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Arab Parliaments Dialogue on the Regional Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after Thirty Years

29–30 May 2024
Amman, Jordan

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the League of Arab States and the Regional Office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), organized the "Arab Parliaments Dialogue on the Regional Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after Thirty Years" in Amman, Jordan. Representatives of parliaments from 14 Arab countries, involved in the advancement of women and gender equality, participated in the meeting. They reviewed the achievements of their parliaments in developing legislation that promoted gender equality, particularly: women's participation in public life and decision-making positions; the right to work, decent work environment and entrepreneurial opportunities; protection from violence; the rights and protection of the most vulnerable women and girls; and family matters and personal status. Participants exchanged experiences and best practices on the role and contribution of Arab parliaments to advancing women's issues and monitoring progress towards the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action thirty years after its adoption. Participants also discussed the challenges facing their work in this area. The dialogue resulted in the following key messages and recommendations that would be submitted to the high-level meeting to be held on 9 December 2024 in Muscat, Oman.

Key messages and recommendations

1. Affirm the unified position of Arab States on the central importance of the Palestinian cause and their full support for putting an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory, maintained since 1967, upholding the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and calling for the cessation of hostilities and genocide in the Gaza Strip; demand that Israel ceases its settlement activities and colonial policy in the West Bank and Jerusalem in addition to all policies and actions targeting Palestinian detainees; and call upon the international community and United Nations organizations to compel the Israeli occupying authority to implement international law and the International Court of Justice decisions.

2. Consider the repercussions of the global, regional and national challenges that Arab countries have faced over the past years, such as armed conflicts, the Israeli occupation, the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economic crisis and climate change; and explore their impact on the most vulnerable women and girls, and on the ability of Arab States affected by armed conflict and terrorism to achieve progress in the critical areas of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and in the indicators of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.
3. Enhance the pivotal role of parliaments in the national review process of the Beijing Platform for Action by highlighting this matter in the guidance note for the comprehensive review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action issued by UN-Women and the regional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, and by urging women's national machineries to involve parliaments and political parties in the relevant national consultations.
4. Intensify efforts to build the capacity of Arab parliaments to draft and develop legislation that promotes gender equality and gender-responsive budgeting by establishing a specialized Arab parliamentary platform, organizing regional workshops to exchange experiences and lessons learned, and highlighting good practices in Arab parliaments.
5. Emphasize the importance of developing mechanisms for the implementation of legislation and strengthen the oversight role of parliaments by adopting regulations and preparing and implementing relevant strategies and plans.
6. Identify gaps in national data on women and development, improve data collection and analysis through quantitative and qualitative studies, and facilitate parliamentarians' access to data to support them in drafting and adopting evidence-based laws and policies.
7. Develop clear and specific indicators and benchmarks for conflict-affected countries, taking into account the different country contexts, particularly those facing armed conflict.
8. Engage with religious leaders to address religiously associated misconceptions that perpetuate the patriarchal system and stereotypical norms, perceptions and roles of women, and that prevent the needed legislative reform aimed at enhancing women's role in public life.
9. Emphasize that special measures are temporary to overcome historical discrimination against women in order to reach parity, and that quotas and seats reserved for women in elected councils represent the minimum level of participation and should not be an obstacle to women's access to competitively won seats.
10. Ensure that representative institutional structures and workplaces are sensitive to women and the family, allowing them to carry out their work duties in the public sphere.
11. Build on legislative and procedural achievements in the field of women's participation in public life, taking into account the national political context to gradually reach gender parity in elected and appointed councils and decision-making positions.
12. Continue efforts to amend the labour law and civil service regulations according to international standards in matters related to maternity and paternity leave, the provision of child care, and protection from violence and harassment, by adopting laws that redistribute responsibilities between the government and the private sector towards the rights of male and female employees.

13. Adopt a new approach to the provision of care to children, older persons and persons with disabilities, based on the principle of care economy and taking into account the need to alleviate the burden of unpaid care and redistribute it at the household and institutional levels.
14. Continue reviewing legislation to enhance women's financial inclusion and entrepreneurship, and adopt fiscal and financial policies that encourage investment in small and medium-sized enterprises and access to finance, especially in rural and remote areas.
15. Adopt innovative mechanisms to ensure parliamentarians' communication with stakeholders and recognize the specific needs of women, either through public hearings or oversight sessions, or by preparing in-depth studies on legislative texts to evaluate the success of implementation of the law and identify gaps that require further legislative amendments in terms of protection from violence, including political violence.
16. Review domestic violence protection laws to consider punitive measures, such as the adoption of alternative punishments and psychosocial treatment for perpetrators, in order to address women's reluctance to report cases of violence for fear of the impact of the breadwinner's imprisonment on the family.
17. Complement the legislative achievements that States have made whether by acceding to the relevant conventions or by adopting laws, including legislation that sets the minimum age for marriage, provides protection for persons with disabilities or criminalizes harmful practices, by enhancing the role of parliaments in tackling the economic and social conditions conducive to such practices.
18. Increase the gender responsiveness of parliaments by achieving gender parity in parliamentary committees, thematic committees and inquiry commissions to consolidate the principle of citizenship.
19. Embrace community-based dialogue in reviewing family and personal status laws to understand the impact of their application on the family, in conformity with religious laws.
20. Emphasize the importance of awareness of the rights granted by legislation, which contribute to more stable family relations by agreeing on the terms of the marriage contract in line with religious laws.