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REPORT

WORKSHOP ON THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN: THE ROLE OF JUDGES AND PARLIAMENTARIANS IN IMPLEMENTATION

AMMAN, JORDAN, 17-19 OCTOBER 2007

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I. Introduction

The Division for the Advancement of Women in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DAW/DESA), in co-operation with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), organized a sub-regional workshop on the roles of judges and parliamentarians in implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the Convention) in Amman, Jordan, from 17-19 October 2007. Judges and parliamentarians from the following nine countries participated in the event: Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Representatives of the Occupied Palestinian Territories also attended the workshop. The facilitators for the workshop were Ms. Meriem Belmihoub-Zerdani, a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Committee), and Ms. Farida Bennani, a professor of Islamic law at the Qadi Ayad University in Morocco. Yasmeeen Hassan and Saras Jagwanth of the Division for the Advancement of Women, and Suheir Azzouni, Kate Corenthal and Carla Moussa of ESCWA, supported the workshop. The list of participants is attached hereto as Annex A.

II. Format and Programme of Work

The programme of work is attached hereto as Annex B. The workshop was opened by Ms. Suheir Azzouni, Chief of the ESCWA Centre for Women, and Ms. Saras Jagwanth of DAW/DESA. Discussions took place both in plenary meetings and in working groups. At the end of the workshop, participants adopted a series of recommendations to enhance implementation of the Convention in countries of the region. The findings and recommendations of the participants in the working groups are attached hereto as Annexes C and D.

Plenary sessions:

On the first day of the workshop, plenary presentations were made by Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani (overview of the Convention) and Ms. Bennani (compatibility of the Convention and Islamic jurisprudence). On the second day, plenary sessions were conducted by Ms. Saras Jagwanth (Optional Protocol) and Ms. Yasmeeen Hassan (violence against women).

An overview of the Convention

Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani gave an overview of the provisions of the Convention, including the general recommendations of the Committee; reservations made by States parties to the Convention (mainly reservations to articles 2, 9, 15 and 16 which were made by countries of the ESCWA region); the Committee's stance on reservations; the work of the Committee; and the reporting process. Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani focused on the roles that judges and parliamentarians can play in implementation of the Convention.

The compatibility of the Convention and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh)

Ms. Bennani's presentation focused on harmonization of the Convention and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), especially in matters relating to family and personal status laws and nationality laws, since these were areas where ESCWA States parties had made reservations to the Convention. Ms. Bennani encouraged participants to question the assumption that Islamic law and jurisprudence was rigid and inflexible on the issue of women's rights, highlighting that there were four main schools of Islamic jurisprudence which had different interpretations of Sharia and that some of these interpretations enabled women to enjoy the rights stipulated in international agreements. Ms. Bennani examined case studies from Islamic countries that have used more progressive schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to inform their laws and made progress in harmonizing their laws with the Convention and lifting reservations. She also pointed out that many arguments against women's equality were rooted in cultural practices that had nothing to do with Islam. Islam merely provided general guidance that had been built upon by discriminatory traditions and practices. She pointed out that many discriminatory interpretations of Islamic texts arose when these were read out of context and stressed the importance of reading Islamic verses in context. She encouraged judges and parliamentarians to consider the ways in which they could question and change deeply rooted cultural practices that lead to the subordination of women and impede implementation of the Convention.

Discussions among the participants at the end of the first day focused on the following:

- the need for dissemination and awareness-raising on the Convention, including amongst judges and members of parliament since it was felt that key stakeholders had no information about the Convention and its provisions;
- the important role that is to be played by other stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations and the executive branch of government, in implementation of the Convention, and the need to conduct training workshops for such groups;
- the identification of the following as obstacles to undertaking any law reform to enshrine women's rights: (i) deeply rooted cultural and traditional practices that sometimes had been justified on the basis of religion; (ii) unwillingness of parliamentarians to address any law or practice that is seen to be within the ambit of Sharia; and (iii) the practical difficulty of using different schools of Islamic jurisprudence to change laws;
- the importance of changing mindsets in the region, as the most progressive laws would be ineffective in the face of pervasive discriminatory cultural practices;
- the need to actively engage progressive scholars of Islamic jurisprudence in law reform, for example, by having them provide legal opinions to members of parliament; and
- the link between the role of judges and members of parliament and ways to improve collaboration and increase joint efforts to implement the Convention.

The Optional Protocol

The plenary discussion during the second day of the workshop focused on the Optional Protocol to the Convention and its role in enhancing women's rights through enhanced accountability of States. Ms. Saras Jagwanth, noting that none of the participants were from a State party that had ratified the Optional Protocol, highlighted the important role that the Optional Protocol could play in assisting States in implementation of the Convention. She gave an overview on the complaints and inquiry procedures under the Optional Protocol and encouraged participants to consider the roles that they could play in advocating for the ratification of the Optional Protocol.

Violence against women

In advance of the working groups on violence against women, Ms. Yasmeen Hassan gave a presentation on the international legal framework on violence against women, including the Committee's general recommendations 12 and 19, highlighting that violence against women is both a cause and a consequence of discrimination against women. She gave a brief overview of the concerns expressed by the Committee on violence against women in concluding comments issued to States parties over the last decade, including those related to attitudes and stereotypes; data and research; legislation and its implementation; provision of services; and specific practices and forms of violence. She provided an overview of the Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women, highlighting in particular its chapters on state responsibility to address violence against women and promising practices in addressing violence against women. She also gave an overview of the General Assembly resolution (A/RES/61/143) on "Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women" pointing out that this resolution was adopted by unanimous consent in the General Assembly at the end of 2006 and thus reflected the concerns and expectations of all States. Highlighting that the Secretary-General's study and the General Assembly resolution have accelerated the momentum for stakeholders at all levels and fields to take comprehensive action on the issue of violence against women, she encouraged participants to think about the roles that they could play towards addressing such violence. Lastly, she provided a synopsis of the cases on violence against women that had been addressed by the Committee under the Optional Protocol complaint and inquiry procedures, highlighting how the Optional Protocol could assist States in implementing the international legal framework on violence against women.

Thematic working groups:

Judges and parliamentarians met in two separate working groups to discuss family and personal status laws on the second day and violence against women on the third day. Each participant had been invited to prepare a short paper on family and personal status laws or violence against women based on her/his own country-specific experience, and to identify progress made in these areas, the role played by judges and parliamentarians and

the obstacles encountered. These papers formed the basis of the discussion in the working groups. The discussion in each working group was facilitated by Ms. Belmihoub- Zerdani (working group of parliamentarians) and Ms. Bennani (working group of judges), assisted by staff members of DAW and ESCWA.

Working groups on family and personal status laws

In the discussion that took place on the first day in relation to family and personal status laws, participants focused on (i) obstacles to harmonizing family and personal status laws with the provisions of the Convention; and (ii) strategies to overcome such obstacles and progress made. Participants were also asked to analyze the impact of reservations to articles 2, 9, 15 and 16 of the Convention, and deliberate on possibilities of narrowing the scope of these reservations and ultimately removing them. *The findings and recommendations of the working groups on family and personal status laws are attached hereto as Annex C.*

The discussion by *judges* focused on the following:

- The participants debated the consequences of the fact that many Constitutions in the Middle East acknowledge that international treaties supersede national laws. One such consequence was that judges in such States had to implement the Convention over contradictory national laws. However, participants noted that, in practice, international law is not applied in domestic courts. Most judges do not know about the Convention, its substantive provisions and its application in the domestic legal framework. There is no case law in the Middle East which refers to the Convention. One judge pointed out that invitation to this workshop was the first time she had even heard of the Convention. Participants felt that the lack of awareness of the Convention clearly hinders the advancement of women's rights by judges.
- Judges also debated their role in application of the law. Many judges felt themselves restricted to a very technical application of the law and did not see any space for a gender-sensitive interpretation and application of the law. Many felt that it was up to the litigants in a particular case to raise the question of the

applicability of the Convention and that judges could not proactively refer to the Convention.

- The issues of lack of female judges, and of religious clerics (with no formal legal training and no knowledge of international conventions) acting as judges and applying personal status and family laws; and the problems encountered in countries such as Syria and Lebanon which have multiple religious sects with their own personal status and family laws, were discussed.
- Discriminatory cultural patterns and traditions and illiteracy among women were seen as major obstacles to reform of family and personal status laws and to the implementation of the Convention.
- Some positive developments in the area of family and personal status laws, such as amendments to laws on age of marriage, guardianship of children, citizenship rights, divorce rights for women and reproductive rights were discussed, along with procedural and institutional advancements such as expedited judgments and special courts.

The discussion by *parliamentarians* focused on the following:

- There was debate on the issue of reservations to the Convention and the role of parliamentarians in the process of removal of reservations to the Convention. It was agreed that there was no uniform position regarding the ratification of, and reservations to, the Convention – i.e., one State party had ratified the Convention without reservations, many States entered several reservations, and some entered declarations. In addition, many countries which ratified the Convention with reservations, ratified other international treaties without similar reservations.
- Most States have entered reservations on articles 2, 9, 15 and 16, stating that these articles contradict Islamic Sharia. The participants discussed the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence and their varying interpretations of Sharia. In addition, they noted that some reservations, such as those to article 9 (nationality) did not have anything to do with Sharia but were based on political considerations in the region that led to discriminatory citizenship laws.

- The issue of sectarianism was viewed as one of the barriers to achieving gender equality in the Middle East, especially in relation to family laws.
- Participants felt that political will for amending national laws that discriminate against women existed in the region, as well as a grassroots level movement, in support of the practical realization of gender equality.

Working groups on violence against women

Judges and parliamentarians met again in two separate working groups to discuss issues related to violence against women, based on their country-specific experience – including the following: (i) prevalent forms of violence against women in the region; (ii) measures that have been established to address such violence; and (iii) gaps and challenges in this regard. *The findings and recommendations of the working groups on violence against women are attached hereto as Annex D.*

The discussion by *judges* focused on the following:

- All forms of violence against women existed in countries of the Middle East. However, the social and legal system is ill-equipped to deal with such cases – there is shame and stigma associated with being a victim of violence against women and women are discouraged from reporting such violence. Victims of rape and sexual assault are often killed by their families. Laws addressing violence against women are insufficient – in either their coverage or the penalties prescribed -- and procedures for filing complaints are often cumbersome. As a result, most cases of violence against women do not even reach courts. In Egypt, for example, judges do not hear about cases of female genital mutilation/cutting unless the girl dies. When cases do reach courts, judges are bound by the realities of the culture in which they function – for example, one judge was aware that in making a rapist marry his victim she was perpetuating further violence against the woman but the alternative of having the victim killed by her family was much bleaker.
- There was discussion of various forms of violence against women and the way these are addressed in the legal system. It was felt that some forms of violence

against women, such as incest, were not appropriately addressed in the laws – one judge pointed out that if a girl is pregnant as a result of rape by her father she is punished but he is not. In addition, there was discussion of legal provisions that exonerate perpetrators of so-called honour crimes or provide for a reduction of penalty based on extenuating circumstances. None of the countries represented penalized marital rape and most did not have provisions covering sexual harassment. Jordan was the only country that had submitted a draft bill on domestic violence to parliament.

- Judges were generally unaware that discriminatory laws that they enforce make women more vulnerable to violence and there was a discussion on this topic. In particular, wife obedience laws in some countries that make women explicitly subservient to their husbands were discussed as facilitating violence against women.
- Participants felt that judges in general were unaware of the international legal framework on violence against women, and in particular the general recommendations 12 and 19 of the Committee.
- There was some discussion on the different court systems (unified or parallel courts for various sects) and legal systems (civil law or common law) in the various countries and participants noted that only some of these systems allow the possibility of creating judicial precedents.

The discussion by *parliamentarians* focused on the following:

- The developments in each of the countries in the region were discussed, and the lack of specific laws covering violence against women was raised. Preventing violence against women in various sectors, including through national action plans, was also discussed.
- The issue of women supporting violence against women, such as by taking part in female genital mutilation/cutting or “honour” killing of other women and by failing to speak out against violence that they witness against other women, was discussed. Participants noted that such responses by women were to be expected within the current cultural contexts and that in a culture supportive of gender

equality such active and/or tacit support would end. One of the male participants stressed that attention was not being paid to the issue of violence against men in the family.

- While the issue of violence against women was a universal phenomenon, the participants felt that the political violence suffered by women in the Occupied Palestinian Territories needed to be acknowledged and addressed.

III. Background materials

Each participant was provided with a comprehensive set of materials in Arabic, intended not only for use during the workshop, but also for future reference, which included:

- Text of the Convention and Optional Protocol;
- General recommendations adopted by the Committee (1-25);
- Overview of the current working methods of the Committee;
- Revised reporting guidelines;
- Concluding comments of the Committee on selected participating countries;
- Background paper (updated September 2007): “Reporting under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” (DAW research paper).
- The Committee’s statement on reservations to the Convention;
- The Secretary-General’s in-depth study on violence against women; and
- General Assembly resolution on intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

New York, November 2007.

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**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women:
The roles of judges and parliamentarians in implementation**

Amman, Jordan
17-19 October 2007

PROGRAMME OF WORK

Wednesday 17 October 2007

8.00 – 9.00 am

Registration

9.00 – 9.30 am

Opening statements

*Ms. Suheir Azzouni
ESCWA*

*Ms. Saras Jagwanth
DAW/DESA*

9.30 – 10.00 am

**Context of the workshop and objectives;
Introductions and expectations**

*Ms. Yasmeen Hassan
DAW/DESA*

10.00-10.15 am

Tea/coffee

10.15 am – 12.30 pm

**The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of
Discrimination against Women: an overview**

- The Convention and general recommendations of the Committee (with some emphasis on general recommendation 19 on violence against women)
- Impact of reservations on the implementation of the Convention and the Committee's stance on reservations
- A brief overview of the reporting process, the Committee's concluding comments and implementation of concluding comments
- The roles of different stakeholders, in particular judges and parliamentarians, in implementation of the Convention

*Ms. Meryem Belmihoub Zerdani
Member of CEDAW Committee*

12.30 – 2.00 pm

Lunch

2.00 – 4.30 pm

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Islamic *fiqh*

- Harmonization of the Convention and *fiqh*, especially in matters relating to family law and personal status
- Obstacles to harmonization and related law reform and ways to overcome such obstacles
- Examination of case studies from Islamic countries that have harmonized the Convention and *fiqh* and reformed family and personal status laws
- Role of judges and parliamentarians in facilitating such harmonization and law reform

Ms. Farida Bennani

Expert on Islamic jurisprudence

Thursday 18 October

8.45 – 9.00 am

Introduction and establishment of working groups

9.00 – 12.00 am

***Parallel working groups for judges and parliamentarians on family and personal status laws**

Judges and parliamentarians will meet in two separate working groups, and each will deal with family and personal status laws. Based on their own country-specific experience, participants will seek to identify (i) obstacles to harmonizing family and personal status laws with provisions of the Convention; (ii) strategies to overcome such obstacles; and (iii) progress made in these areas. Participants will also analyze the impact of reservations to articles 2, 9, 15 and 16 of the Convention, and deliberate on possibilities of narrowing the scope of these reservations and ultimately removing them.

Participants will be invited to make short presentations of their papers relating to this topic. These presentations will form the basis of discussions. Questions to guide discussions in the working group are attached hereto as Annex I. Each working group will appoint a rapporteur to report back to plenary.

12.00 – 1.30 pm

Lunch

1.30 – 3.30 pm

Report back from working groups on family and personal status laws

The rapporteur of each working group will report back on conclusions reached by the working group. Participants will discuss how judges and parliamentarians can complement and enhance their respective initiatives and roles in reforming family and personal status laws, monitoring the application and impact of such laws, and implementing the Convention.

3.30 – 4.30 pm

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

- History of the Optional Protocol and its role in enhancing women's rights
- The complaints procedure
- The inquiry procedure
- The role of different stakeholders towards ratification of the Optional Protocol

*Ms. Saras Jagwanth and Ms. Yasmeeen Hassan
DAW/DESA*

Friday 19 October

8.45 – 9.00 am

Introduction and announcements

9.00 – 9.30 am

The Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women and the General Assembly resolution on "Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women"

- Overview of the study, including state responsibility for addressing violence against women
- Follow-up action to implement the General Assembly resolution

*Ms. Yasmeeen Hassan
DAW/DESA*

9.30 am -12.30 pm

***Parallel working groups on violence against women**

Judges and parliamentarians will meet in two separate working groups to discuss issues related to violence against women, based on their country-specific experience – including (i) prevalent forms of violence against women in the region; (ii) measures that have been established to address such violence; and (iii) gaps and challenges in this regard. Participants will be invited to make short

presentations of their papers. Questions to guide discussions in the working group are attached hereto as Annex II. Each working group will appoint a rapporteur to report back to plenary.

12.30 – 2.00 pm

Lunch

2.00 – 4.00 pm

Report back from working groups on violence against women

The rapporteur of each working group will report back on conclusions reached by the working group. Participants will discuss how judges and parliamentarians can complement and enhance their respective initiatives and roles in facilitating the establishment of comprehensive measures and a conducive environment to prevent and address all forms of violence against women.

4.00 – 4.30 pm

Concluding remarks and evaluation

* Note: All sessions will be held in plenary, with the exception of the parallel working-group discussions marked with an asterisk.

Annex I

Questions to guide the parallel working group on family and personal status laws

Parliamentarians and judges may use the following respective lists of questions to guide their discussion, but need not limit their discussion to these.

Parliamentarians:

- What is the level of awareness of the Convention among parliamentarians in your country and among your constituencies and how can such awareness be enhanced?
- What discriminatory family and personal status laws -- such as existing legal provisions on male guardianship over women; rights of women in marriage, divorce, and custody of children; sharing of marital property; marriage age; polygamy; rights of women to pass their nationality to their children; and women's freedom of movement – exist in your country? What is the rationale and/or justification of such laws? What is impact of such laws?
- What obstacles may be encountered in reforming such laws and how can such obstacles be overcome? What is the role of parliamentarians in such reform efforts?
- How can the Convention be used most effectively to guide such law reform?
- What is the practical impact of reservations to the Convention on women's enjoyment of their human rights?
- What role can parliamentarians play in reviewing, limiting and ultimately removing reservations to the Convention?

Judges:

- How is international law applicable to the work of domestic courts in your country?
- What is the level of awareness of the Convention amongst judges in your country and how can such awareness be enhanced?
- What role do judges play in gender-sensitive interpretation of family and personal status laws and how can their interpretation of discriminatory laws limit the adverse impact of such laws on women?
- How can the Convention be used most effectively in interpreting and applying family and personal status laws? Are you aware of legal decisions where the Convention or other international human rights instruments have been used to protect women's rights? In your country/region/elsewhere?
- What obstacles exist to your using the Convention to interpret and apply family and personal status laws and how can such obstacles be overcome?

Annex II

Questions to guide the parallel working group on violence against women

Parliamentarians and judges may use the following respective lists of questions to guide their discussion, but need not limit their discussion to these.

Parliamentarians:

- What is the level of awareness of parliamentarians of issues related to violence against women and how can such awareness be enhanced?
- How can parliamentarians create awareness and promote discussion in their constituencies on issues related to violence against women?
- What laws exist in your country to address violence against women and what are the shortcomings in such laws?
- What are the obstacles to enacting comprehensive laws on violence against women and how can such obstacles be overcome?
- What use can be made of the Convention (especially, the Committee's general recommendation 19) and the Secretary-General's study on violence against women to guide law reform on violence against women?
- What role can parliamentarians play in the allocation of adequate resources in the national budget to deal effectively with violence against women?
- What role can parliamentarians play in the development of policy (such as national plans of action on violence against women) in line with countries' international obligations on violence against women?

Judges:

- What is the level of awareness of judges of issues related to violence against women and of international obligations in this regard? How can such awareness be enhanced?
- What challenges -- such as lack of appropriate laws or procedures, existence of discriminatory laws and procedures, non-application of existing laws, non-existence of precedent in courts dealing with violence against women, and prevalence of stereotypes -- do judges face in addressing cases of violence against women?
- What role can judges play in gender-sensitive interpretation of existing laws, rules and procedures for the benefit of women victims of violence?
- What possibilities exist to use international law, especially the Convention, in cases of violence against women, especially where national law is inadequate?
- What measures can judges take to ensure that perpetrators of violence against women are appropriately punished?

Findings and recommendations of judges and parliamentarians in the working groups on family and personal status laws

In many countries ratified international treaties take precedence over national laws so that judges must apply the provisions of such international treaties, for example the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the Convention), over conflicting national laws. However, a lack of awareness of the Convention among all stakeholders, including judges and parliamentarians, hinders its implementation. In addition, certain cultural and traditional practices and sectarianism are obstacles for the implementation of the Convention, especially as related to family and personal status laws. As a result, it is recommended that:

- the Convention be published and disseminated widely;
- further training courses be organized for judges, lawyers, parliamentarians and other stakeholders to raise awareness of women's rights and the Convention;
- educational courses on the Convention be included in the curricula of colleges, universities and law schools;
- media campaigns be launched to raise awareness of the Convention in the Middle East;
- mechanisms and strategies be created to assist parliamentarians to enact and/or reform laws in accordance with the Convention and to monitor implementation of the Convention;
- women judges be appointed in all courts dealing with matters covered in the Convention; and
- advocacy networks be established among parliamentarians, judges and members of civil society for improved implementation of the Convention; and
- efforts be made to raise awareness of the Convention at the grassroots level and to create lobbies and pressure groups for the full implementation of the Convention.

While most Arab states have entered reservations to articles 2, 9, 15 and 16, on the basis that these articles would be incompatible with, or contradict Islamic Sharia, there is no unified Arab position *vis-a-vis* ratification of, and reservations and/or declarations to, the Convention. Some reservations, such as those to article 9, are political in nature and have no relation to Islamic jurisprudence. In addition, family and personal status laws in Arab countries are not uniform but are diverse. It is recommended that:

- studies be conducted and published on the compatibility of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the Convention;
- workshops be conducted for Sharia judges and Islamic clerics towards reaching a common understanding of family and personal status laws and the harmonization such laws with the Convention; and
- workshops be conducted for political leaders, Islamic clerics, judges and members of civil society on the compatibility of *fiqh* and women's rights in countries of the Middle East.

Findings and recommendations of judges and parliamentarians in the working groups on violence against women

Many forms of violence – physical, psychological, emotional and economic – exist in all countries. Judges do not have adequate knowledge of the general recommendations 12 and 19 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on violence against women or of other international standards on violence against women, such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. This lack of knowledge prevents them from implementing existing laws in accordance with the provisions of the Convention. Judges have not referred to the Convention in any legal opinion. In addition, judges are not aware that enforcing discriminatory laws may result in violence against women. It is recommended that:

- training courses on the Convention and the Optional Protocol and international standards on violence against women be conducted for the police, judges, and lawyers;
- communication among parliamentarians, judges and members of civil society be enhanced at the national and international levels so that they can share strategies on preventing and ending violence against women;
- an electronic network/forum for judges and parliamentarians be established on the ESCWA website to share experiences and developments on efforts to end violence against women;
- the recommendations of the workshop entitled “Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women: Roles of Judges and Parliamentarians in Implementation” in the Middle Eastern region be disseminated and shared widely; and
- the Division for the Advancement of Women and ESCWA be encouraged to hold further workshops to raise awareness of the Convention.

There have been some positive developments on addressing violence against women in the Arab world including amendments of discriminatory laws, enactment of new laws,

draft laws submitted to parliament, and adoption of plans and strategies that include addressing violence against women. However, there are many obstacles to combating violence against women in the Arab region which include: social customs and traditions that are based on male superiority; patriarchal mentalities; lack of legislation to protect women from violence, end impunity, and punish perpetrators of violence against women; lack of statistics on violence against women; and widespread ignorance among Arab women of their rights. In addition, situations of conflict and foreign occupation make women more vulnerable to violence. Consequently, it is recommended that:

- the educational curricula in the region be reformed with the aim of eliminating discrimination and violence against women;
- steps be taken to modify and/or eliminate stereotypical images of women in the media in the region;
- special funds be allocated within national budgets to support mechanisms aimed at eliminating violence against women;
- research on violence against women and compilation of sex-disaggregated data on violence against women be supported and encouraged;
- laws to specifically protect women from all forms of violence and to punish perpetrators of violence against women be enacted and effectively implemented;
- female police units with female officers and social workers be created in police stations to address the needs of women victims of violence and to provide them greater access to justice;
- government-supported shelters be established to provide shelter and services to female victims of violence;
- the situation of women in prisons be improved through provision of services that aim at their rehabilitation and re-integration into society and such prisoners be held separated, including during pre-trial detention, based on the type of crime committed; and
- special services be provided for women living in conflict stricken areas who have greater vulnerability to violence, and all Security Council resolutions to end foreign occupation in member States and territories be implemented.