate women.
4. Develop a charter with standards for gender equality within and through the media, addressing women's access to decision-making positions in media organizations, institutions and regulatory bodies, media representations of women, women's rights, and gender equality coverage.

V. Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Euro-Med region

One of the biggest obstacles to women's security is violence against women. When a conflict erupts, women become a "war zone" themselves. Sexual violence, assault, torture and slavery increase in the context of armed conflict. Advancement of women's rights is therefore a key to promoting and preserving the rule of law in any society, in particular in times of crises. Women's equal participation and role in social, economic and political decision making as well as in peace negotiations are crucial in finding political solutions to the conflicts in the region, including solutions related to the burning issue of displaced persons and refugees.

We need to strengthen the connection between the Ministerial Process and all international agreements ratified by Euro-Med governments, in particular CEDAW and UNSCR 1325, and to approach them together with the SDGs in one common frame. Until the next Ministerial meeting on women's rights, and as a priority, the conference recommends the adoption of the following policy measures:

1. Adopt a specific Women's Peace and Security Agenda (WPSA) ensuring that governmental actions in the Euro-Med region have a gender sensitive approach to conflicts.
2. Urgently initiate a regional peace process geared towards finding political solutions of all the conflicts in the region and towards ending the occupation of Palestine, enabling the establishment of a Palestinian independent State.
3. Organise structural access of women's CSOs and women's rights defenders to participation in formal peace negotiations in the region, so that issues related to equal citizenship and equality between women and men are present in all peace and transitional processes from their inception.
4. Develop and adopt in all Euro-Med countries NAPs for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 as a goal in itself and a means to include women in peace negotiation and decision making and curb violence against women. Include refugee women in the preparation of these NAPs and in all management positions in camps and refugee settlements.
5. Provide asylum to refugees and migrant women who escape gender based sexual violence, and provide social rehabilitation.
6. Adopt special laws to protect women migrant workers from violence and exploitation.
7. Include violence against women in all the national security policies.

VI. Mechanism to implement gender equality through the Ministerial Process

Support must be given to the creation of women policy agencies in recognition that, although women are traditionally marginalized, they are neither a minority nor a group with more specific needs than men, but are rather half of society, half of Humanity. These agencies will help to develop policies based on the acknowledgement that the marginalization of women is an obstacle to peace, security and development. In this regard:

1. Promote and support the creation of Ministries of Women's Rights, Governmental and Parliamentary Commissions of Gender Equality and/or Women's Rights in the whole Euro-Med region. In the absence of Ministries of Women's Rights, create Inter-ministerial committees to ensure inter-ministerial coordination on women's rights.
2. Allocate financial resources to gender or equal opportunity units in the different ministries and appoint gender experts in these units to ensure proper gender mainstreaming.
3. Undertake permanent gender training programs for ministerial staff in general, and for the ministerial units responsible for gender mainstreaming in particular, including training on the elaboration of gender sensitive budgets.
4. Support the Gender Regional Platform as a mechanism that responds to the call to unify efforts on gender equality policy making and represents a space for genuine dialogue and structural cooperation between women's rights CSOs, decision makers and stakeholders in this field.