



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK
RÉSEAU EURO-MÉDITERRANÉEN DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
الشبكة الأوروبية - المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان

EuroMed Non-Governmental Platform
Plate-forme non gouvernementale EuroMed
منبر المنظمات غير الحكومية للمنتدى الأورو-متوسطي

6 June 2013

**Memorandum in view of the
Third ministerial meeting of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)
On strengthening the role of women in society scheduled in Paris on 12 September 2013**

1. The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights network (EMHRN) and the Euromed Non-Governmental Platform (ENGP) welcome all initiatives, regional and national, aimed at strengthening the role of women in society, protecting and promoting women's rights and women's equal participation with men in political, economic and cultural life.
2. The EMHRN and the ENGP welcome all the measures to install gender equality in order to combat all forms of discrimination against women in accordance with the UfM Conclusions of the Ministerial Conference in March in November 2009
3. The EMHRN and ENGP were active and coordinated civil society initiatives and inputs to the first and second ministerial meetings in Istanbul and Marrakech in 2006 and 2009.
4. Since then the EMHRN and ENGP closely followed the situation on the ground with their members and warmly welcomed the revolutionary moments in the Maghreb and Middle East countries that brought hopes for freedom, equality and democracy. They also praised the crucial role played by women in the revolutions.
5. In 2011-2012, the EMHRN facilitated in depth national discussions and actions on women's rights and gender equality through meetings held in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia as well as with Syrian women's rights activists fighting oppression.
6. On this ground, the EMHRN and ENGP are deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation of women's rights in countries going through transitional processes.
7. A worsened security environment, patriarchal practices and conservative politico-religious views, accompanied by austere economic measures, have led to serious women's rights violations and

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weakened gender equality. For example, gender-based sexual violence is used as a weapon of war in Syria and cases of sexual violence committed with total impunity have been regularly reported in several countries of the region. Parliamentary quota was abolished in Egypt, reducing women's representation in lower house from 12% to 1.5%. Intense brutality was used against women practicing their rights to peaceful assembly and to express their opinion in several southern countries. Many women in Europe suffer greater precariousness due to economic austerity measures, which is coupled with the rise of movements whose policies are harmful to women's rights.

8. The EMHRN and ENGP notice at the same time, that the political situation in the region is highly volatile. Suffice it to mention that the Syrian regime is currently bombing and killing its own people, the legislative assemblies in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have yet to find their shape, parliamentary elections in Lebanon have been postponed to 2014, Israel is continuing the expansion of illegal settlement, etc.
9. The EMHRN and ENGP are, however, ready to support activities that can lead to a better situation for women, human rights and democracy in the EuroMed region and to contribute to the strengthening of civil society activities in this field.
10. In this relation, the EMHRN and ENGP regret that no implementation mechanisms for the Marrakech Conclusions were established at regional level and that the conclusions were not translated into national action plans. Our organisations call for the setting up of such a mechanism.
11. The EMHRN and ENGP strongly suggest that the Third Ministerial meeting by no means should weaken the conclusions of the Istanbul and Marrakech meetings.
12. Ministers should reiterate their commitment to promote de jure and de facto equality between men and women and to respect the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of women as well as men, as defined by the international human rights instruments, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
13. In this regard, the EMHRN and ENGP stress the importance of freedom of association and the independence of civil society as invariable principles for women's rights organisations to fulfil their mission. Restriction on these freedoms, including in relation to funding of organisations, are inadmissible.
14. The Ministers should agree on an Action Plan leading to:
 - a) Ensuring gender equality and non-discrimination based on sex as set forth in article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
 - b) Combating gender-based violence through adopting and implementing laws against gender based violence, including sexual harassment and laws for protection from domestic violence;

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- c) Developing and reforming judicial systems ensuring their independence and impartiality and the full and equal access of women to these;
 - d) Ensuring women's participation in political, civil, economic and public life *inter alia* by agreeing on mandatory quotas as a means for promoting their participation;
 - e) Abolishing discriminatory articles in personal status law, penal code and others;
 - f) Guarantee freedom of association for organisations and their free access to funding.
15. The Action Plan should define specific objectives, activities, timeframes, benchmarks and indicators and assignments of responsibilities.
16. Projects within this framework should include support to:
- i. Civil society actions to lift reservations to the CEDAW and abolish discriminatory articles in personal status law, penal code and others;
 - ii. A regional observatory on violence against women with a program to rehabilitate victims of sexual violence, and a regional initiative to end impunity for violence against women in legislation and practice;
 - iii. Legal aid programmes support to women ensuring their equal access to courts and non-discrimination by these;
 - iv. Projects to support women's equal economic, social and cultural rights, in particular their right to work and to education.
17. Furthermore, independent Euro-Med civil society organisations including women's rights organisations should be closely involved and consulted in relation to the preparations and the outcome of the Paris Ministerial meeting. Representatives of these should be invited to attend the Ministerial meeting in Paris and offered space to convey their analysis and recommendations.

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