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Special Task Force on Gender and Equality Issues

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*Report on Gender and Equality Issues [adopted by consensus
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I. Introduction

Gender equality is, first and foremost, a human right. Discrimination against women and girls - including gender-based violence, economic discrimination, reproductive health inequities, and harmful traditional practices - remains the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality.

Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions. A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all. Gender equality should therefore be a core aspect in the development policy's programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Mediterranean Countries.

II. International Instruments and Treaty Bodies

One of the most significant achievements of women's movement in pursuit of gender equality and empowerment of women in all aspect of live has been the "Commission on the Status of Women" (1946), establishment of which both provided the said movement with international body and contributed to the phrasing of Universal Declaration of Human Rights without distinction based on gender.

Regarding legislation, the most significant achievement in the field of women's rights is the adoption of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW - 1979).

CEDAW's characteristics as a Convention dealing with the issues related to women within the perspective of international law and as the only human rights treaty which affirms the reproductive rights of women make it often referred to as "International Bill of Rights for Women".

The Convention has a broad definition of discrimination against women: "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

A further step has been taken in 1999 with the adoption of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW. This Optional Protocol enabled the individuals direct their complaints against abuses of CEDAW to the "Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women".

Four World Conferences on Women (1975, 1980, 1985 and 1995) embodies importance in the historical context since these meetings set up the international agenda on empowerment and improvement of women's status in society.

Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 under the title "Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace" stands out. The Conference, which reaffirmed that women's rights are human rights, put forward an agenda for women's empowerment, acceleration of the implementation of the conclusions of the previous Conference in Nairobi and removal of all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making.

In order to monitor the implementation the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, the twenty-third special session of the UN General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" was convened in New York. At this summit, a Political Declaration and outcome document with the title "further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" were adopted.

In line with the aforementioned Political Declaration adopted during the special session in 2000, Member States agreed to "assess regularly further implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action with a view to bringing together all parties involved in 2005 to assess progress and consider new initiatives, as appropriate, ten years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action".

Empowering women, eliminating gender disparity and improving human rights of women are also among the Millennium Development Goals to be attained by 2015.

Besides the UN framework, issues related to women occupy the frontlines of international agenda.

As stated in Barcelona Declaration of 1995, “promotion of women’s active participation in economic and social life, and in the creation of employment” makes up one of the main objectives Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED).

These principles were further emphasized in the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on “Strengthening the Role of Women in Society”, held on 14 – 15 November 2006, in Istanbul. In the Conference, convened in accordance with the Barcelona Declaration and the Five Year Work Programme agreed upon during the 10th Anniversary Euro-Mediterranean Summit in Barcelona 2005, the participants reaffirmed that equal participation of women in all spheres of life is a crucial element of democracy and that achievement of a “common area of peace, stability and shared prosperity” relies upon, inter alia, making women fulfil their ambitions and aspirations.

Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Member States held on 20-21 December 2006, in Istanbul, is the first of its kind in OIC context, has declared that the improvement of women’s status in society plays a crucial role in the path towards sustainable development.

III. Gender Equality Issues

Gender Related Development Index (GDI)

The Human Development Index (HDI) is an index combining normalized measures of life expectancy, literacy, educational attainment, and GDP per capita for countries worldwide. It is claimed as a standard means of measuring human development, a concept that, according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) refers to the process of widening the options of persons, giving them greater opportunities for education, health care, income, employment, etc. The basic use of HDI is however to rank countries by level of "human development" which usually also implies to determine whether a country is a developed, developing, or underdeveloped country.

Table 1 shows HDI and GDI values for Mediterranean countries. The Human Development Index (HDI) measures average achievements in a country, but it does not incorporate the degree of gender imbalance in these achievements. The gender-related development index (GDI), introduced in Human Development Report 1995, measures achievements in the same dimensions using the same indicators as the HDI but captures inequalities in achievement between women and men. It is simply the HDI adjusted downward for gender inequality. The greater the gender disparity in basic human development, the lower is a country's GDI relative to its HDI. The gender empowerment measure (GEM) reveals whether women take an active part in economic and political life. It tracks the share of seats in parliament held by women; of female legislators, senior officials and managers; and of female professional and technical workers- and the gender disparity in earned income, reflecting economic independence. Differing from the GDI, the GEM exposes inequality in opportunities in selected areas.

As it is seen from Table 1 human development is unsteady in key areas for some countries and gender inequalities, already deep, tend to deepen further. Inequality between women and men can take very many different forms. Indeed, gender inequality is not one homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and interlinked problems:

Women and Poverty

Women are vulnerable to poverty because gender inequalities distort the distribution of income, access to productive resources such as credit, command over property or control over earned income, and access to labour markets. In addition, women do not always have full control or command over their most basic asset: their own labour.

It is generally recognized that poverty is a multidimensional phenomena. Nevertheless, in the measurement of poverty, priority is given to its economic dimension. The primary sources of national poverty statistics are, consequently, income and expenditure data collected through household surveys; those data are used as indirect measures of access to opportunities and resources by household members. Reliance on such data, however, has proved inadequate for capturing differences in poverty among women and men since it focuses on poverty estimates for households rather than on those for individuals. Such estimates do not readily show sex differences in patterns of distribution of food, income and the like, nor do they reveal the experience of poverty by individual women and men within households.

Considerable progress has been achieved in increasing recognition of gender dimensions of poverty and in the recognition that gender equality is one of the factors of specific importance for eradicating poverty in Mediterranean region. The United Nations Millennium Declaration placed a priority on the eradication of poverty. Governments have agreed that the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is an effective strategy to achieve that goal. Progress has been made by pursuing a two-pronged approach of promoting employment and income generating activities for women and providing access to basic social services, including education and health care. Micro credit and other financial instruments for women have emerged as a successful strategy for economic empowerment and have widened economic opportunities for some women living in poverty, in particular in rural areas.

Although there has been some progress made on women empowerment, unfortunately the big picture confirms that poverty among women is worsening in most developing countries in Mediterranean region. The initiatives towards reducing poverty and promoting development in the area are praiseworthy, but they take too long to be implemented. The decision of eighth UN Millennium Development Goal to allocate 0.7% of GDP of developed countries to the development of poorer countries remains an unfulfilled promise.

Women and the Economy

Women's representation in a range of occupations has increased over the past 20 years, with changes in some higher level jobs being particularly distinct (eg professional and managerial posts). Some Governments have introduced a variety of measures that address women's economic and social rights, equal access to and control over economic resources and equality in employment. There is increased awareness of the need to reconcile employment and family responsibilities and of the positive effect of such measures as maternity and paternity leave and also parental leave, and child and family care services and benefits. Some Governments have made provisions to address discriminatory and abusive behaviour in the workplace and to prevent unhealthy working conditions, and have established funding mechanisms to promote women's roles in entrepreneurship, education and training, including scientific and

technical skills and decision-making. Research has been conducted on barriers to economic empowerment faced by women, including the relationship between remunerated and unremunerated work, and tools are being developed to assist with this assessment.

In conclusion, the last 20 years have been a period of particularly rapid change for women, both in terms of their level of participation in paid work and the quality of the labour market options available to them. But still in some countries the importance of a gender perspective in the development of macroeconomic policy is still not widely recognized. Effective implementation of legislation and practical support systems is still inadequate. Many women still work in rural areas and the informal economy as subsistence producers, and in the service sector with low levels of income and little job and social security. Many women with comparable skills and experience are confronted with a gender wage gap and lag behind men in income and career mobility in the formal sector. Equal pay for women and men for equal work, or work of equal value, has not yet been fully realized. The main barriers to women's equal participation in the labour market can be divided into two broad categories:

- practical barriers, such as access to affordable and flexible childcare and flexible working arrangements
- cultural barriers, including the persistence of informal networks from which women are excluded, unease about women in positions of authority, and the continuation of working cultures in which women are not encouraged or expected to succeed.

Many factors have contributed to widening economic inequality between women and men, including income inequality, unemployment. Gender inequalities and disparities in economic power sharing, unequal distribution of unremunerated work between women and men, lack of technological and financial support for women's entrepreneurship, unequal access to, and control over, capital, particularly land and credit and access to labour markets, as well as all harmful traditional and customary practices, have constrained women's economic empowerment and exacerbated the feminization of poverty.

Women and Health

Programmes have been implemented to create awareness among policy makers and planners of the need for health programmes to cover all aspects of women's health throughout women's life cycle, which have contributed to an increase in life expectancy in many Mediterranean countries. There is increased attention to high mortality rates among women and girls as a result of malaria, tuberculosis, water-borne diseases, communicable and diarrhoeal diseases and malnutrition; increased knowledge and use of family planning and contraceptive methods as well as increased awareness among men of their responsibility in family planning; increased attention to sexually transmitted infections among women and girls, and methods to protect against such infections. There is increased attention to breastfeeding, nutrition, infants' and mothers' reproductive health. HIV/AIDS is not highly prevalent in the Mediterranean region.

Despite all the advances, some of the Mediterranean countries facing problems related to maternal mortality rates (see Table 2). There continues to be a lack of information on availability of and access to appropriate, affordable, primary health care services of high quality, including sexual and health care, insufficient attention to maternal and emergency obstetric care as well as lack of prevention, screening and treatment for breast, cervical and ovarian cancers and osteoporosis. A lack of access to clean water (see Table 2), adequate

nutrition and safe sanitation, a lack of gender-specific health research and technology and insufficient gender sensitivity in the provision of health information and health care and health services, including those related to environmental and occupational health hazards, affect women in developing and developed countries.

Women and Education

Education is a prerequisite for better employment opportunities. Mothers' education is a significant variable affecting children's education attainment and opportunities. A mother with few years of formal education is considerably more likely to send her children to school. In many countries, each additional year of formal education completed by a mother translates into her children remaining in school for an additional one-third to one-half year. Education also has flow-on implications for access to decision-making positions.

There is an increased awareness that education is one of the most valuable means of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. Governments and civil society have increased advocacy for female participation in education especially in eliminating gender disparities in access to all areas of tertiary education by ensuring that women have equal access to career development, training, scholarships and fellowships. Enrolment and retention rates of girls are increased by allocating appropriate budgetary resources; by enlisting the support of parents and the community, as well as through campaigns. Governments provided - in collaboration with parents, non-governmental organizations, including youth organizations, communities and the private sector - young women with academic and technical training, career planning, leadership and social skills and work experience to prepare them to participate fully in society.

But in some countries, efforts to eradicate illiteracy and strengthen literacy among women and girls and to increase their access to all levels and types of education were constrained by the lack of resources. Additionally, in a number of countries, economic, social and infrastructural barriers, as well as traditional discriminatory practices, have contributed to lower enrolment and retention rates for girls.

Violence against Women

As increased attention has been paid to the issue of gender based violence, substantial work has been done by Governments, United Nations entities and other international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and researchers to strengthen survey methodologies, develop common indicators and address the challenges of comparing data over time, and between different countries and regions. However, the lack of data on the nature, prevalence and incidence of the various types of violence against women is regularly highlighted as a major concern and barrier to effective policy making.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women regularly addresses the issue of data collection, urging reporting States in its concluding comments to strengthen and systematize efforts to gather statistics on the various forms of violence against women, including for example on domestic violence, on trafficked, migrant and refugee women, on sexual exploitation, forced marriages and harmful traditional practices.

There is increased awareness of and commitment to preventing and combating violence against women and girls. Governments have initiated policy reforms and mechanisms, such as interdepartmental committees, guidelines and protocols, national, multidisciplinary and coordinated programmes to address violence. Some Governments have also introduced or reformed laws to protect women and girls from all forms of violence and laws to prosecute the perpetrators. Successful cooperation has been achieved between governmental and non-governmental organizations in the field of preventing violence against women. Many Governments have introduced educational and outreach programmes, as well as legislative measures criminalizing these practices.

Despite all the advances, unfortunately, women continue to be victims of various forms of violence. Inadequate understanding of the root causes of all forms of violence against women and girls hinders efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls. There is a lack of comprehensive programmes dealing with the perpetrators, including programmes, where appropriate, which would enable them to solve problems without violence. It is also noted that, in some countries, problems have arisen from the use of new information and communication technologies for trafficking in women and children and for purposes of all forms of economic and sexual exploitation.

Women and Armed Conflict

Women increasingly bear the major burden of armed conflict. In recent years particular attention has been given to the question of violence against women in armed conflict. The significance of these developments is considerable. Women experience distinctive economic problems in armed conflict. In many cases women are separated from the men who traditionally may be their source of income. Lack of education and training, their role in caring for others, and general community attitudes make it extremely difficult for women to support themselves financially. Armed conflict often forces women from their homes. In fact, women civilians are generally the first to be evacuated when hostilities break out. Evacuation, although desirable in many ways, can lead to considerable hardship. Evacuees are generally exposed to foreign-and often inadequate living conditions and, consequently, tend to be more prone to accidents, injuries, and disease. There may also be an increased risk of pregnancy as contraception is generally not readily available, and women are likely to be dislocated from many basic health services.

There is recognition by Governments, the international community and organizations, in particular the United Nations, that women and men experience humanitarian emergencies differently, and there is a need for a more holistic support for refugee and displaced women, including those who have suffered all forms of abuse, including gender specific abuse, to ensure equal access to appropriate and adequate food and nutrition, clean water, safe sanitation, shelter, education, social and health services, including reproductive health care and maternity care. For example, for more than three decades, Palestinian women have faced difficult living conditions in camps and outside, struggling for the survival of their families.

International community and the civil society organizations should be strict in their request from the occupation forces and the parties of the armed conflicts to respect the international law concerning the right of women and girls particularly the obligations stated in the Geneva Convention of 1949 and its protocol of 1977, the Agreement on Refugees of the year 1951 and its protocol of 1967, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against

Women of the year 1977 and its optional protocol of the year 1999, and the United Nations Convention on Children Rights of 1989 and its two optional protocols from the 25th of May 2000 and to take into consideration the relevant stipulations from the original Rome Convention of the International Criminal Court.

Women in Power and Decision-Making

A balanced participation by women and men in society's major political and economic decisions is vital to developing real democracy. In most Mediterranean countries, women are meeting the challenges of leadership, and contributing to change in their communities, countries and in the international arena in very real ways. Women have held public office at various levels of government, have initiated and led grass-roots organizations, and are present in virtually every professional field and in the private sector.

Most Mediterranean countries applied affirmative and positive action policies, including quota systems or voluntary agreements in some countries and measurable goals and targets, developed training programmes for women's leadership, and introduced measures to reconcile family and work responsibilities of both women and men.

Women's share of seats in parliament has been steadily increasing since the early 1990s. Nevertheless, women still hold only 18.2 per cent of parliamentary seats worldwide (see Table 3). only Nordic countries have come close to parity (see Table 4).

As of 31 May 2008, none of the Mediterranean countries had met the target of at least 30 percent representation by women in parliament (see Table 5), which was set by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1990.

There are a number of factors which constrain women's participation in public life and decision-making, including:

- economic dependency and a lack of adequate financial resources
- illiteracy and limited access to education and the same work opportunities as men
- discriminatory cultural and social attitudes and negative stereotypes perpetuated in the family and in public life
- burden of responsibilities in the home
- intimidation, harassment and violence

Parliament represents the highest law-making institution, but women who constitute the majority of the population are often marginalized from that decision-making process. Women's representation in parliaments worldwide is usually much lower compared with men. Within parliament, women often occupy less powerful positions, which is a reflection of an unequal access to education (in developing countries) and social roles assigned to women in general. The socialization process tends to steer women along the study of subjects related to their expected roles and hence their involvement in parliamentary committees or appointment to ministries often reflects those roles.

TABLES

Table 1. The Human Development Index (HDI) -The gender-related development index (GDI) and GEM The Gender Empowerment Measures for Mediterranean Countries

Country	HDI value	Life expectancy at birth (years) (%)	Adult literacy rate (% ages 15 and older)	Combined gross enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary education (%)	GDI	GDI as % of HDI	GEM
France	0.954	80.2	100	96.5	0.950	99.8	0.718
Italy	0.941	80.3	98.4	90.6	0.936	99.4	0.693
Israel	0.932	80.3	97.1	89.6	0.927	99.5	0.660
Greece	0.926	78.9	96.0	99.0	0.922	99.5	0.622
Slovenia	0.917	77.4	99.7	94.3	0.914	99.7	0.611
Cyprus	0.903	79.0	96.8	77.6	0.899	99.6	0.580
Portugal	0.897	77.7	93.8	89.8	0.895	99.7	0.692
Malta	0.878	79.1	87.9	80.9	0.873	99.4	0.514
Croatia	0.850	75.3	98.1	73.5	0.848	99.7	0.612
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	0.818	73.4	84.2	94.1	0.797	97.4	...
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.803	74.5	96.7	69.0	...	...	...
Albania	0.801	76.2	98.7	68.6	0.797	99.6	...
The F.Y.R.of Macedonia	0.801	73.8	96.1	70.1	0.795	.....	0.625
Turkey	0.775	71.4	87.4	68.7	0.763	98.5	0.298
Jordan	0.773	71.9	91.1	78.1	0.760	98.2	...
Lebanon	0.772	71.5	100	84.6	0.759	98.2	...
Tunisia	0.766	73.5	74.3	76.3	0.750	98.0	...
Algeria	0.733	71.7	69.9	73.7	0.720	98.1	...
Palestine	0.731	72.9	92.4	82.4	...	...	...
Syrian Arab Republic	0.724	73.6	80.8	64.8	0.710	98.1	...
Egypt	0.708	70.7	71.4	76.9	...	...	0.263
Morocco	0.646	70.4	52.3	58.5	0.621	96.0	0.325
Monaco	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Serbia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Montenegro	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: UNDP Country Reports 2007-2008

Table 2. Some Health Indicators of Mediterranean Countries

Country	Population using an improved water source	Births attended by skilled health personnel	Maternal mortality ratio, reported (per 100,000 live births)	HIV prevalence (% aged 15-49)
France	100	99	10	0.4 [0.3–0.8]
Italy	...	...	7	0.5 [0.3–0.9]
Israel	100	99	5	<0.2]
Greece	...		1	0.2 [0.1–0.3]
Slovenia	...	100	17	<0.1 [<0.2]
Cyprus	100	100	0	<0.2]
Portugal	...	100	8	0.4 [0.3–0.9]
Malta	100	98	...	0.1 [0.1–0.2]
Croatia	100	100	8	<0.1 [<0.2]
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	...	94	77	<0.2]
Bosnia and Herzegovina	97	100	8	<0.1 [<0.2]
Albania	96	98	17	<0.2]
The F.Y.R. of Macedonia	...	99	21	<0.1 [<0.2]
Turkey	96	83	130	<0.2]
Jordan	97	100	41	<0.2]
Lebanon	100	89	100	0.1 [0.1–0.5]
Tunisia	93	90	69	0.1 [0.1–0.3]
Algeria	85	96	120	0.1 [<0.2]
Palestine	92	97	...	...
Syrian Arab Republic	93	77	65	<0.2]
Egypt	98	74	84	<0.1 [<0.2]
Morocco	81	63	230	0.1 [0.1–0.4]
Monaco	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Serbia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Montenegro	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: UNDP Country Reports 2007-2008

Table 3. World Averages of Woman in National Parliaments

Both Houses Combined		Single House or Lower House		Upper House or Senate	
Total MPs	44'121	Total MPs	37'177	Total MPs	6'944
Men	35'893	Men	30'219	Men	5'674
Women	8'005	Women	6'828	Women	1'177
Percentage of women	18.2%	Percentage of women	18.4%	Percentage of women	17.2%

Source: IPU Women in National Parliaments 31 May 2008

Table 4. Regional Averages of Woman in National Parliaments

	Single House or lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses combined
Nordic countries	41.4%	---	---
Americas	21.6%	20.0%	21.4%
Europe - OSCE member countries including Nordic countries	21.2%	18.8%	20.7%
Europe - OSCE member countries excluding Nordic countries	19.3%	18.8%	19.2%
Asia	18.4%	16.6%	18.2%
Sub-Saharan Africa	17.2%	20.8%	17.6%
Pacific	13.4%	31.8%	15.4%
Arab States	9.7%	7.0%	9.1%

Source: IPU Women in National Parliaments 31 May 2008

Table 5. Mediterranean Countries Averages of Woman in National Parliaments

Country	Lower or Single House				Upper House or Senate			
	Elections	Seats	Women	% W	Elections	Seats	Women	% W
The F.Y.R. of Macedonia	7 2006	120	35	29.2%	---	---	---	---
Portugal	2 2005	230	65	28.3%	---	---	---	---
Monaco	2 2008	24	6	25.0%	---	---	---	---
Tunisia	10 2004	189	43	22.8%	7 2005	111	17	15.3%
Serbia	5 2008	250	54	21.6%	---	---	---	---
Italy	4 2008	629	133	21.1%	4 2008	322	58	18.0%
Croatia	11 2007	153	32	20.9%	---	---	---	---
Slovakia	6 2006	150	29	19.3%	---	---	---	---
France	6 2007	577	105	18.2%	9 2004	330	60	18.2%
Greece	9 2007	300	44	14.7%	---	---	---	---
Cyprus	5 2006	56	8	14.3%	---	---	---	---
Israel	3 2006	120	17	14.2%	---	---	---	---
Syrian Arab Republic	4 2007	250	31	12.4%	---	---	---	---
Slovenia	10 2004	90	11	12.2%	12 2002	40	1	2.5%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10 2006	42	5	11.9%	3 2007	15	2	13.3%
Montenegro		81	9	11.1%	---	---	---	---
Morocco	9 2007	325	34	10.5%	9 2006	270	3	1.1%
Turkey	7 2007	549	50	9.1%	---	---	---	---
Malta	3 2008	69	6	8.7%	---	---	---	---
Algeria	5 2007	389	30	7.7%	12 2006	136	4	2.9%
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	3 2006	468	36	7.7%	---	---	---	---
Albania	7 2005	140	10	7.1%	---	---	---	---
Jordan	11 2007	110	7	6.4%	11 2007	55	7	12.7%
Lebanon	5 2005	128	6	4.7%	---	---	---	---
Egypt	11 2005	442	8	1.8%	6 2007	264	18	6.8%

Source: IPU Women in National Parliaments 31 May 2008