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Regional and global issues

Activities undertaken by ESCWA to follow up on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 20 years (Beijing+20) in the Arab region

Summary

To mark the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, issued at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995, and aimed at achieving gender equality, empowering women and girls in all areas to secure development and peace and acknowledging that women's rights are human rights, the Centre for Women of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has prepared a comprehensive and integrated programme of work to evaluate progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The present report sets out activities undertaken by ESCWA under this programme of work, in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women-Arab States Regional Office and the Woman, Family and Childhood Department of the League of Arab States.

CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION.....	1-3	3
II. ESCWA FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION	4-10	3
A. Workshop for representatives of national mechanisms for women in Arab countries	5	3
B. Consultative workshop for civil society organizations on progress in Implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action	6	3
C. Activities aimed at preparing a consolidated Arab report on implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 20 years after its adoption in the Arab region	7	4
D. Expert group meeting to review the consolidated Arab report on Implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 20 years after its adoption	8	4
E. Arab High-level Conference on Progress Achieved in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 20 Years: Towards Justice and Equality for Women in the Arab Region.....	9	4
F. Preparing a detailed analytical study on the status of women in the Arab Region.....	10	5
ANNEXES		
I. Arab Declaration: Towards Justice and Equality for Women in the Arab Region, Cairo, 2-3 February 2015.....		6
II. Closing statement of civil society organizations in the Arab region participating in the Arab High-Level Conference on progress achieved in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 20 Years: Towards Justice and Equality for Women in the Arab Region, Cairo, 2-3 February 2015		8

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995. Five years later, the General Assembly reviewed the document at its twenty-third special session, held in 2000. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a global framework for achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. It requests the Member States of the United Nations, the international community, civil society and the private sector to put in place strategic measures in 12 critical areas of concern, namely women and the environment; women in power and decision-making; the girl child; women and the economy; women and poverty; violence against women; human rights of women; education and training of women; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; women and health; women and the media; and women and armed conflict.
2. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women is responsible for reviewing the progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action every five years. The Commission undertook reviews in 2000, 2005 and 2010. The 2015 review was conducted at its fifty-ninth session, held from 9 to 20 March 2015. The review process generally results in an outcome document aimed at strengthening international commitment to women's empowerment and identifying work priorities for the next five years.
3. In 2014, the five United Nations regional commissions were tasked with preparing regional reports on progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in their respective regions, on the basis of national reviews of Member States of the United Nations. All five reports were assimilated into a report submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its twenty-third special session and the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-ninth session.

II. ESCWA FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION

4. The ESCWA Centre for Women has prepared a comprehensive and integrated programme of work to follow up on progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, containing several activities implemented in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women-Arab States Regional Office and the Woman, Family and Childhood Department of the League of Arab States.

A. WORKSHOP FOR REPRESENTATIVES OF NATIONAL MECHANISMS FOR WOMEN IN ARAB COUNTRIES

5. A regional workshop for representatives of national mechanisms for women in Arab countries was held in Amman, on 27 and 28 February 2014. The aim was to assist Arab countries in preparing national reviews on progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 20 years after its adoption by presenting and discussing the contents and structure of national reports, in line with the United Nations guidance note on the issue prepared in cooperation with the five regional commissions, and by presenting and discussing the various proposed sections of the reports, their contents and annexes.

B. CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOP FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS ON PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION

6. ESCWA held a consultative workshop for civil society organizations on progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Beirut, on 17 and 18 August 2014. The aim was to discuss progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Arab region from the perspective of civil society organizations. The presentations and discussions highlighted the contributions of civil society organizations to implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to realizing achievements in that regard. Participants tackled key challenges impeding the implementation process, stressing their effects on the role of civil society organizations in achieving the desired progress. They agreed to prepare a statement of behalf of participating organizations, aimed at setting out a unified position on

women's issues in the Arab region in the light of regional and international developments; and at identifying priorities and visions for the future and developing recommendations to hasten the implementation process in the Arab region.

C. ACTIVITIES AIMED AT PREPARING A CONSOLIDATED ARAB REPORT ON IMPLEMENTING
THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION 20 YEARS AFTER ITS
ADOPTION IN THE ARAB REGION

7. ESCWA has prepared a consolidated Arab report on implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 20 years after its adoption in the Arab region, on the basis of 21 national reports from the following Arab countries: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

D. EXPERT GROUP MEETING TO REVIEW THE CONSOLIDATED ARAB REPORT ON IMPLEMENTING
THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION 20 YEARS
AFTER ITS ADOPTION

8. ESCWA held an expert group meeting to review the first draft of the consolidated Arab report on implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 20 years after its adoption in Beirut, on 22 and 23 October 2014. Representatives of national women's departments and bodies in Arab countries and of several regional and international organizations participated in the meeting, which included presentations and discussions on the first draft of the regional report to enrich its contents. The meeting was divided into several sessions focusing on the following: a general review of the implementation of the outcomes of the Fourth World Conference on Women and an overview of previous international reviews in the run-up to Beijing+20; discussing the status of women in the light of previous and current challenges in the Arab region and analysing the political, economic and social dimensions and demographic changes linked to migration and displacement as a result of conflict and violence; highlighting international processes related to the Fourth World Conference on Women from a gender perspective, including the Millennium Development Goals, the post-2015 development agenda, the international Conference on Population and Development, the sustainable development goals and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development; reviewing the objectives of the regional report and its preparation methodology and conducting detailed discussions on its contents and the results of national reviews; identifying lessons learned from collaborations between Governments, regional governmental and non-governmental organizations and international organizations within the framework for implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

E. ARAB HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION AFTER 20 YEARS:
TOWARDS JUSTICE AND EQUALITY FOR WOMEN IN THE ARAB REGION

9. The Arab High-level Conference on Progress Achieved in the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action After 20 Years, on the theme "Towards justice and equality for women in the Arab region", was held in Cairo on 2 and 3 February 2015, attended by representatives of women's ministries, national mechanisms for the advancement of women in Arab countries, civil society organizations and United Nations agencies. The aim was to review national achievements and challenges related to implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 20 years after its adoption and potential methods for implementing it in an integrated manner in the future; to increase synergies between it and parallel international processes; and to respond to current transformations in the region and assess their effects of the Beijing process. The Conference resulted in a set of recommendations, including the following: reaffirming commitment to implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; adopting the consolidated Arab report on implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 20 years after its adoption in the Arab region; issuing an Arab declaration entitled "Towards justice and equality for women in the Arab region" (annex I to the present report); and issuing the closing statement of participating civil society

organizations on priorities and methods for achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls in the Arab region and enhancing their rights (annex II to the present report).

F. PREPARING A DETAILED ANALYTICAL STUDY ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE ARAB REGION

10. The ESCWA Centre for Women is preparing a detailed analytical study on the status of women in the Arab region in the light of the strategic objectives of the Beijing Declaration and programme for Action 20 years after its adoption. ESCWA is expected to publish the study in August 2015.

Annex I

**ARAB DECLARATION
TOWARDS JUSTICE AND EQUALITY FOR WOMEN IN THE ARAB REGION
CAIRO, 2-3 FEBRUARY 2015**

We, Ministers and Heads of national women's machineries responsible for the advancement of women in the Arab region, participating in the Arab High-level Conference on Progress Achieved in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 20 Years, which was held in Cairo on 2 and 3 February 2015 under the theme "Towards justice and equality for women in the Arab region",

Recalling the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000); Economic and Social Council resolution E/RES/2013/18 that encourages United Nations regional commissions, including the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), to undertake regional reviews of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; and Security Council resolutions related to women, peace and security, particularly resolutions 1325 and 1820,

Acknowledge that the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000); the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014; the United Nations post-2015 development agenda; the sustainable development goals; and the Cairo Declaration entitled "Post-2015 Development Agenda for Arab Women: Opportunities and Challenges" are directly linked to effective gender equality and justice for women;

Recognize Arab women's capacity to contribute to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the centrality of their role as partners in sustainable development and the importance of creating an enabling environment to empower women, foster their initiatives and enhance their participation;

Realize the dangers that women are exposed to in the Arab region, especially in Iraq, Libya, Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic, due to foreign occupation, armed conflicts and terrorism, which cause flagrant violations of women's rights that undermine their legal, social, economic, political, civic and cultural achievements and expose them to displacement, oppression and suffering, hindering countries' development;

Value the support provided by ESCWA, the League of Arab States and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to State efforts towards the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the advancement of women in the Arab region;

Acknowledge the valuable efforts of States and their achievements, while recognizing the increased challenges that impede the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;

Reaffirm:

- Our renewed commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Arab region and to the enhancement of the political will and efforts needed to accelerate implementation;
- Our commitment to fulfilling the obligations and provisions of international treaties and conventions related to women's rights, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), its protocols and general recommendations;
- Our will to sustain efforts towards mainstreaming the principles of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda; harmonizing positions in national,

regional and international processes for the achievement of sustainable development; and working on the formulation of indicators that monitor the effective realization of women's rights;

- Our commitment to mainstreaming issues of women's empowerment in policies, plans, programmes and budgets, and to ensuring the availability of detailed sex-disaggregated statistics and data, and of gender indicators that facilitate follow-up and evaluation processes;
- Our commitment to guaranteeing the availability of financial, human and technical resources to sustain efforts towards the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;
- Our support to national dialogues in conflict-stricken countries to ensure a safe environment for women and improve their living conditions.

We, Participants in this Conference,

Recognizing the current developments in the Arab region and the challenges to the full realization of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action objectives, which include overcoming marginalization, discrimination and negative cultural norms, and combating poverty, illiteracy and all forms of violence, particularly in contexts of occupation, armed conflicts, terrorism and forced displacement;

Emphasize our commitment to achieving justice and equality between men and women by taking all the necessary actions and measures in the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, namely women and poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and media; women and environment; and the girl child;

Reaffirm the need to combat discrimination against women in its various forms, and to identify and tackle emerging priorities through the formulation and enactment of comprehensive laws and legislations; strengthening of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; ensuring women's political, economic and social empowerment; protection of women from violence; and building women's knowledge, and cultural and media capacity;

Dedicate special attention to the situation of women in Arab countries affected by foreign occupation, wars, armed conflicts and terrorism, in particular to women refugees, internally displaced and in forced migration, through the adoption of preventive, protective and rehabilitation measures and through rapid responses to humanitarian crises;

Commit to constructive joint work, consolidation of efforts and exchange of expertise and knowledge, and to the establishment of cooperation frameworks with civil society organizations and United Nations agencies, particularly with ESCWA, UN-Women and concerned regional and international organizations, especially the League of Arab States, to tackle challenges, advance the situation of women in the Arab region and ensure a dignified and safe life for them, so that they fully enjoy their rights in both times of peace and of instability.

Annex II

**CLOSING STATEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE ARAB REGION
PARTICIPATING IN THE ARAB HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON PROGRESS
ACHIEVED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION
AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION AFTER 20 YEARS: TOWARDS JUSTICE
AND EQUALITY FOR WOMEN IN THE ARAB REGION
CAIRO, 2-3 FEBRUARY 2015**

During this historic and transformative period, in which the Arab region is witnessing an increase in war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic and religious cleansing, women are paying a heavy price with their bodies and minds and States and national bodies and mechanisms are unable to protect the gains achieved through women's struggles in Arab countries and are unable to protect women from all forms of oppression, violence and discrimination, including slavery,

At a time when the international community is preparing to review the progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 20 years after its adoption in 1995, so as to measure the commitment of States, Governments, United Nations organizations, other international institutions and civil society organizations to achieving objectives aimed at liberating women from all forms of exploitation and discrimination and achieving gender equality,

As a follow-up to the Beirut Declaration issued at the consultative workshop with Arab civil society organizations on progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 20 years after its adoption, held at the headquarters of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on 13 and 14 August 2014,

We, the civil society organizations participating in the Arab High-level Conference on Progress Achieved in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 20 Years: Towards Justice and Equality for Women in the Arab Region, held in Cairo on 2 and 3 February 2015, declare the following:

Firstly, we commend the struggle of both women and men for freedom and dignity, which is ongoing in the face of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories, other occupations, authoritarianism, religious extremism and terrorism;

Secondly, regarding emerging priorities, we stress the need for the following:

- To protect women and girls under Israeli occupation and in conflict-affected areas, operationalize international resolutions, especially resolutions 1325, 7820 and 2122, and require States to develop national strategies, mechanisms and budgets for their implementation;
- To require States to involve women in all aspects of national discussions, negotiations and decision-making processes at all levels;
- To enact and operationalize national laws to pursue and prosecute perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence, ensure the right of women to protection, services and access to justice and streamline a gender-based approach in all stages of transitional justice and its mechanisms;
- To require States and the international community to meet their commitments to women and girls under occupation and female displaced persons, refugees, detainees and survivors regarding the provision of necessary protection, ensuring the basic requirements for a decent life, health care and education and facilitating identity document processes;

- To operationalize laws and develop policies to combat trafficking in women and girls and all forms of sexual exploitation, especially forced and early marriage;

Thirdly, regarding the commitment of States to implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we require the following:

- To lift reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, especially to articles related to personal status and the right of women to pass citizenship to their families, given their effects on women in public and private life;
- To ratify the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- To require States to respect the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and identify a minimum age for marriage in line with criminal liability and remove all exceptions if they exist;
- To develop national strategies to combat violence against women in countries that have not yet done so;
- To develop mechanisms to operationalize strategies on advancing the political, civil, economic, cultural and social rights of women, especially health and reproduction rights;
- To empower women in rural and remote areas to access resources and services and effectively participate in local decision-making;
- To evaluate the effects of programmes, policies and strategies on the status of women;

Fourthly, we direct a special recommendation to United Nations organizations on the importance of coordinating their programmes and interventions on the advancement of women's issues and the development of a consolidated mechanism to evaluate, compare and follow up on national and regional reports on the advancement of women's issues;

Lastly, we stress the importance of undertaking concerted and consolidated efforts to tackle threats and challenges facing women, girls, populations and countries, so as to ensure the safety, security and rights of all citizens and protect State sovereignty, the rule of law and institutions.
