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Commission on the Status of Women

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Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled

“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century” (c) Implementation of

strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of

concern and further actions and initiatives: (i) Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and

the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality,

development and peace for the twenty-first century”; (ii) Current challenges and forward looking strategies for the

advancement and empowerment of women and girls

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

**Report of the Arab Regional Conference Ten Years After Beijing:
Call for Peace**

Beirut, 8-10 July 2004

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held the Arab Regional Conference Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace at United Nations House in Beirut during the period 8-10 July 2004, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 58/148 of 22 December 2003 in which the General Assembly recognizes the importance attached to the regional and subregional monitoring of the global and subregional platforms for action and the implementation of the outcome of the twenty-third session by regional commissions and other regional or subregional structures.

The conference comprised three meetings, namely, the second session of the Committee on Women, the Expert Group Meeting to Follow Up on the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing + 10) and the second meeting of the Consultative Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations at ESCWA.

The conference was organized around four seminars on the role of women in Arab parliaments, women in executive and decision-making positions, women in civil society and women in the media and intellectual and cultural life. The seminar concerned with women in civil society constituted the second meeting of the Consultative Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations. The three other seminars constituted the Expert Group Meeting to Follow Up on the Fourth World Conference on Women. Each seminar resulted in a set of conclusions and recommendations that form the basis of the Beirut Declaration on Arab Women Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace.

The present report contains a review of the recommendations issued by the conference and the most important conclusions of the discussion of each agenda item.

I. RESOLUTIONS ISSUED BY THE CONFERENCE

1. The Committee on Women adopted the following two resolutions at its second session:
 - A. RESOLUTION ON THE ARAB REGIONAL CONFERENCE TEN YEARS AFTER BEIJING: CALL FOR PEACE

The Committee on Women of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Recalling Economic and Social Council resolution 2003/9 of 18 July 2003 on the establishment within the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) of a committee on women responsible, inter alia, for following up global and regional conferences and the participation of member countries therein and coordinating the endeavours of member countries and regional organizations with regard to implementation of the resolutions and recommendations adopted at such conferences,

Recalling also General Assembly resolution 58/148 of 22 December 2003, in which the Assembly recognized the importance attached to the regional and subregional monitoring of the global and regional platforms for action and of the implementation of the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly,

Noting with satisfaction the progress achieved with regard to the advancement of Arab women and the narrowing of gender gaps in the fields of education and health as well as in the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and related legislation,

Recognizing at the same time that illiteracy and unemployment rates remain much higher among women than men and that women in some countries in the region suffer from poverty and recognizing also the participation of Arab women in decision-making remains limited at the local and municipal level and in the legislative, executive and judicial spheres,

Deeply concerned with regard to the adverse effects of wars, the occupation of Arab territories and political instability on the advancement of women and girls in the region,

1. *Endorses* the Beirut Declaration on Arab Women Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace issued by the Arab Regional Conference Ten Years After Beijing and attached as an annex to this resolution;
2. *Appeals to* the international community to take action to end the wars and find a just and lasting solution for the occupied territories in the Arab region so that security and peace prevail, so restoring prosperity and progress to the peoples of the region, including women;
3. *Calls on* all governments to implement the Beirut Declaration on “Arab Women Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace”;

4. *Urges* all governments to strengthen national machineries for women by the allocation of adequate human and financial resources;

5. *Requests* ESCWA to provide advisory services, at the request of national governments, in the area of the empowerment and advancement of women, with particular focus on the production of gender-disaggregated data, strengthening of national machineries and provision of support in the preparation of national reports on the implementation of CEDAW and mainstreaming gender in policies and programmes.

Annex

BEIRUT DECLARATION ON ARAB WOMEN TEN YEARS AFTER BEIJING: CALL FOR PEACE

1. We, the participants in the Arab Regional Conference Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace, gathered at ESCWA headquarters in United Nations House in Beirut from 8 to 10 July 2004, recalling General Assembly resolutions 52/100 of 12 December 1997 and 52/231 of 4 June 1998 on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, 58/142 of 22 December 2003 on women and political participation and 58/148 of 22 December 2003 on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, in addition to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000 on the role of women in peace-building and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in the year 2000, in particular the third goal, namely, to promote gender equality and empower women,

2. Note that the Arab Regional Conference “Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace” is convened pursuant to the United Nations resolutions that stipulate the need to assess the accomplishments achieved during the ten years following the Beijing Conference in order to present the findings to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at its forty-ninth session, to be held in New York from 28 February to 11 March 2005, for their inclusion in the comprehensive document to be prepared by CSW and submitted to the General Assembly in order to provide information on the circumstances and needs of the region.

3. We also note the continuing instability in the Arab region, which has suffered for decades from conflicts and tensions and is one of the regions of the world most exposed to wars and armed conflicts. This situation not only slows the pace of economic and social development but, also, undermines the progress that has been achieved. There is evidence to indicate that the gravity of the regional dangers, the decrease in investment rates and the persistence of the disparity between physical and human capital are all factors that contribute to reducing levels of growth.

4. Our conference today is held in extremely difficult and intricate circumstances, at a time when the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, is experiencing a decline at all levels, including the political, social, economic and cultural levels, which has a negative

impact on the living conditions of Palestinian women and the Palestinian people as a whole. The continuing occupation by Israel persists, with the confiscation and settlement of land, demolition of homes, razing of agricultural lands, partition of Palestinian territory and construction of the wall. Circumstances such as these are also being experienced by the people of Iraq, which now suffers from occupation as it suffered from repeated wars and lacks security and stability, as well as the peoples of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, parts of the territories of both of which remain under occupation.

5. The theme “Call for Peace”, chosen as the theme of the present conference, embodies the circumstances and particular conditions of the region and expresses the desire of its peoples to live in peace and stability and for a better life, in particular since emphasis in past years has been on equality and development while peace has not been accorded sufficient concern. In this regard, we consider that the action required for the achievement of equality and development cannot proceed without the establishment of peace based on the rule of law, justice and international legitimacy and, consequently, human security and social stability.

6. It is a cause for optimism that the status of women is a topic addressed by the majority of regional and national reform initiatives. At the Arab summit held recently in Tunis, the Arab States made a commitment to support the rights of women and broaden the scope of their participation in the political, social and economic spheres. During the deliberations and in the declarations of Alexandria, Sana'a, Doha and Beirut, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with women, in addition to academics and representatives of various different political parties emphasized the importance of the empowerment of women, which demonstrates that this issue has become a fundamental element in the Arab vision of reform.

7. This conference has highlighted the progress achieved by the countries of the region towards implementation of the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, according to the responses of those countries to the questionnaire sent by the United Nations to governments.

8. In this context, we note that these accomplishments have included the promulgation of new legislation for the benefit of women, the establishment of mechanisms concerned with women's issues, including ministries, councils, bodies and commissions, the attainment by women in some countries of their political rights, the allocation of quotas to women in the parliaments of some countries and the ratification by 17 countries of CEDAW.

9. We recognize that the findings of the questionnaire have also highlighted the existence of challenges that require further work and effort, including illiteracy, the school dropout rate of girls, violence against women including the negative impact of terrorism on the advancement of society in general and women in particular, discrimination in legislation with particular regard to penal codes, in addition to social traditions and customs. The findings have also made clear that women in the Arab region continue to suffer from the problems of poverty, unemployment, budget restrictions on programmes for their advancement and the absence of accurate, gender-disaggregated statistics. In the light of this analysis, we consider that the vision that needs to be

implemented in the coming ten years in order to empower women, improve their conditions and increase their participation in political, economic and social life requires the following:

10. Urging governments to formulate strategies and programmes for the empowerment of women in conjunction with public policy priorities and variables at the national level, in order to achieve MDGs during the coming ten years;
11. Action to increase budgets and human resources allocated to policies, programmes and national mechanisms concerned with women and linkage of these budgets to the public budget;
12. Analysis and treatment of the indicators that demonstrate the existence of a gap between equality under the law and actual equality with regard to parliamentary representation since, although the fundamental right of women and men to political participation is recognized, the representation of women in parliaments remains token or non-existent;
13. Continuous review and updating of national legislation and amendment of discriminatory legislation, action to invigorate and apply laws in force, review of laws and legislation on political parties and electoral systems in order to promote the role of women, in particular the requirement to assign a proportion of political party nomination lists for women, allocation of quotas for women in public institutions and, in particular, legislative institutions in order to guarantee an increase in their participation in political activity;
14. Establishment of a gender-disaggregated information and database covering projects and programmes concerned with women's issues in the Arab countries in order to facilitate the exchange of information and comparison with the situation of women in other countries;
15. Establishment of observatories and early-warning mechanisms for follow-up and analysis of the social phenomena particular to the situation of women and girls so that social problems can be remedied before they become severe;
16. Elimination of the political obstacles and security concerns that hinder the advancement of society and women in some areas through linkage of women's issues to public policy issues, the utilization of positive political rhetoric in favour of women and emphasis on clarification of the influence of these policies on their interests;
17. Emphasis on the role of women in strengthening the concepts of peace and dialogue to which the Arab countries aspire, since equality and development cannot be achieved in the absence of peace, and emphasis on the need of Arab women for peace, security and stability as the political obstacles before them are occupation, settlement and menace;
18. Interlinkage of the efforts of men and women to achieve democracy and human rights and mainstreaming gender in development policies;
19. According the necessary attention to the education of girls and women and encouraging them to enter the field of applied sciences, in addition to the removal of discriminatory pictures and ideas that endorse a negative image of women from schoolbooks;

20. **Habilitation and training of women to assume positions of leadership and career advancement;**
21. **Finding solutions for the problems that cause girls to drop out of education, in order to eliminate the illiteracy, poverty and unemployment from which women continue to suffer;**
22. **According rural women the necessary concern through the provision of the basic services necessary for their lives, the formulation of health awareness, illiteracy eradication and vocational training programmes and the provision of soft loans in order to enable them to support themselves and their families;**
23. **Concern with the issues and needs of elderly and disabled women, changing their image in the eyes of society and encouraging their participation in development activity;**
24. **Formulation of awareness programmes in order to acquaint men, women and youth with the human, statutory and legal rights of women and the importance of the role that they play in society;**
25. **Continued action to increase awareness and change the prevailing mentality of different social groups, in particular youth, with regard to the necessity of achieving gender equality and causing change in cultural concepts, with the participation of all stakeholders and the assumption by NGOs of an important role in such action;**
26. **Strengthening the network of Arab women parliamentarians by the issuance of a publication for the exchange of experiences, facilitation of communication and achievement of solidarity between them and between them and their counterparts in other countries with the objective of raising awareness of Arab women's issues and achieving mutual support in this regard, in addition to action based on cooperation and constructive competition in an effort to improve participation in political life;**
27. **Encouraging women and women's unions to acquaint women with their rights and duties under the law, the constitution and relevant conventions and boldly pursue their cases before local courts in order to stop violations of women's rights;**
28. **Requiring professional unions, labour syndicates and other professional associations to ensure the involvement of women in their activities and assumption by women of positions in these institutions and urging women to participate in these institutions and make a positive and effective contribution;**
29. **Amendment of the existing laws and enactment of new laws regulating the work of NGOs in a manner that guarantees them freedom in their activities, provides the necessary political support and contributes to the creation of a climate of confidence between them and the government parties concerned;**

30. Continued efforts to build confidence and partnership between NGOs and government institutions, based on integration, cooperation and statement of views with regard to strategies, plans, bills and programmes related to women and monitoring and following up on their implementation, calling on these organizations to participate as members of official delegations to regional and international conferences and in the preparation of reports and working papers for these conferences;
31. Support of NGOs, invigoration of their role in serving society and women and elimination of the administrative constraints that prevent them from assuming the role required of them, in order to achieve a qualitative shift in their activities so that their role is not confined to the provision of pastoral social services but includes missionary activities and awareness programmes in development projects;
32. Establishment of networks between NGOs concerned with women's affairs in order to exchange experiences, make Arab women's issues known at the local, national, regional and international levels, eliminate duplication and derive greater benefit from their work;
33. Change the negative image of Arab women in the media through the formulation of audio visual media programmes and direct means of communication;
34. Promote media coverage in order to raise awareness of the rights of women and rectify the flawed perceptions that distort the image of Arab women to the broadest audience, including rural and remote areas, and accord the necessary concern to the media rhetoric directed to the world at large in order to change this image;
35. Monitoring, highlighting and making accessible the successful experiences of women in the media and, in particular the difficulties encountered with regard to the experience of Arab women in satellite channels and coverage of armed conflict zones and wars and the allocation of the necessary resources;
36. Establishment of an association for Arab women in the media in order to facilitate communication among them and with other parties;
37. Establishment of media colleges and centres for training women in countries without such institutions;
38. Call on governments to formulate programmes for raising awareness in schools, media, public institutions and local administrations in order to eliminate wrongful customs and traditions and illegal practices and laws that hinder the advancement of women, prejudice their rights and equality with men and distort their image;
39. Holding workshops and seminars at ESCWA that bring together women in the media, women intellectuals and civil society organizations;
40. Undertaking by ESCWA to prepare a comprehensive directory of the names of women intellectuals, media figures and researchers, in order to improve media coverage of women's issues;

41. Coordination between ESCWA, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the League of Arab States, the Arab Women Organization (AWO) and the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) with regard to the preparation of the report of NGOs on evaluation of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, for inclusion with the report of governments;

42. Undertaking by ESCWA to organize meetings with Arab parliaments, unions and national associations and organize an international Arab forum that includes Asian women, in order to benefit from their experiences and attainment of key positions, in addition to giving women the opportunity to make their viewpoint known at the hearings held in European parliaments.

B. RESOLUTION ON THE SUBPROGRAMME ON THE EMPOWERMENT AND ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN WITHIN THE PROPOSED STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 2006-2007

The Committee on Women of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Recalling the restructuring of the ESCWA programme of work that requires the review of its priorities,

Recalling also ESCWA resolution 240 (XXII) of 17 April 2003 on the establishment within ESCWA of a committee on women,

Expressing its satisfaction with the establishment of a centre for women within the secretariat with the responsibility for acting as the secretariat of the Committee on Women, pursuant to the above-mentioned resolution,

Informed that the proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2006-2007 includes a special subprogramme on the empowerment and advancement of women,

Convinced of the importance of this subprogramme,

1. *Adopts* the subprogramme for the empowerment and advancement of women within the proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2006-2007;

2. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to allocate the necessary human and material resources to the Centre for Women under the programme of work for the biennium 2006-2007, which will be prepared in view of the proposed strategic framework for the same period, in order to enable the Centre to assume the expanded tasks entrusted to it.

II. DISCUSSION TOPICS

A. GENERAL DISCUSSION (Agenda item 5)

2. The heads of the following delegations made contributions: Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen. A

representative of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the World Network for Literacy and Adult Education also spoke.

3. In addition to discussion of the possibility of the Arab North African countries becoming members of ESCWA, the following main points were raised:

- (a) The important pioneering role played by women in areas damaged by war and conflicts;
- (b) Intense unease with regard to the violence and danger present in the region;
- (c) The need for political will to transcend social and cultural customs that prevent the full incorporation of women in public life and the need to facilitate their political participation at the local, legislative, executive and judiciary levels from the perspective of the achievement of human rights, including the right to development;
- (d) The importance of affording women access to excellent health and culture so that they can contribute to sustainable growth and the importance of reproductive health, mother and child protection and family planning, which have a pivotal impact on the situation of women;
- (e) The need to adopt legislative mechanisms in order to expand the participation of women in political, social and economic decision-making as a fundamental element of national advancement.

B. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN BUILDING SOCIETY: SEMINARS AND CONCLUSIONS (Agenda item 6)

4. During the conference, four seminars were held on the role of women in building society, addressing the role of women in legislation and political life, the role of women in public life, the role of women in civil society in the political, economic and social spheres and the role of women in culture and the media.

1. *Seminar with Arab women parliamentarians to discuss the role of women in legislation and political life*

5. The seminar was chaired by Ms. Bahia Hariri, member of the Lebanese parliament. The main speakers were Ms. Salwa Masri, Member of the Senate in Jordan; Ms. Kawthar Aljouan, Director of the Women Development and Training Institute in Kuwait; Ms. Amal Osman, Deputy Speaker of the People's Assembly and member of the National Council for Women in Egypt; Ms. Bahiya al-Jishi, member of the Consultative Council in Bahrain; Ms. Yunsook Lee, Member of Parliament in Korea; Ms. Mona Makram-Ebeid, President of the Association for the Advancement of Education in Egypt; and Ms. Nayla Mouawad, Member of Parliament in Lebanon.

6. Ms. Bahia Hariri commended the theme of the conference, "Call for Peace", in view of its significance for the Arab region and the impossibility of achieving development without stability. She also called on the international community to review the extent of its support to just Arab issues. Foremost among these issues was that of the Palestinian people, which was suffering from occupation and conflicts, in addition to the issue of those living in the Syrian territories in occupied Golan, Shebaa farms in Lebanon and the Iraqi people.

7. During the discussion, the following main points were raised and conclusions reached:

- (a) The importance of the participation of women in all aspects of economic, social and political life for the achievement of comprehensive development;
- (b) The linkage between the issue of the political participation of women and shortcomings with regard to the position adopted by political parties with regard to the participation of women in general and political activity in particular, in addition to the possibility of implementing a specific quota system for women in legislative councils;
- (c) The importance of accepting the principle of the rotation of authority through electoral funds in a correct electoral process and encouragement of the formation of new political parties;
- (d) The existence of a number of mechanisms for the empowerment of women, including consultation with civil society institutions, coordination with the concerned ministries and institutions, participation in all committees, assistance from experts and specialists and their involvement in the activities of the committees and other bodies;
- (e) The need to implement compulsory education on a broad scale and eradicate illiteracy at all levels;
- (f) Continued work on the modernization of legislation, including that related to electoral systems and emphasis on the importance of adopting national legislation in conformity with international criteria as set out in CEDAW, and establishment of the necessary mechanisms for the implementation of CEDAW;
- (g) Focus on the means whereby women can gain access to parliaments and their performance within them, as well as invigoration of the role played by women parliamentarians in the call for peace in the region;
- (h) Action to form women's pressure blocs and set in motion an initiative for reform through this seminar;
- (i) Preparation of a news publication for Arab women parliamentarians that would permit the exchange of information and news and communication with civil society organizations as an important point of access to the grass roots;

- (j) Formulation of a practical motivation programme for Arab men and women parliamentarians that would lead to the desired positive change;
- (k) Call on ESCWA to conduct studies on the obstacles and impediments faced by women parliamentarians and formulate a training programme in order to enhance the roles played by women in parliaments and, in particular, on dialogue and the use of political rhetoric.

2. Seminar with Arab women ministers and executives to discuss the role of women in public life

8. The seminar was chaired by Ms. Berglind Asgeirsdottir, Deputy Secretary-General of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The main speakers were Ms. Carolyn Hannan, Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women at the United Nations; Ms. Naziha Zarrouk, Ambassador of Tunisia in Lebanon; Ms. Fatimah Abdel Mahmoud, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Chair in Women, Science and Technology and Member of Parliament in Sudan; Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Minister of Women's Affairs in Afghanistan; Ms. Yasmina Baddou, Secretary of State responsible for Family, Solidarity and Social Action in Morocco; and Ms. Nesreen Berwari, Minister of Municipalities and Public Works in Iraq.

9. Ms. Asgeirsdottir opened the seminar by emphasizing the capacity of women to cause change in society and citing the experience of her country, Iceland, in this regard. She noted the importance of monitoring the implementation of the laws enacted by women in leadership positions and the need not only for the promulgation of these laws but, also, adherence to their correct application.

10. During the discussion, the following main points were raised and conclusions reached:

- (a) The need for Arab women to possess administrative proficiency, knowledge and capacity for leadership in order to impose themselves at the centre of authority;
- (b) The ministerial role of women should not be confined to ministries concerned with family, children and social affairs;
- (c) The importance of strengthening the aspect of statistics and studies for the provision of accurate data on Arab women and drafting of future policies;
- (d) The need to eliminate misconceptions with regard to gender issues in order to expedite development;
- (e) *Women ministers should be urged to adopt women's issues and maintain close contact with society and the grass roots in order to attract other women and sustain the support and backing of society. They should be encouraged to appear regularly in the media in order to familiarize the public with them and their capacity to develop society;*

- (f) Encouragement of women to join political parties in addition to their support for participation in those parties, preparatory strengthening their role in parliaments;
- (g) Encouragement of women to form associations concerned with business and the private sector with the objective of increasing their participation in economic activity;
- (h) Establishment of a forum for Arab women ministers for the exchange of knowledge and experiences and the identification of means for the advancement of women and to promote the political culture of women;
- (i) Undertaking by ESCWA to conduct an analytical compendium study on the future of the situation of Arab women;
- (j) Assistance from ESCWA in monitoring and following up the progress achieved by member countries in the application of international resolutions, treaties and agreements on women and indicating to Arab governments the need to facilitate the assumption by women of leadership positions.

3. Seminar with civil society organizations including unions, syndicates and political parties to discuss the role of women in civil society in various political, economic and social spheres

11. The seminar was chaired by Ms. Mahnaz Afkhami, President of the Women's Learning Partnership. The main speakers were Sheikha Hissa Khalifa Ahmad Al-Thani, Special Rapporteur on Disability to the United Nations Committee on Social Development; Ms. Mary Jean Eisenhower, President of People to People International in the United States of America; and Ms. Zahira Kamal, Minister of Women's Affairs in Palestine.

12. Ms. Afkhami opened the seminar with a summary of her experience with civil society organizations, during which she noted that opinion polls in the region indicated an aspiration towards democracy. She focused on the need to kindle awareness among youth and women of the issue of gender equality and cause change in cultural concepts. She emphasized the importance of cooperation and exchange of experiences between civil society organizations in the various Arab countries in order to replicate the successful experiences that produce the desired results.

13. During the discussion, the following points were raised and conclusions reached:

- (a) Neglect of many of the ratified international conventions for the disabled who constitute 10 per cent of the total world population and, in particular, disabled women with special needs;
- (b) Insufficiency of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, responsibility for which rests jointly with governments and civil society;

- (c) Insufficiency of civil society action with regard to emergency aid services in a number of Arab countries because of political circumstances and instability, as in Palestine and Iraq;
- (d) Absence of genuine, institutional democracy, existence of laws and legislation that restrict the freedom of action of NGOs and the need to create a climate of confidence for genuine, sound partnership between NGOs and governments;
- (e) Lack of coordination between civil society organizations at the national, regional and international level;
- (f) Absence of young leaderships;
- (g) Lack and reduction of financial resources;
- (h) Neglect of the private sector to assume its responsibilities with regard to implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action;
- (i) Indivisibility of assistance and provision of services on the one hand and contribution to the development process on the other hand, because of the overlap between all development activities;
- (j) Importance of the utilization of micro-credit as a means to empower women and encourage them to undertake income generation projects;
- (k) Strengthening the partnership between NGOs and governments and emphasizing the role of these organizations in monitoring and building bridges between peoples and governments;
- (l) The need to amend the laws and legislation that protect the work of NGOs in the Arab countries;
- (m) Urging civil society organizations to focus on comprehensive, sustainable development in addition to pastoral activities;
- (n) Undertaking by ESCWA to conduct a comparative study on the situation of women in conflict zones and violent circumstances and those in countries that enjoy stability;
- (o) Call on ESCWA to conduct a study on the role of NGOs in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the experience of Arab women, with emphasis on youth and the encouragement of young leaderships and highlighting the issue of women at the national, regional and international levels.

4. Seminar with women intellectuals and media figures to discuss the role of women in cultural life and the media

14. The seminar was chaired by Ms. Bouthaina Shaaban, Minister for Expatriates in the Syrian Arab Republic. The main speakers were Ms. Asma Khader, Minister of State and Government Spokesperson for Media and Culture in Jordan, Mr. Hisham Sharabi, Chairman of the Center for Policy and Analysis on Palestine and Ms. Iqbal Barakah, Editor-in-Chief of Hawwa magazine, from Egypt.

15. Ms. Shaaban opened the seminar by emphasizing that the struggle today was taking place, above all, at the level of media and culture. She noted the issuance of the consultative opinion of the International Court of Justice ruling on the demolition of the wall in the West Bank and emphasized that this opinion indicated that the struggle would certainly lead to victory and that public opinion was in favour of Arab rights. She also noted that the balance of civilization, ethics and justice weighed in favour of the Arab world, even if the balance of force was against it. Therefore, it was the responsibility of every intellectual to convey Arab rights to public opinion. It was the duty of those working in the media to show world opinion that the weakness from which the Arab world suffers is procedural and organizational, not civilizational or ethical. She emphasized that the Arabs should coordinate their positions and speak with one voice and that men and women in the media and intellectuals should work to win over world opinion and present an intellectual position in the media that would bring Arab rights to the fore.

16. During the discussion, the following main points were raised and conclusions reached:

- (a) The mission of the media in conveying the rights of women as human beings in conformity with international law without allowing room for hesitation or doubt in this regard and the joint role of journalists and political will in the accomplishment of this mission;
- (b) The role of women in the media in defending women's issues;
- (c) The need to mobilize women's organizations to put pressure on those media that convey a negative image of women;
- (d) The need to move from an abstract, intellectual vision of women to realistic scenarios and achieve balance between resources spent in the gathering of information and that utilized in the implementation of projects;
- (e) Utilization of information drawn equally from a variety of legal and cultural sources at the country level in order to confront reality;
- (f) The role of the media in the reduction of the gap between theory and practice in the sphere of women's issues, in addition to support for dialogue and cohesion between peoples and politicians in order to empower the Arab peoples to express their position with regard to the significant developments taking place in the region;
- (g) The need for the commitment of journalists and the media to bring out the accomplishments of women in the Arab world and the obstacles that continue to stand in their way;

- (h) Establishment of media mechanisms in institutions and organizations concerned with women and strengthening media institutions;
- (i) Establishment of an Arab association for women in the media and a specialized centre for women and media studies;
- (j) Organization of training and professional skills programmes for Arab women in the media;
- (k) Strengthening of direct media access to women in rural and remote areas;
- (l) Enactment of advanced modern laws and legislation in order to protect Arab women in the media;
- (m) Establishment of an Arab network for press monitoring and response to negative articles and programmes about women and addressing western media in order to rectify the negative image of Arab women;
- (n) Kindling the awareness of media figures and intellectuals of women and gender issues;
- (o) Call on ESCWA to cooperate with specialized Arab media institutions, the Arab Union of Journalists and the Council of Arab information ministers and Arab media institutions and prepare an Arab media strategy for women;
- (p) Call on ESCWA to organize a special conference for Arab women in the media, hold workshops devoted to women in the media in order to study ways of promoting their role, allocate budgets for the preparation of television programmes on women and encourage good quality televisual and cultural activities in support of women's issues;
- (q) Call on ESCWA to publish and promote websites dealing with Arab women's issues.

C. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CENTRE FOR WOMEN SINCE THE FIRST SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN (Agenda item 7)

17. The Executive Secretary introduced this agenda item with reference to document E/ESCWA/WOM/2004/IG.1/4/Rev.1. This document is in two chapters, the first of which reviews the activities of the Centre for Women since the first session of the Committee on Women while the second includes a summary of progress achieved in the implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Committee on Women at its first session.

D. PROPOSED STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK OF THE CENTRE FOR WOMEN FOR THE BIENNIUM 2006-2007 (Agenda item 8)

18. The Executive Secretary introduced this agenda item with reference to document E/ESCWA/WOM/2004/IG.1/5, which contains a review of subprogramme 7 on the empowerment and advancement of women mentioned in document A/59/6(Prog.18) which

includes the proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2006-2007, in order to provide information on the above-mentioned subprogramme.

E. DATE AND VENUE OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN (Agenda item 9)

19. It was decided to hold the third session of the Committee on Women in Beirut in 2006.

F. OTHER MATTERS (Agenda item 10)

20. Under this agenda item, Ms. Noura Al Suweidi, Chairperson of the Second Session of the Committee on Women and representative of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak Al Nahyan, President of the Women's Union in the United Arab Emirates, announced the establishment of the Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak Fund for Arab Women Development at ESCWA. A memorandum of understanding was being prepared between ESCWA and the Women's Union with regard to the operation and mechanism of the fund. Ms. Mervat Tallawy, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA, thanked Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak for this generous initiative, her confidence in ESCWA and her support for Arab women.

III. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT (Agenda item 11)

21. During the closing session, held on 10 July 2004, the Committee on Women adopted the draft report on its second session presented in document E/ESCWA/WOM/2004/IG.1/L.6, with the agreed amendments.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE CONFERENCE

A. DATE AND VENUE

22. The conference was held at ESCWA headquarters, United Nations House in Beirut during the period 8-10 July 2004 and covered the second session of the Committee on Women, the Expert Group Meeting to Follow Up on the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing + 10) and the second meeting of the Consultative Committee for NGOs at ESCWA.

B. OPENING

23. The conference was opened by Ms. Mervat Tallawy, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA. She delivered the speech of Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, in which he focused on the importance of the role played by the empowerment of women in the resolution of conflicts and achievement of justice. He also noted the negative impact of the gravity of regional dangers on investment rates, which led to a reduction in levels of growth, and emphasized the need to deal with the disparity between the position of Arab women in political, social and economic life and that of women in other regions of the world.

24. The Executive Secretary then delivered her opening statement, in which she thanked the First Lady of Lebanon, Ms. Andrée Lahoud, represented by Ms. Randa Berri, for her patronage

of the conference. She focused on concern for women and children in the wars in the region that led to an increase in the number of victims, most of which were women. The Executive Secretary spoke of the negative impact of the tensions in the Arab region, including the decline in the investment and growth rates, the reduction of national income in the region during the past twenty years and the rise in the unemployment rate. She noted the numerous positive measures that had been taken in the region for the benefit of women and also noted the obstacles that continued to confront the progress of women. She emphasized the need to provide education and housing services, ensure employment opportunities and combat poverty and unemployment among women and eradicate customs and traditions harmful to them.

25. Ms. Nana Rawlings, former First Lady of Ghana and President of the 31 December Women's Movement in Ghana, made a statement in which she encouraged women to have faith in their capacity to cause change with the objective of bringing about peace, growth and stability. She focused on the need to bring about social justice through the participation of women in political, economic and social life. She also spoke of the importance of the role of the United Nations in protecting the organizations that were concerned with the improvement of social and living conditions and, in particular, in Africa.

26. Ms. Randa Berri, representative of the First Lady of Lebanon, then made a statement in which she expressed her optimism with regard to the situation of Arab women. She emphasized that the recommendations of the Beijing Conference had had a positive impact on the role of Arab women during the past ten years. She expressed the view that women were building their presence and political participation based on the conviction that had been established in individual countries and the Arab region in recent years.

27. A representative of ESCWA, Ms. Fatima Sbaity Kassem, Director of the ESCWA Centre for Women, reviewed the content of the Arab Regional Ten-Year Review and Appraisal of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action presented in document E/ESCWA/WOM/2004/IG.1/3. She focused on the accomplishments that had been achieved by the Arab countries and the obstacles that confronted them with regard to the implementation of the Platform for Action, based on country responses to the questionnaire sent by the Secretariat of the United Nations to governments in this regard. The Commission had received full responses from 18 Arab countries.

28. At the end of the opening ceremony, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA presented a number of awards pursuant to the recommendation made by the Committee on Women at its first session to the following persons: Ms. Suzanne Mubarak, First Lady of Egypt, in recognition of her launching of the "Women for peace" initiative; Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak Al Nahyan of Kuwait, for her support of Arab women's issues; the late Ms. Lour Mughayzal of Lebanon, for her defence of women's rights; Palestinian women, for their stand for the right to self-determination; and Morocco, for the issuance of the family code.

C. ATTENDANCE

29. Representatives of twelve ESCWA member countries attended the conference in addition to representatives of six other Arab States Members of the United Nations not members of the

Commission and other States Members of the United Nations; representatives of United Nations programmes, bodies and organizations; and observers from other inter-governmental, governmental and NGOs. A large number of women ministers and parliamentarians also attended, bringing the total number of participants to 450. The list of participants is attached as annex I to this report.

D. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

30. Rule 18 of the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of ESCWA stipulates that member countries shall assume the chairmanship of the sessions of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission on a rotating basis, in Arabic alphabetical order employed by the United Nations. In view of the absence of the United Arab Emirates from the first part of the meeting, Ms. Lulwa Al Awadhi, head of the delegation of Bahrain, which follows the United Arab Emirates in alphabetical order, assumed the chairmanship of the second session. Bahrain then handed chairmanship of the session to the United Arab Emirates, in the person of Ms. Noura Al Suweidi, Head of the United Arab Emirates delegation, who attended the second part of the meeting. Pursuant to the same rule, the Commission unanimously elected Ms. Bouthaina Shaaban, Head of the Syrian delegation and Ms. Mounira bint Nassir Al Missned, head of the Qatari delegation, as Vice Chairpersons and Ms. Intissar al-Wazir from Palestine as Rapporteur for the session.

E. AGENDA AND PROPOSED ORGANIZATION OF WORK

31. During the first session, the Committee on Women adopted the agenda of its second session as presented in document E/ESCWA/WOM/2004/IG.1/1, as follows:

1. Opening of the meeting:
 - Opening statements;
 - Presentation of the Arab Regional Ten-Year Review and Appraisal of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action;
 - Distribution of awards for outstanding work for the advancement of Arab women.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the provisional agenda.
4. Proposed organization of work.
5. General discussion.
6. The role of women in the call for peace: seminars and conclusions:
 - (a) Seminar with Arab women parliamentarians to discuss the role of women in legislation and political life;
 - (b) Seminar with Arab women ministers and executives to discuss the role of women in public life;
 - (c) Seminar with Arab women civil society organizations, including syndicates, unions and political parties, to discuss the role of women in civil society in various political, economic and social spheres;
 - (d) Seminar with Arab women intellectuals and media figures to discuss the role of women in cultural life and the media.
7. Report of the Executive Secretary on the activities of the Centre for Women since the first session of the Committee on Women.

8. Proposed strategic framework for the Centre for Women for the biennium 2006-2007.
9. Date and venue of the third session of the Committee on Women.
10. Other matters.
11. Adoption of the report of the Committee on Women on its second session and the Beirut Declaration on Arab Women Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace.

32. During the same session, the Committee adopted the proposed organization of work presented in document E/ESCWA/WOM/2004/IG.1/L.2.

F. DOCUMENTS

33. A list of the documents presented during the Arab Regional Conference Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace is attached as annex II to the present report.