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**CONSOLIDATED ARAB REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION: +15**

Summary

Fifteen years after the fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 4-15 September 1995) and the Beijing Platform for Action, which specified twelve critical areas of concern aimed at achieving the advancement of women and gender equality, a process of reviewing and evaluating the progress made in its implementation is currently under way in order to identify the obstacles and challenges that are still hindering the advancement of women and their equality with men at national, regional and international levels.

Within that context, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women is set to hold its fifty-fourth session in New York from 1 to 12 March 2010, where the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will be evaluated along with the results of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (New York, 5-9 June 2000), entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace in the Twenty-first Century". The session issued a declaration with additional procedures and initiatives aimed at implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

In addition to the twelve critical areas of concern, procedures and initiatives specified in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, ESCWA underscored those priorities that were defined by the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005 and that were issued in 1995 by the Council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs in the League of Arab States.

In preparation for the presentation and evaluation process, the United Nations along with its five regional committees prepared a questionnaire addressed to governments on the follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. ESCWA collected the answers to the questionnaire from 17 Arab countries and, based on these, worked in cooperation with the League of Arab States on preparing this consolidated report, which is hereby presented to the Committee on Women in its fourth session for adoption.

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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 violence against them.
5. This report comprises four chapters as follows: (a) chapter I reviews the achievements and main obstacles faced by countries during the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly; (b) chapter II exposes specific examples of progress made in each of the critical areas of concern defined in the Beijing Platform for Action, while pointing to areas necessitating the adoption of other procedures and initiatives as well as defining obstacles and gaps still hindering the implementation of such areas; (c) chapter III presents information on the national mechanisms on the advancement of women; and (d) chapter IV reviews the challenges and obstacles still hindering the implementation, as well as the plans of action defined by countries to stand up to the challenges and accelerate in the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly over the next five years.
6. The report centres on the achievements realized during the past five years in terms of accomplishing gender equality and relies as much as possible on analysing the presented statistics. In addition to national responses to the questionnaire, the report also made use of regional and national reports, such as the *Human Development Report 2009*, follow-up to the declaration of the Istanbul Report, implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) report, as well as reports prepared by countries on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

I. OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN ENHANCING GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERING WOMEN

7. Awareness of the importance of gender equality and the advancement of women increased at both governmental and civil levels in Arab countries. Arab governments worked on increasing equal opportunities for women in the fields of health, education, employment and political participation, as they offered employment opportunities for positions previously inaccessible to women. Civil society organizations vigorously appealed to governments to reform national legislations discriminating against women and to combat all forms of violence against them. There were some important achievements at both governmental and civil levels in the framework of comprehensive human development in which women participation is gradually increasing.

A. MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

1. *Regional efforts*

8. United Nations entities, including ESCWA centre for Women, are working on providing technical services to ESCWA member countries on the gender-based integration in national development projects, programmes and policies as a tool to end discrimination against women, thereby empowering them, achieving equality between genders and bridging the gap stemming from differentiation between women and men. They also offer consultative services to these countries when elucidating a consolidated regional position on important international issues. Furthermore, they assist in promulgating awareness with regard to gender-based issues, the right to development and international agreements through reports, studies, conventions and the media. Moreover, they grant member countries technical services in order to institutionalize and build the capacities of women's national mechanisms as well as civil society organizations.

9. On the other hand, the League of Arab States attaches major importance to the issue of women advancement and empowering, which was reflected in the successive Arab summits held in Tunisia, Algeria and Sudan where Arab leaders underscored the importance of issuing essential legislations aimed at ensuring a wider participation of women in different sectors on the basis of equality of opportunities and non-discrimination. In the Arab economic social and development summit, which was held in Kuwait in January 2009, Arab leaders reiterated the commitment to empowering women as a way of consolidating the principle of equality, justice and social equity through the implementation of common Arab projects to decrease the rate of poverty, limit unemployment, develop education and improve the standard of health care in view of implementing MDGs. The Arab women's summit in 2000 resulted in the establishment of the Arab Women Organization as a specialized body, with financial and administrative independence working within the framework of LAS.

10. The General Secretariat of LAS recently undertook activities aimed at enhancing the concept of women empowerment, including the issuance of the "Arab charter on human rights" and the "Arab women law" as a reference document for legal texts used as guidelines for member countries when putting, ratifying or unifying women's legislations, and the publication of the two documents on the League's website; publishing the Arab strategy for family; defining a plan for developing education in Arab countries and declaring the period 2008-2018 an Arab decade for education in the Arab region. The General Secretariat is currently preparing an Arab strategy and operational plan of action, entitled "Fighting women illiteracy in the Arab region", as well as "Fighting domestic violence" and the "Regional strategy to protect Arab women: security and peace", based on relevant Arab and international resolutions. It also maintains its efforts in collaboration with some international and regional specialized organizations, in particular the regional office of the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research to ensure the implementation of some of these programmes.

11. The Arab Women Organization has been active in different fields, including legislation reform, where its legal group revised the legislations of member countries and issued recommendations to improve the legal status of Arab women. The recommendations were adopted by its high council formed by first ladies of member countries or their representatives, and are considered as a guideline to highlight procedures that can be adopted by countries for the implementation on the ground. Furthermore, it defined and implemented strategies for the advancement of women, including the “media strategy for Arab women” in which the “media professionalism” programme was implemented, along with the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) project, entitled “Arab youth strategy to support the role of Arab women in building society” in which young people from member countries contributed, and the “Regional strategy to protect Arab women from violence” under preparation. It also established electronic databases, including “the Arab women directory”, comprising an observation of experts, literature, organizations, research centres, and women studies’ programmes and departments related to Arab women; the “Arab women e-library” to promulgate woman friendly culture; and the “Network of Arab women in immigrant countries”, which is a database of immigrant Arab women. The organization developed indicators related to the status of women, including quantitative and qualitative indicators to implement CEDAW.

2. *National achievements*

12. Over the past five years, the Arab region has witnessed legislative reform in two main areas, namely: laws aimed at warding off all types of discrimination against women and protect them, and other legislations aimed at fighting violence against women. Several laws discriminating against women were reformed while new laws were issued to protect them and ensure their increasing participation in public life. In view of the weak women political participation in most of Arab countries, some governments issued new laws, some of which implied positive distinction in favour of women.

13. During recent years, three Arab countries acceded to the CEDAW, namely: the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar; while Tunisia and Libyan Arab Jamahiriya acceded to the optional protocol to CEDAW, in addition to the moral commitment of the Palestinian National Authority to the Convention. Morocco withdrew all its reservations on the Convention, while other countries withdrew reservations as follows: Kuwait, on Article 7; Egypt, on Article 9 (2); Jordan, on Article 15; Algeria, on Article 9 (2); and the Syrian Arab Republic and Egypt are working on withdrawing other reservations that do not contradict with Sharia. However, most Arab countries still have reservations on several important articles of the Convention.

14. Legislative reforms implemented to achieve equality between genders include ratifying the nationality laws in Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan, Egypt, Morocco and Yemen to empower women and enable them to pass on their nationality to their children as male counterparts. Measures aimed at limiting women’s sufferance in some countries that have not ratified the nationality laws have been taken. Several Arab countries started ratifying some legislations related to family laws, such as increasing the age of marriage as well as the age of children custody in order for them to remain longer with their mothers, establishing family tribunals and alimony or family insurance funds, thereby ensuring the right of mothers to claim child custody and modifying the procedures of religious courts. Other countries are trying to implement some reforms to grant additional rights to women within the family. Qatar established equality between women and men as to the reparational payment for involuntary manslaughter law (commonly referred to as blood money). Bahrain issued the family law (first part) in 2009, while Oman issued a law that grants equal opportunities to men and women as to appropriating construction lands.

15. Furthermore, some legislations were ratified and resolutions issued to guarantee equality between women and men in the business field, such as civil service laws to empower women to balance between their family role and productive role. Other legislations were equally ratified, such as laws related to insurance, salaries and income tax in Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Tunisia, Djibouti, Oman, Qatar, Egypt and Yemen. In some countries, women were employed in new fields, such as the police, the jurisdiction and the financial market. Furthermore, women occupied leadership positions in the department of fatwa and legislation, while legislative reforms related to the right of women to travel were also implemented.

16. In view of increasing women political participation, some countries issued legislations related to women quotas to run as candidates and vote in order to increase the number of women in parliaments and local councils, namely, Jordan, Tunisia, Sudan, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco and Mauritania. In this context, many countries witnessed an increase in the number of women in the electoral force, parliaments and local councils, such as in the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Djibouti and Oman. On the other hand, without the quotas system, the ratification of the Kuwaiti law to acknowledge equality between men and women at the ballot resulted in four women entering the Parliament for the first time.

17. Several Arab countries stood up to the problem of violence against women and broke down the wall of silence by preparing national strategies to eliminate violence against women. In Tunisia and Morocco, the penal law was ratified, and new legislations issued to criminalize sexual harassment; while Jordan issued a law to protect women against domestic violence; and Djibouti, Egypt and Yemen issued a law to prohibit female genital mutilation.

18. Data and statistics related to the different forms of violence were collected and awareness of the media was raised as to the best way of handling this case publicly by providing some services to battered women, such as providing a shelter. This has led to an increase in the number of women who do not fear reporting violence, both domestic violence and sexual harassment in public places, and an increase in the gravity and speed of implementing verdicts of the perpetrators of violence against women.

19. Many countries started facing the problem of trafficking in women. Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Algeria and Oman issued special laws to criminalize all actions related to trafficking in women and girls and the different ways of exploitation. In Egypt, a specialized committee was established to fight the phenomenon of trafficking in people. Sudan established a national committee to fight the kidnapping of women and children. These legislations deal with cases related to attracting, moving, sheltering or receiving people in order to exploit them by threatening them with force, resorting to it or through any other form of coercion, kidnapping, deception, fraud, exploiting authority or a weakness, giving or receiving money or merits to get the approval of a person with authority on these people, or attracting, moving, sheltering or receiving people under 18 in order to exploit them, even if this exploitation is not linked to threatening by force, resorting to it or any other previously mentioned way.

20. These achievements were implemented through political will in many Arab countries and a wish to achieve advancement of women in the different areas of life, as well as eminent activities implemented by civil society organizations working in the field of women, which have increased in number during the past five years, thereby attracting growing numbers of women claiming their rights. Some of these organizations succeeded in winning over government trust where they excelled in the invitation and influence to raise issues of discrimination against women and mobilize the media to support them and break the wall of silence on issues that have been kept obscured for so long, such as crimes of honour and sexual harassment in public places and workplaces.

B. OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES

21. Despite the achievements made in the field of advancement of women in the Arab region over the past five years, the issue of equality between genders and advancement of women still faces many obstacles and challenges requiring work and courage to face them on several levels from both governmental and civil sides.

1. *Gap between law and reality*

22. Despite the legislative reforms implemented in many Arab countries, there is a prevailing gap between legislations and reality given the constant negative cultural traditions; stereotyped images of women and men; unfair distribution of their tasks within the family, domestically and beyond; contradictions between

laws, where these exist, and the everyday reality; and the social acceptance of discrimination and violence against women, which lead to the inflexibility or even regression of acquired concepts related to equality.

2. Media deficiency

23. Media, through its different means, still contributes in consecrating the stereotyped consideration of the role and characteristics of women, stemming from false interpretations of cultural and religious traditions in such a manner that it keeps women victim of obsolete customs and traditions, rather than being a way to develop the status of women. Therefore, the content of the media message should be monitored, given that it is crucial to avoid transmitting interpretations of some false religious practices that consecrate discrimination against women.

3. Practices that are harmful to the health of women

24. Some of the practices harmful to the health of women, such as female genital mutilation, still prevail in a number of Arab countries, based on the belief of the importance of controlling women's body as a way of preserving their purity and honour.

4. Absence of women-related statistics

25. The absence of statistics and analysis related to the effect of recent global phenomena on women, such as the international financial crisis, world food crisis and climate change, prevents governments from defining policies to protect women in particular and citizens on a wider base from the negative effects of such phenomena, particularly in view of these effects being more severe and complicated mainly for women. In addition to that, many Arab countries lack statistics and data segregated by gender, which complicates the process of identifying, analysing and finding appropriate solutions for problems faced by women.

5. Armed conflicts

26. Armed conflicts and occupation in some Arab countries and territories still constitute a breach of human rights, including women, and hinder their advancement. Israeli violations have continued in Palestinian territories, including building the separation wall, and implementing the plan aimed at taking over Palestinian lands and water resources, and isolating the Palestinian people. These violations reached their peak in the war waged by Israel against the Gaza Strip to affect children, women and men, which led to the aggravation of women's suffering.

27. Women in Iraq are considered among the main victims of the armed conflicts over the past 30 years, starting with the war between Iraq and Iran, followed by the Gulf War and the American-led invasion of that country. Iraqi women lost many rights they had enjoyed under the Constitution of 1970 in the fields of health, education, employment and political participation, due to the absence of security and safety, which made fear part of every girl's and woman's life in Iraq. Women health deteriorated, maternal mortality increased to reach 292 deaths per 100,000 women. Moreover, the number of women receiving health care declined, in particular for those who suffer from mental disturbances due to the continual conflicts, with less than 20 per cent of these women getting health care. Women illiteracy rate for the 15-24 age range increased to more than 80 per cent, in particular because of the refusal of parents to send their girls to school owing to the absence of security, violence and physical or verbal sexual harassment in public places. The number of women killed during the first ten months of 2006 was an estimated 1190, according to the Minister of Health in Iraq, and were caused by shootings, explosions or kidnapping of working women heading to their workplaces. The Ministry of Women's Affairs estimated the number of widows at 206,082. Therefore, Iraqi women suffer from violence, rape, kidnapping, murder (including so-called honour crimes), female genital mutilation, trafficking and prostitution, due to the absence of implementation of law on the perpetrators of such crimes.

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

29. This chapter presents specific examples of achievements made by Arab countries as to the implementation of the main areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action as well as procedures and initiatives specified by the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Moreover, it reviews the obstacles and challenges still hindering the implementation of the main areas of concern in addition to some learned lessons.

A. BURDEN OF POVERTY ON WOMEN

30. High-income Arab countries and some middle-income countries succeeded in providing good fundamental services in the fields of health care, education and providing shelter for a large number of poor women. They defined national strategies and social development policies aimed at reducing the propagation of poverty among women and offered different services to women.

31. Most Arab countries established a social security system and offered monthly social and financial aids to categories covered by the social security law as they exempted them from service fees, and offered support to weak categories, people with special needs and the elderly. In Oman, the social security law ensures a monthly salary for women, providing for their family, as well as for divorced women, widows, orphans and families of prisoners or those without a primary earner. The Government of Egypt exempted children of families supported by women from all school fees; and in Qatar, the Government offered monetary support to students whose families suffer from low economic or living standards. Similarly, Bahrain increased governmental allocations for social help and decreased electricity and water fees for the poor, with the launch of a national programme for employment in order to eliminate unemployment. Djibouti started the project for supporting orphans and weak children from poor families and Tunisia recently adopted a special programme to help families in need, 53 per cent of which are supported by women, and offer donations for nurseries designed for mothers in need, as it ratified the agreement on the rights of people with disabilities and the protocol related to this agreement. Yemen offers monthly monetary aids to poor families, in particular those mostly composed by women. In Sudan, the project of ensuring university students from both genders was adopted. In Kuwait, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour offers aids to divorced women, widows, wives of prisoners and women with no supporters, in addition to monthly aids for university students from both genders, while a fund for citizens from both genders unable to settle their consumption loans to banks and investment companies was established. In the Syrian Arab Republic, families are supported through free education at all stages, supporting fundamental food substances, encouraging the establishment of women-related projects, providing employment opportunities and implementing agricultural and developmental sessions for rural women.

32. Many countries worked on defining initiatives aimed at helping poor rural women. For instance, Djibouti granted the plan to eliminate poverty in rural regions a national priority; while Tunisia and Algeria enhanced women's education, particularly in rural areas; Egypt and Yemen promoted schools for girls, particularly in rural and remote areas; Mauritania started "women's banks" funds aimed at improving the living standards of women by supporting income-inducing activities; and Oman established monetary allowances from the public budget for programmes aimed at meeting the needs of rural women within the allowances of the agricultural and fisheries sectors.

33. Many countries worked on providing small loans and micro-credits and supporting small projects' marketing. Tunisia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Sudan issued national plans to establish units and small

financing sources as well as funds to guarantee and fund small projects available to the largest number of women possible. Jordan and Tunisia expanded on their strategies of providing credit to women who wish to start a small productive project. Egypt provided small loans and micro-credits to women through the social fund while civil organizations established the food bank for poor. Sudan started the family bank and the poor bank and prepared an integrated strategy to eliminate unemployment of both genders, which was reflected in small-term programmes. Jordan started a food bank. Oman launched programmes to ameliorate family incomes, such as sustenance resources, productive families and subsidized loans projects. Bahrain established the family bank to provide small loans and help poor families, as it developed the Microstart project, which has benefited 37 per cent of women in terms of improving the living standards of poor families. Yemen included poor families in the social security system and provided subsidized loans to support small projects implemented by middle-income women, with the establishment of the Bank of Hope for poor. Djibouti established a woman-related fund for savings and loans within the National Union of Women.

34. Many Arab countries still suffer from the disparity in income and wealth distribution and an unfair distribution of resources between rural and urban areas, which exacerbates poverty in the countryside, broadens the gap between men and women and between different categories of women, increases illiteracy among women and enhances the resort to early marriage and forced marriage of girls to face the shortage in income and avoid spending on them. In view of poverty and the increase in the number of families supported by women due to a rise in the rate of divorces, separation and polygamies, supporting women are compelled to take their children out of schools and make them work at an early age, thereby leading to an increase in the phenomenon of child labour and street children in low-income Arab countries.

35. Factors delaying solving the poverty problems in some countries and forming an obstacle to the women stepping out of the circle of poverty include the absence of social security networks, absence of laws providing real protection to women against need and poverty, adopting the policy of presenting aids in kind instead of integrating poor families in the productive process and the difficulty for poor women to get credits, and the economic blockade on some countries and territories, such as Sudan and the Gaza Strip, which lead to the scarcity of available resources, particularly for poor women.

36. The unavailability of accurate and recent gender-based data on the economic status of women in some countries forms a handicap in terms of sound planning of programmes and projects aimed at improving the status of poor women and families supported by women. The lack of coordination between concerned parties, such as ministries, official entities and the local and international non-governmental organizations, has led to undermining the desired results of programmes and activities aimed at improving the status of women, or even to halting such programmes for long periods. The lack of coordination among financing institutions granting small loans for developmental targets also weakens the work of such institutions. In Lebanon, some financing institutions impose high interests on loans' solicitors to ensure their money, which deprives many women from the chance of making use of these loans.

B. WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND TRAINING

37. Arab countries established national education strategies guarantying free public education until college level for all their citizens without any discrimination. These strategies include the development of curricula and pedagogic policies related to education and professional training to ensure gender-based considerations and eliminate differences between genders at all educational levels in addition to defining operational plans. They also took a special and major interest in teaching women and enhancing their capacity to pursue education in order to promote education in all Arab communities and eliminate illiteracy, which is more widespread among women.

38. In Tunisia, for example, the law related to education and teaching stipulates the principles of non-discrimination and equality of opportunities among all children, and sets out mandatory education from age 6 to 16. In Kuwait, the mandatory education age was raised to 17; and in the Syrian Arab Republic it was

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.

44. Given that women are the most exposed to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), some Arab countries defined national programmes to fight the spread of the virus as well as a strategy aimed at enhancing awareness and guidance in this view in order to limit the number of affections, and a number of projects to integrate concepts related to procreative health in pedagogic curricula were prepared. Sudan adopted the national programme to fight AIDS along with a five-year strategy. Lebanon issued a governmental decree to perform a periodical medical check-up for all public sector employees, in particular pregnant women and mothers, while the national AIDS Control Programme put a national strategy in collaboration with civil entities. In 2006, Djibouti issued a law related to people living with HIV, which stipulates improving their status and the situation of their families by adopting measures aimed at eliminating discrimination and stigma against them. Bahrain and Oman adopted several measures to increase awareness with regard to the risks and effects of STDs, including the national strategy to fight AIDS and STDs in December 2007.

45. The United Arab Emirates founded the Dubai Healthcare City, which attracted many international medical institutions, and defined a system for mandatory health insurance applicable to all residents. Morocco provided mobile medical help units for urgent cases in urban areas for pregnant women and newborns, in addition to reorganizing and modernizing delivery hospitals. Sudan offers free treatment in cases of accidents and Caesarean surgeries; and in Bahrain, all medical services are provided freely to all citizens, including women.

46. A number of countries worked on raising awareness among women on female diseases, such as breast cancer, and in particular through civil society organizations working on women's issues. Some countries with high health risks provided compensations, including, for example, in Egypt where women dependent on breeding or trading poultry to support their families were directed towards other productive activities in the light of pandemic avian influenza.

47. The absence of a strategy on women's health in some countries, the lack of related surveys and medical research, and the prevailing unhealthy living pattern characterized by a lack of mobility are among the factors causing women's diseases, in particular diabetes and high blood pressure. The dependency of many female-related projects on financing from specific entities leads to the instability of such projects. In Palestine, roadblocks between cities and villages in addition to the separation wall make it difficult for women to reach hospitals and emergency clinics.

48. Focusing on maternal health while neglecting the health of the girls and women with no children or old women, in addition to the lack of integration of sufficient information of delivery health in scholar curricula, has a negative impact on the health of several categories of women. Moreover, the unavailability of health insurance for unemployed women or those working in the private sector in some countries renders health care too expensive and beyond the reach of poor women.

D. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

49. Some countries adopted legislations to eliminate certain forms of violence against women. The penal law in Jordan, Bahrain, Tunisia, Algeria, Syrian Arab Republic and Djibouti includes regulations that criminalize all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence. By virtue of the ratified penal law in Algeria, acts related to trafficking in women and girls are criminalized. In Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, a law for criminalizing sexual harassment and exploiting women in prostitution and sex tourism was issued. The Syrian Arab Republic, Oman, Qatar and Lebanon acceded to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2000 and its protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children; as well as the 1956 supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the slave trade, and institutions and practices similar to slavery. A special law related to fighting human trafficking was issued in the United Arab Emirates in 2006, in Bahrain and Oman in 2008, and in Jordan in 2009. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt established a national committee to fight

human trafficking. Qatar established a national institution to fight human trafficking, while Oman established a committee to follow up the implementation of CEDAW.

50. Within the framework of policies and procedures, some countries, including Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania, established national strategies to fight violence against women. Tunisia launched a green line to receive calls from women who were victims of violence. Bahrain, Tunisia, Algeria, Palestine, Qatar, Egypt, Morocco and Yemen collected data on battered women and established an informatics matrix to observe and evaluate the violence phenomenon against women (in the case of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco). In Palestine, the national statistical office undertook a survey on the violence against women in 2006.

51. In the Syrian Arab Republic, a law was issued in 2009 stipulating the nullification of Article 548 of the Penal Law and increasing the minimal margin for the penalty of murder committed under the pretext of honour. Jordan issued a law to protect against domestic violence. In Jordan, Tunisia, Syrian Arab Republic, Sudan, Oman and Qatar, national committees, institutions, units or departments in courts, have been established aimed at protecting families and fighting violence against women.

52. Preventive and remedial services were granted to battered women, with countries working to establish national institutions to eliminate violence, centres or departments for family guidance, some of which fall within family courts, such as in the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Egypt. Other countries expanded and developed social support centres to offer psychiatric support to battered women. Some countries are currently working on issuing national legislations to protect expatriate housekeepers against possible violence.

53. Women's institutions and organizations in a number of countries have established listening centres, legal assistance and special houses to shelter battered women who need help. Training session for judges, lawyers and police officers are being organized to inform them of ways of protecting women against violence, where international treaties and national legislations are introduced in this context. The women's complaint office in Jordan and Egypt along with the Foundation for the Protection of Women and Children in Qatar examine complaints of violence presented by women. The women's complaint centre of the Supreme Council for Women in Bahrain provides free legal assistance for those complaining of violence, in addition to its main function in matters related to family problems. Bahrain also established a centre to deal with domestic violence cases, in which training services and awareness are offered to battered women. In Palestine, a unit for complaints exists in all ministries, and women can benefit from these units and present complaints about possible violence.

54. Women's organizations were active in promoting awareness about the different forms of violence exerted against women and in uncovering a deficiency in legislations with regard to dealing with the perpetrators of violence crimes. A group of young boys and girls in Egypt established specialized websites for the condemnation of all forms of violence perpetrated against women. All the above mentioned activities have helped to break the wall of silence and encourage women to turn to the law to complain against violence they are being subjected to.

55. Articles related to human rights and CEDAW were included in educational curricula in schools and universities in some countries, thereby identifying the problem of gender-based violence. In Oman, the integration of human rights concepts in educational curricula started in the 2008-2009 academic year.

56. Despite all these achievements, negative cultural traditions and customs constrain women and prevent them from disclosing the violence they are subjected to. Moreover, poor- or low-income women prefer to refrain from complaining of such types of violence owing to their incapacity of living independently. There are still women and girls, particularly in rural areas, who accept being battered by their fathers, brothers or husbands for various reasons, including false interpretations of religions, negative traditions and customs, stereotyped images of the roles of men and women and their obligations in the frame of the family and

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 Iraqi refugees, including free educational and health services. Scholarships are being granted to dozens of female students from the occupied Golan to resume their education in Syrian universities and aimed at providing them with shelter and income, in addition to providing necessary services and main utilities in camps.

61. Women in some Arab countries suffering from a lack of security and stability are subjected to different forms of violence, thereby hindering their and their families' development, in particular in view of the non-application of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. Iraqi women suffer different forms of violence in the frame of armed conflicts and occupation. Syrian women in occupied Golan endure habitual detentions and strict procedures imposed by occupation troops on visiting female detainees, the tragedy of the separation from their families, and occupation troops forbidding private visits between relatives on both borders of the Golan region.

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 workers in agriculture.

66. The rate of women's participation in the economic field in the Arab region is still low compared to other regions in the world. Palestine is considered the country which most lacks the participation of women in economic activities, owing to high interest rates on loans, low rate of women employment in refugees' camps, and high number of women working for no return in rural regions, particularly given that the employment of women is largely concentrated in the centre of the West Bank where governmental, international and civil society organizations have already been established. In Oman, the participation of women peaks in the age range of 20-34, while it decreases with age and increases again after 65, where women in the two ranges of 25-44 and 45 and above have to leave the labour market due to marriage or to care for children. Some Arab countries lack a convenient atmosphere to empower women to undertake their roles as a result of prevailing social and cultural concepts and family obligations imposed on them. The wage gap is still wide between men and women in some Arab countries, while girls are steered towards specializations that are not truly required in the labour market.

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 governmental services or sufficient policies that take into consideration the different roles undertaken by women.

G. WOMEN IN AUTHORITY AND DECISION-MAKING

71. The countries of the region worked on enhancing the political participation of women in elected councils. In the United Arab Emirates, a system of electing the national council members through election and nomination has been established in order to activate women's participation. In Egypt, the Constitution was ratified to allocate 32 electoral districts to women whereby they are entitled to two seats for every district, in addition to the right of women to run for the remaining seats, in order to grant at least 64 seats to women. The female quota in local councils was adopted in Jordan, Djibouti, Palestine and Mauritania. In Morocco, parties pledged to include women in their lists, which led to an increase in the number of women in parliaments. An Arab woman from Bahrain headed the sixty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly, while another was named Director of the United Nations Information Centre. In Kuwait, women were allowed to run for election in 2005 for the first time, which resulted in four women elected in the Parliament and two women acceding to the local council.

72. In some Arab countries, the number of women occupying high positions in the State increased, and women became ministers, counsellors of president, secretaries of cabinet, or heads of political party. The number of women in the diplomatic corps increased, and some women occupied high jobs in some countries, such as university dean, judge, mayor, head of a municipality, or member in the state council, as the number of women at the head of civil organizations increased. In the Syrian Arab Republic, a woman occupied the position of Vice President in 2006. In Oman, 14 women were nominated in the State Council. In Palestine, women were voted members of the Executive Committee of the Liberation Organization; one headed the Commission of the Monetary Authority and another was named Vice-Governor. In Lebanon, a woman headed the military court for the first time. In Egypt, where programmes are implemented to train women for leadership positions, a position of first assistant of the minister was created in four line ministries, namely, Finance, Investment Trade, Industry and Communications. Moreover, the number of female ministers increased to seven in Morocco and to six in Sudan.

73. Some governmental and non-governmental entities have adopted programmes for the political empowerment of women by providing in-kind support for candidates in addition to technical and moral support and capacity-building for female members of parliament and local councils on the best performance (as in the case of Bahrain, Egypt and Yemen).

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 and their rights according to CEDAW, owing to the lack of recognition of Palestine as a State member of the Convention. Women in occupied Golan also suffer from the lack of protection of their rights.

80. Sudan and Somalia have not acceded yet to CEDAW, while most Arab countries still have reservations on some of its crucial articles, such as Articles 2 and 16. Only Tunisia and Libyan Arab Jamahiriya have acceded to the optional protocol to the Convention, which still hinders the efforts of women requiring international support in the case of violation of their human rights.

81. The lack of knowledge of women of their legal rights still constitutes an obstacle to their rights, given that they rarely resort to the law to regain their rights, particularly in the case of uneducated or low-income

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 guaranties 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 Childhood and Motherhood is establishing and following up girl-friendly schools in order to help drop-out girls to resume their education. Jordan established a new national strategy to limit the worst forms of child labour in 2006 in a collaborative methodology, while girls were integrated in the cultural programme for drop-outs aimed at providing drop-out children at risk of both genders with knowledge, skills and orientations suiting their needs.

93. Some countries worked on protecting girls from immoral acts. Lebanon established a new institution to provide inner care for girls who have violated the law, in addition to a special unit within the police force for minor girls, which is responsible for interrogating them. The Syrian Arab Republic works on gathering delinquent girls and fulfilling their needs. In Egypt, some civil society organizations took care of street girls by spreading awareness about the problems they could face and defined several suggestions to face this problem; a project to protect juveniles from drugs was implemented with a special focus on protecting girls. Yemen founded shelters for delinquent girls in some towns under the supervision of specialized female staff.

94. Girls still suffer from discrimination within their families when the family income decreases and the priority of education is granted to boys, while girls are compelled to marry young or even trafficked in an unbalanced marriage in order to remove the burden of spending on girls, while simultaneously achieving profits through their trafficking.

III. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

A. WOMEN'S NATIONAL MECHANISMS

95. All Arab countries have established women's national mechanisms to work on achieving gender equality. Some were formed as independent ministries or ministries concerned with women's affairs and other categories, such as family, national union, committee or council for women's affairs. In some cases, these councils are headed by women or by the first lady of individual countries. Some countries examine women's issues through the ministry of social affairs. While most of these mechanisms are governmental, some are semi-governmental and others are restructuring themselves according to specific temporal sessions. They meet on most of the tasks consigned to them related to policies, legislations, planning, coordination, advertising and implementation in a way aimed at enhancing the status of women, promoting their rights, achieving gender equality in legislations and increasing the participation of women in society, particularly in decision-making positions, in addition to their representation in international forums and conventions and performing training and capacity-building missions.

96. Women's national mechanisms have managed in some cases to influence ministries and governmental administrations by nominating gender-based coordination entities, units for equal opportunities and other mechanisms, mindful of the gender-based integration in programmes of ministries and governmental institutions, gender-based departments, regional committees or units in several ministries to work on the gender-based integration in their policies and plans. In some cases, women's councils include a special committee for civil organizations.

97. Most women's national mechanisms receive part of the governmental budget. The budget related to the advancement of women is not restricted to the ministry budget or the women's mechanism; rather, it also comprises budgets from other ministries that provide services to women, such as ministries of education, health, labour, agriculture and social affairs, among others. Budgets related to gender-based issues help in identifying the size of budgets oriented towards women's interests and achieving equality in spending resources. Most ministries or women's councils are granted donations and aids from donor committees and international organizations to implement agreed tasks or projects.

98. The number of civil organizations catering for women increased along with their activities in different fields, with some managing to exert pressure on governmental entities to build up important cases related to women, such as fighting the different forms of violence against them. These organizations joined forces at both national and regional levels to reform some laws that discriminate against women.

99. Women's national mechanisms have succeeded in collecting scattered data related to women's participation and gender-based gaps in many fields, and in influencing other entities to adopt this mission by defining strategies and plans of action for the advancement of women. Some of these mechanisms succeeded in the gender-based integration in national plans, and a few tried to define a budget corresponding to gender-based issues. Jordan, Bahrain, Tunisia, Syrian Arab Republic, Oman, Qatar, Egypt and Yemen defined strategies and programmes of work for the advancement of women, which are periodically updated, while a large number of these national mechanisms were able to activate various legal reforms with regard to gender equality. For example, the National Commission for Lebanese Women succeeded in influencing the Parliament's resolutions by attending all parliamentary committee sessions on women's issues, and the Commission formed pressure groups in Parliament to pass the ratification on Article 562 related to crimes of honour in the penal code. In Egypt, the National Council for Women succeeded in ratifying the laws pertaining to nationality, salaries, tax exemptions and the fund for ensuring the family to ensure that alimonies were well received by concerned women and children, in addition to founding family courts. In Djibouti, a national strategy was established to integrate women in development, which is updated every five years, in addition to a plan of action for the period 2010-2012 aimed at institutionalizing the gender-based concept. In Palestine, the women's national mechanism cooperated with the Parliament to present a new penal code, in addition to laws taking gender into consideration with regard to public service, local elections,

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 pressure groups representing women from the electoral base in order to ratify the personal status law and the penal code. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the women's national mechanism formed a pressure group on Parliament to discuss reservations on CEDAW. In Qatar, the Supreme Council for Family Affairs was behind the issuance of a number of legislations, such as the law of people with special needs and the equality of reparation money (or blood money), as well as the ratification of other legislations, such as the housing act. In Bahrain, the Family Law was issued in 2009, while the alimony fund was established to help divorced women and reorganize the marriage certificate. In Kuwait, the women affairs committee coordinates national efforts aimed at suggesting general policies related to the development of women.

100. In addition to entities of coordination related to gender issues, the overwhelming majority of Arab countries established other national mechanisms over the past five years aimed at protecting women's interests in different ways and at trying to make serious steps towards achieving gender equality. In Lebanon, the Ministry of Social Affairs comprises a department dealing with women issues, and a women and children committee exists within Parliament. In Palestine, four coordination entities related to gender issues work in collaboration with civil and governmental institutions to coordinate and provide data about women to decision-makers, while women and children departments have been established in the different districts since 2007. In Egypt, coordination exists between the National Council of Childhood and Motherhood, the National Council for Human Rights and the Gender Unit within the Social Fund for Development, while the National Council for Women started a women's complaints office to register any discrimination. In Jordan, the National Committee for Women's Affairs cooperates with the Women's Electoral Network and the women's knowledge network of female municipal council members, and the women department within the Ministry of Labour. In Oman, a national committee for family affairs was established in 2007, presided by the Minister of Social Affairs, a national committee for combating human trafficking in 2008, as departments for family development were started in the different regions of the country. In Djibouti, a unit for listening and guidance was established in the headquarters of the National Union of Djiboutian Women in 2007. In Algeria, a national council for family and women was established. In the Syrian Arab Republic, a unit for women development was established within the Ministry of Economy and Trade. In Bahrain, a committee for women and children was established within the Shura Council in 2006, while the Bahraini Women's Union was launched as the representative of all women associations annexed to it in civil work fields. In Qatar, the Foundation for the Protection of Women and Children was established along with the Foundation for Combating Human Trafficking. In Tunisia, the National Council for Women and the Family was established as well as the National Committee on Women and Development, while several plans of action were implemented to support women and the family and develop a large number of mechanisms and work tools, including two observatories, one unit for listening and guidance, a unit for evaluating the impact of development projects on women and a mechanism to support small projects of women. In the United Arab Emirates, the Family Development Foundation was established in 2006, along with the Family Development Foundation in Dubai, the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking and the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children in 2007. In Sudan, a national committee for the advancement of women was established, presided by the Minister of Welfare and Social Development, as well as the Ahfad University for Women, and the UNESCO chair in women, science and technology, and Sudanese Women General Union. In Kuwait, the women's affairs committee within the Council of Ministers cooperates with governmental and non-governmental entities to discuss and remediate women's issues.

101. Some women's national mechanisms cooperated with national statistical entities in projects aimed at issuing gender-based indicators, statistics and budgets, and integrated gender issues in their national plans, as some issued gender-based studies. In Lebanon for example, the civil committee for the follow-up to women's issues in cooperation with the Ministry of Education issued studies and surveys to integrate gender-based concepts in Arabic and civil education books as well as introducing sex education in curricula.

However, many of these mechanisms are still in the first stage of collecting gender-based statistics in many fields and analysing them periodically.

102. Some women's national mechanisms tried to implement the decentralization principle by establishing branches annexed to them. In Egypt, the National Council for Women founded annexed branches in all provinces. Sudan started branches for the National Council for Women in its different states; however these branches are considered executive entities with little decision-making authority. In Yemen, the National Committee of Women established branches in all districts. In Palestine, the Ministry of Women's Affairs established communication centres in all provinces. In Djibouti, subsidiary offices for gender-based issues were started in all districts at the beginning of 2009.

B. OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN'S NATIONAL MECHANISMS

103. While targets defined by women's national mechanisms are usually diversified and ambitious, they lack specified priorities. Institutionalized mechanisms still face difficulties in monitoring the actual implementation of policies, laws and activities related to women and gender equality, due to the lack of knowledge of those charged with the law implementation of the ratifications made in favour of women, or the deficiency of participating institutions as to appropriate follow-up mechanisms, which enable them to provide necessary information for women's national institutions. There is therefore a need to develop accurate observation and follow-up mechanisms that can review lessons learned from previous experiences.

104. Factors that negatively affect performance in general include, among others, poor coordination between development partners whether from governmental, non-governmental or donor entities; and the non-participation of such entities in decision-making related to plans and policies governing the activities and aimed at advancing and developing women.

105. The existence of gender-based coordination entities cooperating with women's national mechanisms in the integration of gender-based concepts in different ministries is considered to be an important factor in achieving the main two functions of such mechanisms. However, the problem resides in the lack of human and financial resources of coordinating entities, or the lack of appropriate competences, particularly those that can make a change; and the non-institutionalizing of coordination entities within administrative structures, which weakens their effects, particularly given that gender-based integration can sometimes be among the diversified tasks of coordination entities with regard to gender issues and concepts or the units for equality of opportunities.

106. Women's national mechanisms are mainly concerned about women's issues and problems, with limited focus on gender-based concepts and issues. They do not adopt issues for analysing relations on a gender-based principle and for reformulating them in such a way as to achieve gender equality. On the other hand, these mechanisms do not attract many men to work with them and adopt their cases, thereby leading in some cases to hostility with regard to issues of advancement of women and gender equality, and the criticism of these mechanisms as well as requesting institutional mechanisms on the rights of men.

107. The main obstacles that weaken the role of women's national mechanisms are linked to the structure, formation and competences of such mechanisms and their lack of financial resources, data, statistics and professional cadres specialized in such issues as gender-based integration, gender equality and empowerment of women. Given that some of these mechanisms in women's issues are still new, there is insufficient experience to implement their tasks, diverse entities working on women's issues, lack of coordination among them and weak follow-up and evaluation; and results often turn out to be unclear or undocumented.

108. The advancement of such mechanisms requires enhancing their institutional structures and technical competencies, supporting experience-sharing and experiences related to the advancement of women on the national, regional and international levels, more efficient coordination and cooperation, and a better

participation along with civil organizations and all civil society organizations active in the field of advancement and rights of women.

IV. MAIN CHALLENGES AND PLANS FOR CONFRONTING THEM

109. Some Arab countries face four main challenges hindering the empowerment of women and achieving genders equality, namely: negative cultural traditions that degrade the status of women and lead to the constant existence of legislative gaps; poverty and its impact on women's economic participation; low rate of women's participation in decision-making positions; and the weakness of mechanisms and tools for observation, follow-up and coordination. The countries in the region are working hard to establish plans and programmes aimed at mitigating the impact of those challenges.

A. NEGATIVE CULTURAL TRADITIONS AND LEGISLATIVE GAPS

1. *Reality*

110. Some negative cultural traditions as well as practices and customs contradicting with Islamic laws and codes in Arab countries hinder the advancement of women and achieving gender equality, which constitutes an obstacle in terms of implementing a core change in this context. Some legislative gaps in some countries, in particular family and personal status laws, entail discrimination against women and place them in a lower status than men, which makes it indispensable to reform them in a way that grants women their full legislative rights and contributes in achieving justice and equality between genders.

111. On the other hand, a gap still exists between legislations and the everyday life despite the reform of many legislations aimed at achieving justice and equality. The main reasons for this gap stem from anti-change, development or modernization practices that hold on to negative habits and customs and the patriarchal society, as well as false interpretation of religions which leads some to consider the status of women on a lower par to that of men, and resists the reform of legislations discriminating against women, as well as the commitment to the implementation of legislative ratifications aimed at achieving gender equality.

2. *Plans for confrontation*

112. In order to confront the challenge posed by negative cultural traditions that degrade the status of women and obstruct gender equality, Arab countries have defined future plans aimed at the following:

(a) Enhancing political will to support equality between genders and promote it as well as working on changing negative cultural traditions unfair to women;

(b) Reviewing legislations and reforming those that discriminate against women;

(c) Training people implementing the law on women's legal rights, such as judges and police officers;

(d) Raising awareness with regard to women's legal rights, helping poor women and supporting them in case they wish to resort to jurisdiction;

(e) Monitoring judicial decisions and making sure they do not include any violation to the rights of women and are coherent with the articles of CEDAW;

(f) Changing the stereotyped image of women in the media, adopting media strategies that are gender-based considerate, and reviewing the curricula so that they include a positive image of women and human rights of women;

(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 education and encouraging girls to join specializations that are compatible with opportunities available in the labour market;

(b) Eliminating the spread of illiteracy among women, defining a time schedule in this context and developing programmes for eliminating illiteracy in its different forms, including basic literacy, numeracy and legal and informatics;

(c) Providing and developing micro-financing for women and ensuring the risks in order to encourage women to start small projects as well as providing means to market their products;

(d) Establishing systems for health and social insurance for poor women as well as enhancing and developing social security networks;

(e) Ensuring women's employment and gradual advancement to promotion by achieving administrative reform and good governance in both public and private sectors;

(f) Expanding opportunities for women's access to resources and ensuring their right to inheritance, including of agricultural lands and real estate;

(g) Establishing and activating national plans for the advancement of rural women and encouraging poor women to participate in formulating local plans for the advancement of their local communities; Developing relief programmes into developmental programmes;

(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. WEAK MONITORING, FOLLOW-UP AND COORDINATION MECHANISMS AND TOOLS

1. *Reality*

117. A number of Arab countries still lack gender-based statistics and have weak mechanisms for evaluating, following up and monitoring the development related to women's status, which makes it hard to define clear policies aimed at bridging the gender gap in many fields. This is due to the limited institutional capacities of national mechanisms related to women, the lack of institutionalization of the tasks of coordinating entities in gender issues in ministries and institutions in some countries, and the weak coordination among them, as well as the lack of human resources and skills for analysing gender-based issues and integrating them in different plans and programmes.

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;

(g) Defining required gender-based studies and executing them, as well as adopting an integrated approach to handle women's needs in a comprehensive and impartial way;

(h) Developing indicators to measure women's empowerment in different fields in cooperation with national mechanisms related to women's advancement, women's organizations and studies and researches centres in order to facilitate the evaluation of the progress made as to enhancing the status of women.