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INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Regional Perspectives in Progress Achieved and Remaining Gaps and
Challenges in the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action**

Written Statement

Submitted by

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Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished representatives,

Arab countries have all made progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Arab region has witnessed significant advances in women's education in particular. Arab countries invested in adopting national education strategies that guarantee free public education to all citizens without discrimination. The gender parity index (GPI), (which measures the ratio of girls to boys), increased at all levels of education in most Arab countries, reaching a GPI of 1.63 in tertiary education in the GCC countries as women's enrolment rates exceeded those of men.

Advances have also been made in improving the quality of and accessibility to public health services. As a result of the progress made, women's life expectancy has increased considerably, while fertility rates and maternal mortality rates have dropped sharply. In the United Arab Emirates for example, maternal mortality ratio reached 0.01 % (per 100,000 births), and 98.2 % of all births in the GCC countries are supervised by medical skilled workers.

The region also witnessed legislative reform revising laws that discriminate against women and enacting new laws to provide them with protection and increase their participation in public life.

The legal reform that took place in recent years in the Arab region is an indication of a strong political will at the leadership and grassroots levels for the reversal of discriminatory legislation and the increased involvement of women in the public domain.

Favourable measures included the promulgation of new Family Laws, the creation of Family Courts and the amendment of discriminative labour laws, Personal Status Laws, and the penal code.

Citizenship Laws were also amended to enable women to pass on their nationality to their children in countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen.

In view of the low level of women's political representation in most of the Arab countries, some governments have adopted special measures, such as the quota system, to remedy this situation. This was done in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco, Mauritania, Palestine, Sudan and Tunisia.

In this context, many countries witnessed a substantive increase in the number of women in the electoral force, parliaments and local councils. In the ESCWA region, Iraq has the highest level of female representation in parliament at 25.5%; followed by United

Arab Emirates at 22.5 %, while amendments in the electoral law in Kuwait resulted in four women entering the Kuwaiti Parliament for the first time.

Commitment to women's equality has also been demonstrated by the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by 19 of the 22 Arab States. During recent years, three GCC countries acceded to the CEDAW, namely: the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar. Tunisia and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya acceded to the optional protocol. Morocco withdrew all its reservations to the Convention, while other countries such as Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan, and Algeria withdrew their reservations on some specific articles.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

Notwithstanding these achievements, the region is still marked by the limited participation of women in public life. Today, only one third of Arab women participate in the labour force, while their share and representation in national parliaments, is at a mere 10 %.

Furthermore, violence against women especially in conflict afflicted countries, such as Iraq and Palestine, still constitutes a challenge to the advancement of women.

Other factors that impede gender equality in the Arab region are related to structural barriers and the lack of basic statistics and sex-disaggregated data, which are necessary for evidence based planning and policy making.

The absence of statistics and analysis related to the effect of recent global events on women, such as the international financial crisis, the world food crisis and climate change, prevents governments from defining policies to protect women.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

The Arab regional review of progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action culminated in the adoption of a resolution that called for building further the capacity of national machineries for women and for increasing financial and human resources allocated to policies and programmes aimed at ensuring gender equality.

The resolution focused on the need to establish national observatories and early-warning systems to track and analyze social phenomena relating to the status of women, and to maintain sex-disaggregated databases in order to identify gender gaps in various sectors.

In addition, member countries were urged to integrate women in conflict resolution and peace building processes and to pay special attention to women victims of violence in Iraq and Palestine, through the adoption of local action plans in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

In this context, ESCWA continues to work closely with member countries to assist them in bridging gaps and overcoming challenges, towards the full implementation of the Platform for Action in the ESCWA region.

The ESCWA Centre for Women will continue to assist member countries in the challenging task of empowering women and unlocking their potential to contribute to the realization of sustainable human development in equitable societies.