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Introduction

1. This constitutes the third regional report since the Fourth World Convention on Women (Beijing, 4-15 September 1995) aimed at reviewing and evaluating the progress made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in terms of assessing the achievements realized with regard to the gender equality, empowering women, highlighting current obstacles and challenges, defining appropriate strategies to put an end to obstacles, and achieving the advancement of women and equality in all countries. The report is presented every five years shedding light on developments during this period of time.

2. This report, which was prepared through the cooperation between ESCWA Centre for Women and the Women Department within the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States (LAS), is based on national reports issued by 17 countries. ESCWA co-organized, along with the General Secretariat of LAS, the regional office of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the Arab Women Organization and the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research, a training session for Arab countries aimed at preparing national reports on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which was held in the General Secretariat Headquarters of LAS in March 2009.

3. National reports were prepared based on the questionnaire addressed by the United Nations to governments as a basis for their reports and in order to define implemented achievements, gaps and current challenges. The questionnaire also highlighted fields in terms of procedures and initiatives that were most pressing for follow-up to the implementation. The countries and territories that prepared national reports were as follows: Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Tunisia, Algeria, Syrian Arab Republic, Djibouti, Sudan, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, Mauritania and Yemen. Countries that did not prepare related reports included Comoros, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Somalia, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. In view of the women status in Iraq due to conflicts stretching over several decades, other information on the status of Iraqi women were collected from other recent reports and included in this report.

4. The Arab region comprises three categories of countries, namely: high-income countries, middle-income countries and low-income countries. High-income countries as well as some of the middle-income countries succeeded in providing many fundamental services to women, such as health, education, shelter and micro-loans, which led to a noticeable improvement on both women education and health levels, compared to low-income countries. However, all three categories still face common challenges regarding the status of women, namely, limited economic and political participation of women as well as vio09 T 79lrmen as vio09 n

28. Women in Lebanon also suffered from destruction during the July 2006 war waged by Israel against Lebanon, in which millions of cluster bombs led to the destruction of infrastructure and the emigration and killing of civilians.

**II. PROGRESS MADE ON THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION AND
AS PER THE OUTCOME DOCUMENT OF THE TWENTY-THIRD
SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

raised to 16 and mobile schools were established for children living in the desert, and girls are being encouraged to direct their education towards scientific and technical fields as well as information technology. In Djibouti, the mandatory age was raised to 16 and programmes were defined to combat the illiteracy of women. In Oman, the equality of opportunities between genders was consecrated, and a number of full scholarships were dedicated to girls who have achieved their general diploma but do not benefit from scholarships from governmental institutions.

39. Arab countries expanded on programmes and projects related to non-formal education offered by governmental and non-governmental institutions in order to eliminate illiteracy, particularly among women. Such programmes include open education to provide the opportunity of resumption of education for women who have interrupted their college education, as well as education programmes for adults.

40. Arab countries, including Qatar, adopted a pioneer policy to encourage scientific research, develop skills and competences, and sponsor creative people of both genders by providing scholarships and expeditions distributed equally between women and men. Some countries excelled in this field, namely, the Syrian Arab Republic where the number of women who went on expeditions exceeded that of men; and Yemen, which dedicated all inner scholarships to female students. Some Arab countries, such as Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, worked on limiting the gender-based gap in the fields of information and communication technology (ICT) by providing qualitative training for women to use computers and the Internet, with a special focus on women in less fortunate areas. Qatar encouraged scientific research by allocating 2.8 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) for researchers and established a fund to sponsor scientific research in 2006. Oman offered scholarships to people with limited income and training grants in order to improve women's skills and provide opportunities of qualification and employment for women with disabilities in view of habilitating them.

41. Many Arab countries adopt a continuous revision of curricula and school textbooks, as well as programmes to develop competences in gender-based fields for teachers and administrative staff, in particular female and male pedagogic supervisors and planners, integrate women human rights and children's rights and fight discrimination against women in programmes.

42. Despite all efforts exerted to provide education and improve its level, women illiteracy rates are still elevated in many Arab countries, particularly Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, Egypt, Morocco, Mauritania and Yemen, which deprives women of opportunities to work and benefit from many services. In many Arab countries, education has not been promoted yet to the quality required, and is not homogenous with the needs of the labour market, in addition to the fact that most of it is traditional, unmotivating and insufficiently entertaining for students, which leads to a low level of graduates and a lack in important competences needed in the labour market. This, in turn, leads to a rise in unemployment rates, particularly among women, due to the unwillingness of educated girls to work.

C. WOMEN AND HEALTH

43. The countries of the region worked on providing free health care to mothers and newborns, which led to a decrease in the rate of maternal mortality in some countries, by following up pregnant women in maternity and childhood units in primary health centres, health institutions, public hospitals, and establishments specialized in women's diseases and delivery. Some countries worked on eliminating female genital mutilation. In Tunisia, the mortality rate of women recorded a high decrease to achieve 47 deaths for every 100,000 live newborns, thereby exceeding the target defined in MDGs. Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait issued the law of the mandatory medical check-up before marriage, while some countries defined national programmes for family planning and plans of action aimed at improving maternal health and newborns in particular, as well as providing means of pregnancy planning in medical centres. Egypt founded the new Ministry of State for Family and Population. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the "healthy villages" project was implemented in 530 villages in which comprehensive health, development and social services were provided.

society, refusal of female victims and the families to acknowledge this phenomenon, social pressures exerted aimed at silencing victims, lack of awareness of many women with regard to their human and legal rights, and lack of balance in authority distribution and relations between women and men.

57. Some legislations, such as family laws as related to women, lean in favour of discrimination against women, thereby leading to domestic violence without fear of retribution. The absence of legislations criminalizing sexual harassment at work and the impossibility of punishing the perpetrators of such crimes make women vulnerable to the violation of their fundamental rights. With regard to so-called crimes of honour and rape, the conservation of the attenuating circumstances in the penal laws of some countries allows the attenuation of the penalty on the perpetrators of such crimes and paves the way for perpetuating these crimes without fear of retribution.

58. There is still a deficiency in services that should be offered to women who face several forms of violence, namely, help lines, appropriate shelters for battered women, and psychiatric rehabilitation of women, in addition to a deficiency in health services, training and employment.

E. WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICTS

59. Some countries have adopted measures aimed at reducing the impact of armed conflicts on women, such as establishment of the international committee for fair and permanent peace between Palestinians and Israelis. Palestine, through workshops and meetings, aims to promote Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000 on women, peace and security, which urges United Nations Member States to ensure an increased women's representation on all levels of decision-making in institutions and international, regional and national mechanisms to prevent, manage and solve conflicts. Sudan established a national committee for eliminating the kidnapping of women and children aimed at protecting women and children in times of war. Jordan formed a national committee for the activation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Yemen has fought the phenomenon of carrying arms in main cities, destroyed all private stocks of and provided an integrated residential agglomeration for refugees from Somalia next to Aden. Moreover, shelters for battered refugees were established in Sana'a, supervised by a civil society organization, in addition to camps for internal displaced persons in the wake of the conflict in Saada, while providing all necessary services. In Egypt, the Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement was established to promote the culture of peace and security as well as to adopt measures aimed at limiting the effects resulting from armed conflicts and ensuring women's participation in decision-making related to preventing conflicts; and activate the Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on the ground.

60. Following the war waged by Israel against Lebanon in July 2006, the National Commission of Lebanese Women launched the programme on Women Empowerment: Peaceful Action for Security and Stability (WEPASS) in 20 villages and small towns, in which women's commissions and municipal councils coordinate to define and implement the reconstruction priorities. Furthermore, the National Commission implemented the programme on supporting women in southern Lebanon in regions exposed to Israeli aggression. In the Syrian Arab Republic, aids, shelters and services were provided to dozens of thousands of Lebanese refugees, as well as for more than a million Ira

F. WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

62. Most Arab countries placed economic empowerment among priority topics in their national plans for the advancement of women. They issued legislations, adopted initiatives and measures, and established programmes to support women economically as they encouraged and sustained women with individual initiatives to turn their initiatives into productive projects. Many countries took interest in emigrant female workers and women working in the informal sector. In Lebanon, a draft law was submitted to the Council of Ministers to stipulate the incorporation of housekeepers to the provisions of the labour law, and a committee was formed by representatives of concerned ministries, non-governmental organizations and embassies to suggest legal texts governing the status of female housekeepers. Tunisia adopted part-time working systems for mothers for two-thirds of the salary, with a preservation of their full rights, which provides better opportunities for mothers to coordinate between their family lives and professional engagements. Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic launched training and work programmes for new graduates in the ICT sector.

63. Most of countries resorted to encouraging women to work in posts and professions that have hitherto been reserved for men, such as marriage official, mayor, police, licensing, jurisdiction, heading the military court or the financial market.

64. Some countries launched mechanisms to support projects undertaken by women and programmes to support the participation of women in economic life by facilitating their accession to financing sources, empowering them through training and marketing opportunities and launching funds to guarantee small projects. Bahrain started the *Ibda'a* (creativity) Bank aimed at providing small loans to applicants with limited incomes, and implemented the anti-unemployment insurance system for female workers to achieve economic and social security for families. In Qatar, the Social Development Centre established a unit to develop projects as an independent social institution in order to develop small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and a fund to finance small projects providing training services, follow-up and marketing services for the SME sector. Palestine issued the loans directory and distributed it on women's institutions and organizations. Tunisia established a mechanism to support women's projects by facilitating access to financial sources and help market female products. In Djibouti, a social fund was established for youth wishing to start small projects in 2008 whereby the State bears the security and insurance fees necessary for the continuity of the projects. Councils and organizations were established for business women in several Arab countries. Oman encouraged women's participation in SMEs, such as projects of babysitting, and caring for the elderly or disabled people.

65. Some countries defined strategies for the development of rural women and the rural community and financing projects undertaken by rural women. For example, Jordan launched a new initiative to limit unemployment and define an operational plan to develop the capacities of male and female woa

67. There is an aversion in the private sector to employing women due to the expense resulting from delivery and maternity holidays, and an aversion of women to working in the private sector due to the working hours exceeding those of the public sector, or because of its requirements, such as travelling or transportation, which leads to the concentration of a high rate of women employment in the informal sector. This translates in most cases in their deprivation of social protection and health insurance, the right to accede to syndicates or labour unions, and making use of the benefits of working in the formal sector.

68. There is a lack in information on the impact of the global financial crisis and other global phenomena on women's employment, in addition to the general lack of information related to operational mechanisms or women's work.

69. Low-income Arab countries in the region, such as Sudan, suffer from a scarcity in resources due to the economic blockade, burden of debts, challenges of globalization, integration in the global economy and the difficulty of obtaining assets and credits, which negatively affects projects of fighting poverty.

70. Arab women are still responsible for all their family members, which makes it hard on them to balance between their family role and their productive role, particularly given that the State fails to recognize women's efforts in family care economy and to provide

74. Despite the achievements in terms of enhancing the accession of women to authority and decision-making positions, the proportion of Arab women participation in elected parliaments still represents the lowest in the world. The number of women candidates and voters in elections remains very limited in many Arab countries due to an aversion of women participating in political life that stems from a firm, albeit erroneous belief that men better fit this field and that voting for men is more of a guarantee of success. In addition, women are occupied by their different roles within households without little assistance. Factors inciting women to refuse participation include the absence of security in political life as well as the pressures often exerted on them to cast their votes for the same candidates. The absence of civil and political freedoms does not help to enhance the effectiveness of women political participation. In many cases, women are chosen for authority positions owing to their class within society, relations in the governing party or because they represent certain confessions.

75. The number of women in leadership positions remains insignificant. Some countries lack the special measures to support women in high leadership positions, while the implementation of women early retirement systems in some countries has led to a decrease in the number of women in decision-making positions.

H. WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

76. Most governments in the Arab region have acceded to international conventions, treaties and protocols related to human rights stipulating equality between genders, while civil society organizations have worked on promoting the culture of human rights and on reaffirming that women's rights are part of human rights.

77. Several countries made different legislative ratifications to eliminate discrimination against women, as discussed in chapter I. Tunisia and Qatar issued a law related to female prisoners, mothers, pregnant women and wet nurses, stipulating the reservation of a private place for them and their children. In the United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, Djibouti, Sudan, Oman and Qatar, special laws were enacted to protect people with special needs. In 2009, Bahrain issued a law related to the treatment of foreign wives of Bahrainis, and of the children of Bahraini women married to foreign men, ensuring the same provisions as full nationals with regard to the settlement of some fees imposed for governmental services, including health, education and residence provided they are permanently residing in Bahrain. Yemen ratified the law related to the protection of female prisoners. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the right of children of female citizens residing in the country with foreign spouses were upheld in terms of enrolling in Syrian universities and institutes. Many countries have combated the problem of trafficking in women by issuing new legislations or defining plans to limit this phenomenon.

78. Some countries established women's complaints offices, while others expanded the activities of the already existing complaints offices in order to look into any discrimination of women and to work on eliminating it. Such offices currently exist in Jordan, Bahrain, Djibouti and Egypt.

79. Arab women still endure the violation of their human rights due to occupation, such as in Palestine, where their rights to move and change residence, receive proper treatments, work, security, stability and protection during armed conflicts are violated in addition to the impossibility of protecting Palestinian

women. Customs and traditions in rural areas still deprive women of many of their rights, such as their legitimate and legal right to inheritance.

I. WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

82. The media in most Arab countries currently is significantly interested in women's issues, which is reflected in programmes to discuss such issues and the media coverage to highlight the achievements of active women or the civil society institutions working on the advancement of women.

83. Large numbers of girls are acceding to the different specializations related to the media in universities, while large numbers of women occupy jobs in the media. Some of these have succeeded in assuming leadership positions in the media, such as heading channels as well as television and radio media networks or national newspapers, including in Jordan, Tunisia, Syrian Arab Republic, Oman, Lebanon, Egypt and Yemen. In Bahrain, a woman was nominated Minister of Culture and Information. In 2007, Jordan issued a law to ensure the right to information, which is considered an important legislative achievement in the region.

84. Some countries, such as United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Tunisia and Lebanon, launched media strategies for Arab women to support the role of the media in transmitting a positive, non-stereotyped image of women, while national councils and media directorates specialized in women's and children's issues were established in the United Arab Emirates and the Syrian Arab Republic. The United Arab Emirates, Tunisia and Algeria encouraged the launch of women's websites, and Egypt established a media observatory to monitor positive and negative images of women on television. Moreover, centres for Arab women as well as ICT were established in Algeria, in addition to the Arab Media Women Centre in Jordan aimed at reviewing advanced female experiences in the media, promoting awareness of CEDAW in the media circles and raising women's awareness with regard to their political rights. In Qatar, a woman succeeded in reaching a decision-making position in the information technology field, while another gained the seat of Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology.

85. Despite this progress, media policies still lack the gender-based considerations in a way capable of controlling media orientations in an integrated and comprehensive way that guarantees the continuity of transmitting positive, non-stereotyped images of women and their different roles. The media in some Arab countries limit their coverage to a few categories of women, while neglecting women in rural and remote settings as well as those with special needs.

J. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

86. The number of countries that founded ministries of environment has increased and currently includes Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, Syrian Arab Republic, Sudan, Oman, Qatar and Egypt. Women have assumed the position of minister of environment in Jordan, Tunisia and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the head of the Environmental Affairs Agency in Egypt and the Water Research Institute. In Tunisia, Oman and Egypt, women play an effective role in environmental decision-making by defining local plans, specifying local development work priorities with regard to protecting the environment and contributing in supporting State efforts in implementing the different environmental policies. Some countries established a general administration for women in the water resources ministry, such as Egypt and Yemen. Moreover, the programme of work of the National Environment and Sustainable Growth in Tunisia included a chapter pertinent to women.

87. Environmental awareness-raising programmes were prepared and implemented based on the activation of the role of civil society, while efforts were exerted for gender-based integration in the natural resources administration. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the project of enhancing women environmental capacities in rural communities was implemented, while gender-based issues were integrated in the concepts of preserving natural resources.

88. Wells were dug in rural areas of Tunisia and Yemen, while poor families were provided with necessary materials to build closed water reservoirs to facilitate women's accession to pure potable water and mitigate the burden of having to bring water from long distances, in addition to organizing guidance programmes in this view. In Djibouti, cement wells were dug in rural areas in all districts in 2009.

89. Poor Arab countries, in particular those subjected to hard environmental circumstances such as Yemen, suffer from a lack in potential in terms of providing improved potable water, where 20 per cent of citizens still use potable water from open wells.

90. Many countries do not allow women to participate in policymaking and decision-taking in environmental administration and preservation or in limiting the effects of global phenomena, such as climate change. Other countries suffer from incomplete databases and information related to women's integration in the sustainable growth strategy and the repercussions of women's participation in managing natural resources, thereby exacerbating efforts aimed at measuring the progress made with regard to the participation of women.

K. GIRLS' RIGHTS

91. Many Arab countries have focused on girls' rights, while some have issued laws stipulating the full equality between girls and boys. The United Arab Emirates, Tunisia and Palestine issued a law to protect the rights of children, while some countries, including Tunisia and Yemen, established a higher council for motherhood and childhood. In Egypt, the Children's Law was ratified to include more rights to girls, such as prohibiting and criminalizing female genital mutilation and increasing the marriage age of girls, while the national council for childhood and motherhood launched a phone line to help parents and girls risking female genital mutilation and a hotline to receive complaints of violence against children. Sudan ratified its Children's Law and established the National Council for Child Welfare. Djibouti issued a national strategy to eliminate all types of female genital mutilations in 2006. Lebanon established the Higher Council of Childhood to protect children against mistreatment. The Ministry of Social Development in Oman launched a phone line for domestic orientation and guidance.

92. Many governments work on limiting the number of girls dropping out of schools and on increasing the rate of women acceding to education, particularly in rural areas. In Egypt, the National Council for

retirement rights and military service. It cooperated with civil organizations in encouraging the Parliament to review the local political parties' law. In Jordan, the National Committee for Women's Affairs along with civil societies formed groups to exert pressure on the Parliament and succeeded in raising the legal age of marriage, and presented a programme of work aimed at establishing dialogue between parliamentarians and

(g) Including men in plans and activities aimed at enhancing gender equality in order for the women's issue to become a societal one;

(h) Facing all forms of violence exerted against women through legal reform, accentuating the penalty and speed of execution on the perpetrators, establishing mechanisms to monitor violence and centres to shelter and support battered women, and enhance the participatory methodology of limiting violence and protecting families;

(i) Investing in ICT to spread legal awareness in the society on the rights of women and children.

B. POVERTY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

1. *Reality*

113. Most countries highlighted the impact of poverty on women, its reasons and the way to step outside the cycle of poverty even in high-income countries. This stems from several factors, including the spread of illiteracy, school drop-out rates of girls, population growth, lack of women's skills, lack of work opportunities, higher unemployment among women compared to men, and conditions of women working in the informal sector where salaries are limited and where there is a lack of social security or health insurance. Women sustain poverty, particularly in rural areas where they work for no return, and due to their multiple roles and the immensity of burdens they undergo without any assistance when they provide for their families, especially in the wake of the international food and financial crises. This reality prevails in view of the absence of a vital and clear methodology to deal with the issue of women's poverty.

2. *Plans for confrontation*

114. Countries are working to confront the challenge of women's poverty and the consequences reflected in a weak participation in the economic field through plans aimed at the following:

(a) Ensuring women's access to education at all levels, increasing the proportion of girls joining education, decreasing the rate of drop-out rates among girls, implementing the mandatory education, developing the quality of /Pa()TJiep0.1641.169 2iY(tT4ir oi8(or he()0,i Tc 0005saccen of -1.153izad(en, ath to
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(h) Coordinating between foreign financing entities to ensure a fair distribution of financing on different problems of the various categories of women;

(i) Establishing a database on the dimension and kind of incoming employees and improving their standards of living as well as ensuring their human rights and non-exploitation;

(j) Taking care of women with special needs and marginalized categories, such as teenagers, the elderly, emigrants and women enduring occupation;

(k) Caring for women's health in general and puerperal health in particular, and developing the health system as well as the preventive programmes.

C. LOW RATE OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

1. *Reality*

115. The participation of Arab women is still limited in the political field, decision-making positions, and in terms of national and local plans in the context of conflict-solving.

2. *Plans for confrontation*

116. Countries are trying to exert more efforts to face this challenge and increase the rate of women's participation in decision-making through plans aimed at the following:

(a) Increasing the rate of women's participation in parliaments, elected councils and political parties in different ways, including through female quota, and encouraging and empowering women to run for elections;

(b) Making available jobs to women that were hitherto inaccessible to them, and defining a minimal limit to enhance women's presence in decision-making positions;

(c) Increasing the number of portfolios given to women and working on diversifying them;

(d) Providing services that empower women to fulfil their productive and puerperal roles and increase their societal participation, and working on enhancing men's participation in assuming the family and children responsibilities to help women assume their puerperal function;

(e) Promoting a positive image of women who have reached decision-making positions, and their achievements as well as promoting women serving as role models from different categories;

(f) Enhancing women's participation in resolving conflicts in countries undergoing armed conflicts.

D. W

2. Plans for confrontation

118. In order to face the challenges stemming from weak mechanisms and tools for monitoring, follow-up and coordination, several countries have defined plans aimed at the following:

(a) Networking and developing institutional work mechanisms by ensuring financial and competent human capacities to integrate gender-based issues in programmes, plans and projects;

(b) Updating national mechanisms related to women, reviewing their competences and priorities and evaluating their performance, establishing effective systems for follow-up and evaluation, institutionalizing the functions of the coordination entities and units of gender issues in ministries, and working on analysing the different ministries policies from a gender-based perspective;

(c) Training line ministries to define gender-based responsive budgets;

(d) Collecting and publishing all gender-based statistics;

(e) Integrating women-related national plans in comprehensive national development plans;

(f) Capacity-building and training in gender-based issues, networking with parliaments and enhancing the participation of women-related civil organizations to face women's problems;