

Outcomes and Debated Issues During

The Second Conference of the Arab Women Organisation

Women in the Concept and Issues of Human Security

Arab and International Perspectives

Under the Kind Patronage and Chairmanship of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak

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Outcomes and Debated Issues During The Second Conference of the Arab Women Organisation

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Introduction

By the onset of the third millennium, the march of Arab action - at state and regional levels - towards the promotion of Arab women had come a considerable way; This allowed for, and ensured the success of, calls for initiating an institutional framework to regulate, integrate and coordinate these efforts. This task was advocated by the first Arab Women Summit, called for by Her Excellency Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak and held in Cairo in November 2000. The summit was widely and actively attended by delegations from 19 Arab countries, led by these Arab countries First Ladies or their representatives.

The major success achieved by that first Arab Women Summit was the clear message-on which Arab First Ladies agreed - that Arab solidarity was necessary in order to promote the status of Arab women and coordinate the tremendous efforts exerted by various official, civil, national and regional bodies seeking the empowerment of Arab women. The Arab First Ladies translated this conviction into tangible recommendations incorporated into the Cairo Declaration issued by the summit. In particular, the formation of an institutional entity was recommended, by which efforts exerted towards the empowerment of Arab women could be integrated and coordinated.

Accordingly, the Arab Women Organisation (AWO) was established under the umbrella of the League of Arab States, to act as one of the specialised institutions of joint Arab action, seeking Arab women's empowerment through capacity building, promotion of women's status and improving the overall environment affecting the progress of women, particularly in seven fields outlined by the organisation, namely: education, health and environment, economy, media, politics, law, and society.

Since its inception, the AWO, the head of consists of a Supreme Council whose membership is composed of the Arab First Ladies of member states or their representatives, was resolute on keeping pace with developments in the international community in dealing with women's issues. The AWO believes that the Arab world is an integral part of the international community and a key component in the global stage.

For at least a decade, issues of women used to be mainly addressed using development, as a conceptual framework, development being considered as a human right. In light of this fact, women are viewed as human beings that have the right to enjoy the fruits of development. There emerged a conviction that the enhancement of women's capabilities is one means to consolidate their human right to development. Thus, women's empowerment became validated in all walks of life. Then there was a shift in the approach through which women's issues are handled, in line with the rise of the concept of human security. It is now believed that development as a right cannot be achieved without first ensuring both security and safety.

The officials in charge of the AWO realised the importance of this shift at the international level in the handling of women's issues. This is because they were able to

see that in spite of continuous and accumulated Arab efforts towards the empowerment of women as active partners in the process of community development on an equal footing with men, women's suffering from various aspects of insecurity constitutes a barrier to their advancement. So the AWO decided to adopt the approach of human security as a theoretical framework through which to develop its plan of action and work with women, and also as a practical guide in the drafting of its programmes and projects aiming to promote women.

Accordingly, the AWO decided to focus its second general conference on the concept of human security in its varied aspects related to Arab women. The AWO found that definitions of the concept, whether by the UN or by foreign or Arab academicians, the last remain limited, are very broad and alarmingly complicated. It includes a variety of material and moral elements that are interlinked with each other in no clear arrangement. So the concept, in this sense, is ambiguous to an extent that it cannot be easily attuned to a clear agenda, a task which the AWO aims to achieve.

Aware that the concept of human security in its different elements, as developed by the UN and the international community since the mid 1990s, is in concordance with the different aspects of the social presence of Arab women, on which the AWO is active, the AWO designed its second conference to be a forum for dialogue and interaction among Arab and foreign academicians and practitioners interested in human security as a

conceptual framework and its relation to the issue of women advancement. The gathering aimed to exchange ideas and experiences via a dynamic dialogue translating the concept of human security in general, and women's security in particular, into policies to frame working programmes, projects and activities implemented on the ground in accordance with set priorities.

In view of the above, the Second Conference of the Arab Women Organisation was held under the title, "Women in the Concept and Issues of Human Security: Arab and International Perspectives", during the period 11-13 November 2008 in Abu Dhabi (UAE) under the kind patronage and chairmanship of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak.

The conference was divided into seven sessions, discussing eight studies. Seven of these studies analysed key realms of the concept of human security and its links to Arab women's security. These key realms are: culture, education, health, environment, economy, social policies and armed conflicts. A theoretical study introduced the seven studies and laid down a theoretical base regarding the concept of security in its broader sense. At the conclusion of the conference, a panel discussion was held in which participants proposed practical ideas on the means through which Arab women's security could be assured. These ideas will be helpful as the AWO formulates a programme of action that can be put into effect.

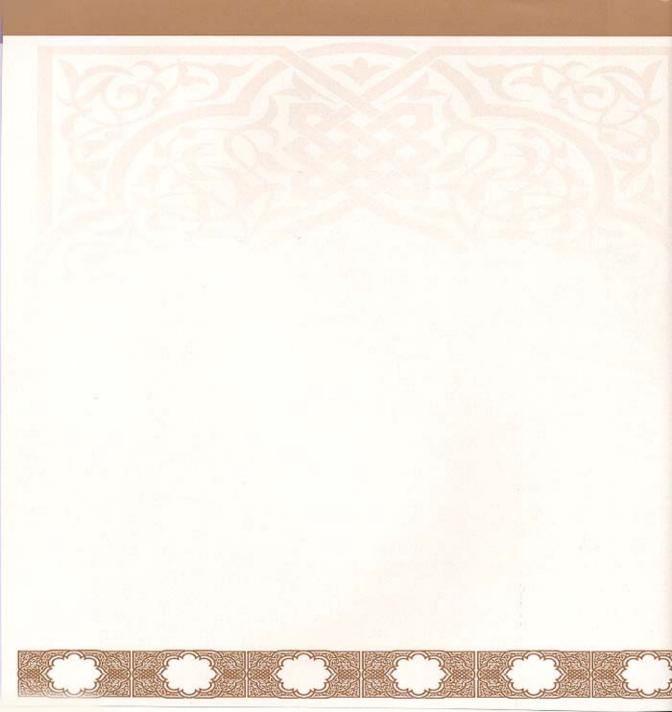
The eight studies, when debated over during the sessions of the conference, enriched the discussions and encouraged attendees to focus on important issues related to women's security. AWO officials found that the contributions of participants were worthy of being recorded for three reasons. First, the points and issues raised were serious. Second, comments were made in a transparent and bold manner, despite the sensitivity of the issue. Third, the contributions reflect a distinguished level of awareness of the overall issue under discussion.

The following report, which constitutes an in-depth reading of the discussions had during the seven sessions, and during the concluding panel discussion, is divided into two sections. The first section presents the most important issues raised by the attendees regarding women's security, while the second is concerned with forming a list of the proposals tabled across the varied sessions of the conference. These proposals were mainly aimed at enhancing action undertaken to achieve women's security and safety. The final communiqué of the conference, appended below, includes the most important agreed-upon principles and recommendations.

The seven sessions of the conference reviewed the following studies respectively:

- World Visions of Security: How far have women been taken into consideration? by Professor Bahgat Korany, Head of the Conference Scientific Team, Professor of international relations at the American University in Cairo (AUC) and director of the AUC Forum, Egypt.
- Women's Security: A cultural perspective, by Professor Muhammad Abdelbaqi
 Al-Hermassi, President of the High Council of Communication, Professor of
 sociology in Tunisian universities and the University of California, and Former
 Minister of Culture, Tunisia.
- Globalisation and Women's Status in the Arab World: Blessing or curse? by Dr Fatima Al-Shamsi, secretary-general of the United Arab Emirates University and assistant professor of economy.
- Women's Security and Health Issues, by Her Excellency Professor Nada Haffadh, lecturer at the Faculty of Medicine, Arabian Gulf University, and Former Minister of Health, Kingdom of Bahrain.
- Gender and Climate Change in the Arab Region, by Balqis Osman-Elasha, Senior Researcher at the Higher Council for Environment and Natural Resources, the Republic of Sudan.

- Education: The effective route for women's security, by Dr Munther Wassef Masri,
 Head of the National Centre for Human Resources Development, Jordan.
- Women's Security and the Impact of Social Policies, by Dr Kamal Hamdan, Director
 of the Consultation and Research Institute, Lebanon.
- Armed Conflicts and the Security of Women, by Professor Ali Al-Jarbawi, Professor
 of political science at Birzeit University, Palestine.



PART I: The Main Issues Regarding the Security of Arab Women Raised in the Discussions During the Conference Sessions:

A detailed reading of the discussions had during the seven main sessions, and during the panel discussion at the end of the conference, reveals that a number of issues were raised repeatedly by participants across all sessions. Hence, these issues can be seen as pressing needs that are important for Arab intellectuals and activists to consider. They can be condensed into 10 main areas of concern or action:

- Key players in the process of Arab women's empowerment and ensuring their security and safety
- 2. Spheres to give priority to while seeking to achieve security for Arab women
- 3. Supportive measures towards achieving security for Arab women
- Key challenges facing the drafting of a unified regional strategy on achieving security for Arab women
- 5. Which precedes the other and leads to it: state security or the security of society (women being a key component in society)?
- 6. Democracy and women's security and safety

- International intervention in the domestic affairs of countries under the claim of the protection of human rights in general, and the protection of women's rights in particular
- 8. International humanitarian law and its capacity to ensure protection for women
- 9. Globalisation and women's security
- The intellectual elite and their responsibility towards ensuring security for Arab women

1. Key players in the process of Arab women's empowerment and ensuring their security and safety

Panelists in this discussion were of the view that the issue of Arab women's security revolves mainly around the issue of women's empowerment; that the gateway to women's security is through achieving the advancement of women in all social aspects. The discussion evolved around identifying the key actors responsible for ensuring women's empowerment.

In providing answers to this question, panelists were divided into five main groups. The first believed that the state is the key player in achieving Arab women's empowerment. Supporters of this idea were of the view that the process of empowering Arab women'should be realised, at least for the time being, through supra-decisions, due to the multifaceted and interlinked problems facing Arab women, especially those related to the cultural sphere in which there is most scope for empowering women and which is still discriminating against them. So only the state, the most powerful actor, is capable of addressing discrimination through affirmative action in favour of women.

To prove the validity of their claim, the group referred to success stories in several Arab countries that adopted this top down strategy where the burden of achieving women's empowerment is shouldered by governments. Adherents to this view further argued that the role played by governments was, in most cases, deeper and more influential than that of civil society.

In this context, some participants underlined that any plan aiming at women's empowerment would not work in the real world unless it entailed real empowerment for all citizens, which is a colossal task, once again confirming the necessity of establishing the state as the key player in the process of empowerment.

The main point raised by the second group, which believed that civil society is the key player in the process of Arab women's empowerment, is that past experience has revealed that empowerment cannot bear results as long as it follows a top-down approach. The right course for realising empowerment, according to this group, is to pursue empowerment from bottom up, believing that this is the only course for attaining sustainable empowerment. According to this view, civil society organisations are the most eligible actors able to play this role, in view of their access to women at the grassroots level, and their ability to win their trust and to interact actively with them.

Within this framework, this group identified several characteristics of civil society and its institutions that ensure that it is more efficient than governments in the role of key player in women's empowerment, especially in view of its remarkable capacity to identify areas in need of swift action. This is in addition to the role civil society can play in lobbying governments in order to take positive moves in aspired directions and even its capacity to question the government on what it has achieved with regards to women's issues. Moreover, civil society identifies the areas where there is discrimination against women,

and can launch awareness campaigns to bridge gender gaps and lobby to reach this objective.

However, even those supporting the claim that civil society is the key player in achieving women's empowerment, security and safety did not overlook the problems faced by civil society, which can hinder its efforts. One problem is outside funding for its activities. This casts doubt on the ability of civil society organisations to draft national agenda of action that can address real societal problems. In addition, adherents referred to the patriarchal hegemony present in most civil society organisations, especially religious organisation that play an active role and exercise considerable influence through offering a wide range of services. Many such religious organisations hold a vision with regards to women and their role within society that clashes with the concept of women's security.

As far as the third group is concerned, it underlined the importance of the role of the private sector in empowering women. Those favouring this claim believe that the problems of women are deeply rooted in society and affect a very large bracket of it. Change in such a situation requires huge human and financial resources, which are beyond the capacities of any government alone. According to adherents of this view, even the oil exporting countries in the Arab world are no exception, as they will not be able to continue offering the same care for their citizens forever. They added that these oil-exporting countries, like all other Arab countries, would soon resort to establishing

partnership ties with other effective players, the most important according to their view is, the private sector.

The fourth group referred to the importance of the role of women themselves as players in the process of women's empowerment and security. Those advocating this position believe that Arab women, though victims of discriminatory social, political, economic and cultural policies, can become a tool for essential change in social attitudes towards them. This group proposed certain preconditions for the success of this process. First of all, women holding leading positions should bear their responsibility with regards to being tools for change. They should play their role in preparing a second rank of active women that can rise to leading positions. On the other hand, these women'should establish a network of alliances which aims at achieving women's aspired to shift in social attitudes towards women. According to this group, the main effective party in this network of alliances is the youth. Open to change, the youth are less impressed by taboos.

A last and fifth team comprised of a good number of attendees believed that the lists proposed by the other groups were not comprehensive, and that women sempowerment as a means towards their attainment of security, cannot be realized in absence of full coordination and integration between political will, on the one hand, and popular will on the other. Popular will is generated by a dynamic and effective civil society. While

speaking about popular will, this group referred also to the role played by women themselves in changing their own conditions. To reach aspired to change, this group stressed the importance of contributions from the youth and intellectual elites. In general, they asserted that state and civil society are the two key players and that neither can be excluded but at the cost of the other. However, the group also called on the private sector to bear its share of social responsibility in this regard.

2. Spheres to give priority to while seeking to achieve security for Arab women

Attendees at the conference made remarkable contributions to this particular topic while their views and opinions varied drastically. One group was of the view that attention and priority should be given to the **political sphere**, as the political empowerment of women would play a decisive role in achieving their security and safety in other walks of life. They believed that any efforts being exerted to empower women in any other field would not achieve aspired to results as long as women were excluded from the processes of policymaking and decision-making. Those advocating this position stressed that ensuring security and safety for women requires building social peace, and that this cannot be achieved unless gender relations are based on social justice. In return, this necessitates the participation of women in the process of decision-making at all levels.

Supportive of the importance and prioritisation of the political sphere in the process of women's empowerment, security and safety, some advocates of this opinion called for the adoption of a quota system as a temporary measure to achieve women's empowerment in the political field. Others of the group underlined that what is meant by political empowerment is not linkages to political power as such, but rather the activation of women's capacities to make and take decisions in all aspects of life, including at the family level. Adherents to this opinion stressed that many women who reach leading

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positions and are not experiencing disadvantage relative to education, healthcare or their participation in the workplace, are barred from participating in family affairs, and that this should be considered a form of moral violence practiced upon them.

On the other hand, many attendees placed the field of education as a priority in achieving Arab women's security. The type of education referred to was not merely education in its traditional sense, but education in its broader meaning. By this, they mean civic education .Many educated young women, they noticed, cannot take decisions alone, so we cannot say that formal education has made a real change in their status. According to this group, women have to realise their rights in order to achieve security. In fact, all society should recognise the rights of women. In this context, the role of civil society surfaces once again, especially its organizations that are concerned with human rights, with regards to raising awareness on gender equality. This can be achieved through developing programmes for civic education.

Some of the attendees raised a question mark with regards to the supposed causal relationship between women's education and security. They claim that such relationship could be detected in modern societies where social mobility depends on acquired factors, prior among which is good education and training which is tailored to market requirements. On the other hand, in traditional communities, including Arab ones, social mobility takes place in accordance with traditional and inherited formulas, including

social status, the tribal affiliation, etc. Accordingly, so long as the determination of an individual s position on the social ladder in Arab communities does not depend primarily on education, we cannot claim that education is the sphere to give priority to in order to empower women and ensure their security. If social promotion through education amongst males in Arab communities is limited, it will be more limited for women, because they suffer from gender discrimination in addition to class discrimination.

While some attendees referred to the importance of adding health to education as the most important fields relative to women's empowerment and security, a fourth group added economy to education, considering this combination as the most important in achieving women's empowerment, security and safety. This group underlined women's active employment as a means of enabling them to have an independent income - a cornerstone allowing them to take their own decisions. On this regard, some warned of gender inequality in work as common in Arab communities, and which negatively affects women's presence in the field of education. As women'see that they are biased against in the field of work, they believe that work is not guaranteed, hence ,their interest in education and their keenness on getting educated declines, especially if this would call on women to fight social forces and conventions that deny women's right to education.

A fifth group, referring to the necessity of empowering women in the fields of education, health and economy, said this is not enough, in view of the cultural complexity of the matter. For instance, it is not enough that the percentage of girls in education is increasing. What is important is the quality of education attained, the type of specialisation offered, and the training available, and how far all this meet the market s requirements. In short, we cannot overlook the nature and methods of education offered to girls. Moreover, one cannot overlook the content of curricula, the preparation of teachers, and the types of school activities offered. In the health sector, it is not enough to improve maternal mortality while the overall health system contains gender discrimination. Similarly, it is not enough to increase women's economic participation without looking into the types of economic activities usually reserved for women. Such points concern the cultural atmosphere within which women are educated and are working.

What was most important for this group is success in bringing about a radical shift in the predominant cultural system in Arab communities, which is generally discriminatory against women. In this context, some said that women themselves accept this patriarchal culture. In the end, women are part of the cultural system of their societies, and hostage to prevailing values. Moreover, women are often an active element in widening gender gaps through reproducing these values and teaching them to their children, both boys and girls. Nonetheless, this group confirmed that changes in culture are possible, and that some evidence suggests that traditions, customs and standards prevalent in Arab communities have started changing.

A final group said that no field or sphere is more important than others, or should be prioritised over others. Rather, aforementioned spheres intertwine and integrate to form one unit, namely, the human security of women. If one element were more important than the other, women's security would have been achieved in the Arab countries that overcame women's illiteracy and enjoyed a high percentage of educated women, or in the countries where women are more present in the legislative, executive and judicial structures, or in countries where Millennium Development Goals are at hand in the field of women's health.

3. Supportive measures towards achieving security for Arab women

Attendees raised concern over supportive measures that can help the process of women's empowerment in a way that can achieve women's security. In general, attendees discussed three supportive measures as follows.

i. Development of gender sensitive data and statistics

Attendees agreed that without the availability of such data and statistics, which is by and large lacking in the Arab region, decision makers would not be able to develop successful strategies for women's empowerment and ensuring their security. This is because the reality of the depth of gender gaps, and where these gaps are deepening and accentuating, will not be clear to decision makers.

ii. Legislative reform

Many attendees referred to legislative reform as the main guarantee of the security and safety of women. On the one hand, legislative reform is a pivotal mechanism for ensuring women's protection against violence they examine in society and the family. On the other hand, it also represents a key mechanism through which women can gain their rights. In this context, attendees underlined the necessity of reviewing prevailing legislations in the

Arab region. This would identify legal texts that imply or establish discrimination against women, and suggest possibilities for amendments that better regulate gender relations and help women to gain their rights. In this respect, attendees underlined the importance of amending family laws and personal status laws. They also stressed that the state should not claim to have no hand in the matter, under the pretext that gender relations are private affairs. As long as women do not feel safe at the private level - namely, within the family - it is difficult to speak of their enjoying security at the public level, within the community.

Some attendees mentioned that inspite of the importance of a women-friendly legal atmosphere, the problem is not always in legal texts that are discriminatory against women or because these texts do not offer protection for women. The problem is often that equitable legal texts are not enforced on the ground. According to adherents to this view, a main reason for this problem is that men dominate law enforcement bodies, such as the judiciary and the police, a fact which means that patriarchy prevailing in the interpretation and implementation of law. This is in addition to any adverse cultural context, as it often hinders the society s acceptance of legislative amendments in this regard. In this way, one will note a significant difference between what is mentioned in legislation and social reality with its pressing traditions and norms. Thus a third supportive measure emerged in discussion.

iii. Changing the predominant cultural context in the Arab region

Attendees unanimously agreed that Arab women's empowerment, security and safety cannot be successfully achieved and sustained unless a radical shift has been introduced into the predominant cultural context in the Arab region, which runs contrary to the values of justice and fairness regarding women. Attendees further indicated that the predominant culture in the Arab region regarding women is passive, whether at the level of mind or at the level of behaviour. This culture, participants said, reproduces erroneous concepts about gender relations, which make discrimination and violence against women'socially acceptable and normal conduct. Attendees indicated that neither the state nor civil society could achieve anything substantial for women if they act in such an unfavourable cultural atmosphere.

In response, attendees proposed three mechanisms for introducing aspired to change in the predominant cultural system. The **first mechanism** entails working to marginalise hard line religious discourse that interprets the texts of Islamic law in ways that run contrary to the values of justice and fairness otherwise elevated in Islam. Attendees underlined the importance of ensuring that enlightened religious thought reaches the lay person in the Arab street, so they can understand the true image of Islam. They also stressed the importance of exposing the traditions, customs and norms that are falsely claimed to be religious and that contradict the tolerant spirit of Islam that preserves the dignity of human beings, both men and women.

The second mechanism is spreading the culture of democracy and citizenship through a programme of civic education, in order to educate the new generation on the values of equality and acceptance of the other. Supporters of this opinion believe that women will not feel secure and safe until decisions in society reflect their needs. This will not happen until women participate in decision making and taking at all levels. To achieve this goal, a new generation should be inculcated with the values of democracy. Supporters of this opinion underlined the importance of deepening the culture of human rights in general, and political rights in particular. Women's security can be achieved only in a safe society that ensures equal citizenship for both women and men. Indeed, there is a close link between the space of human rights in thought and practice, on the one hand, and the space of security and safety women enjoy, on the other.

The third mechanism is spreading a culture of social peace. Attendees underlined that domestic violence against women, classified by some participants as the most heinous form of violence against Arab women in terms of nature and frequency, is a direct result of the absence of a culture of peace in society. Thus domestic violence against women within the family as a means to settle disputes is seen as common and acceptable. On the other hand, some attendees indicated that the absence of a culture of peace lies behind the increase of violence against women in the Arab street, leading to women feeling physically and phsycologically insecure outside the home, which results in more women remaining home, confining their activities to traditional roles, thus increasing the effects of discrimination against them.

4. Key challenges facing the drafting of a unified regional strategy on achieving security for Arab women

Although it was widely believed by attendees that there is a need to develop a unified strategy for Arab women's empowerment, security and safety, the challenges of drafting such a strategy were glaringly apparent. The most important challenges raised by panelists include the following.

The first challenge is apparent variances between the conditions of Arab women from one Arab country to another, and even from one region to another within the same country (such as between urban areas, the countryside and scattered areas). In this context, attendees discussed extensively the issue of poverty in the Arab nation, and how human security is closely linked to freedom from fear and need which, in turn, is linked to the economic welfare of the state and the individual, and this strongly differs from one Arab country to another.

Attendees also underscored the fact that poverty further aggravates the impacts of gender inequality with women being always the most affected victims, thus reducing their opportunities in the fields of education, health, work and political participation in comparison to men. Some attendees drew attention to the fact that the family, in the traditional Arab societies, most often makes decisions on women's access to education,

obtaining of healthcare, employment and participation in political life. When the family is poor, with few available opportunities in the fields of education, health, economy and politics, the choice made, under the predominant patriarchal culture, often favours males at the cost of females.

Therefore, in view of differences amongst Arab countries in terms of levels of economic welfare, the conditions of Arab women, in terms of the availability of opportunities of education, healthcare services and employment, also differ. Accordingly, it is difficult to talk about a unified Arab strategy on achieving Arab women's security and safety.

The second challenge is represented in the existing gap between scholars, on the one hand, and policymakers on the other. Attendees believed that it was not enough to encourage scientific research, as researches addressing and analyzing the problems impeding the advancement of the Arab women's security and safety were useless unless the gap could be bridged between scholars and policymakers so that the latter could make use of the results of scientific research. In this context, some of the attendees highlighted the necessity of encouraging academic research that identifies the main stages of sound strategic planning and details the scientific method in making and evaluating policies, ensuring that they meet the needs of all citizens, including women, and that the objectives of policies are realised in the implementation process. They also stressed the necessity of making opportunity available for those conducting research to get closer to decision-making circles and to participate in policymaking working groups.

The third challenge, which some attendees highlighted, is represented in the Arab mindset, which stops in most cases at identifying symptoms and diagnosing reasons, but rarely goes further into identifying solutions, or practical mechanisms for addressing problems, which are indispensable for any strategy to succeed in countering any problem.

5. Which precedes the other and leads to it: state security or the security of society (women being a key component in society)?

As the first working paper focuses on the development from the concept of national security to the concept of human security, attendees throughout the working sessions of the conference were keen to voicing their opinions on the topic. Having reviewed all the opinions expressed, we found that there were two different points of view regarding the nature of the relation between the security of the state and the security of the citizen.

The first point of view believes that the safe state produces a safe citizen. Supporters of this point of view call for the necessity of respecting the sovereignty of the state and enhancing its role, as the state cannot be ignored or its role undermined. Those advocating this point of view warned that we should not blindly follow claims that accuse the state of suppressing citizens. Even when this claim proves to be accurate in some countries, the solution is not cancelling the state or even marginalising its role, but rather to exert tremendous and sincere efforts towards changing its role for the best.

The second point of view believes that the safe citizen produces a safe state, and that without achieving security for society - where women are key partners - we cannot speak about a secure state. Supporters of this point of view argue that saying the sovereignty of the state should be respected so that the security of the citizen can be achieved is a false

presupposition. If the state is tyrannical and suppresses its citizens, its sovereignty should not be protected. Those believing in this view claimed that faith in the safe citizen producing a safe state requires a radical shift in the predominant political culture, as all individuals of society - men and women - should change from being subjects dominated by ruling regimes to citizens from whom regimes derive their legitimacy, by protecting their rights and ensuring their safety.

In other words, those advocating this point of view believe that the security of the citizen, which leads to the security of the state, requires the spread of the values of democracy. This point resulted in a shift in the discussion among attendees to the issue of democracy and its role in achieving the security of citizens in general, and women in particular.

6. Democracy and women's security and safety

Attendees agreed that women's security and safety could be achieved only in the framework of a democratic system. It was remarked that there is a close link between respect for human rights and the fair distribution of rights and duties in a society, and progress achieved with regards to the status of women in society.

Yet despite this consensus, conferees differed over the best means to achieve democracy in Arab countries. One group believed that the best means was through the direct intervention of the state to impose democratic measures and mechanisms within the political sphere and practise. Supporters of this opinion argue that governments moving ahead on the democratic track necessarily produce a democratic society, as the family - the nucleus of society - is formed in the image of the state. Similarly, power relations within the family are a reflection of power distributions between the state and citizens. If the power distribution within the state is democratic, the distribution of power within the family will be democratic also.

On other side, some participants rejected this claim, affirming that real and effective democracy, from which women can benefit, can only be promoted from within society, and cannot be imposed from the top down. Indeed, real democracy cannot be reduced to a set of measures and mechanisms, as the real core of democracy is a system of values that spreads amongst members of a given society. In this case, the culture of democracy, human rights and citizenship becomes an integral part of the social fabric in terms of thinking and practice.

Supporters of this opinion believe that the spread of the values of democracy, beyond the mere adoption of democratic mechanisms, is vitally important, and that several tracks towards this end can be pursued. In this context, awareness should be raised regarding the culture of human rights, as women in most cases do not ask for - or assert - their rights because they are not basically aware of them. In this regard, it is important that the efforts being made on raising awareness on the culture of human rights not be restricted to women. It is important to presume that men do not deal fairly with women because they do not realise that they are being unfair.

The second course of action raised by supporters of this group, to spread the culture of democracy and human rights, is education. Some adherents stressed that creating a democratic society could be realised only through education and eradication of illiteracy. They believe that education is an enlightening, as well as, emancipating tool. Ignorance makes people fall easy pray to tyrannical systems that violate their rights. However, they drew attention to the importance to be given to the content of educational curricula, as such content can further deepen inequality between men and women and possibly enhance the culture of violence against women.

The third course of action proposed by supporters of this point of view, those who believe in the importance of promoting democracy and not imposing it, is the serious march towards enhancing economic human rights so that they include women who should be encouraged to constructively participate in various economic activities, and so take a role in the overall economic development of society. Hence, the spreading of democratic values to the economic sector.

Supporters of this point of view summed up their opinion in saying that members of Arab communities should not wait for democracy to be imposed on them, but should develop democracy through raising awareness of the values of democratic life, and establishing an educational system to embrace the culture of democracy and implant it in the minds and consciousness of citizens in society. At the same time, a system of economic rights should be adopted in a way that can support the right of all of society s members, both men and women, to participate in economic activities and benefit from the fruits of development. Adherents believe that this task should be mainly performed by civil society in the first instance, as it has a vital role to play in bridging gaps caused by the exclusion of women from decision making processes concerning the allocation and distribution of society s resources.

International intervention in the domestic affairs of countries under the claim of the protection of human rights in general, and women's rights in particular

Participants in the working sessions of the conference condemned the use of human rights in general, and women's rights in particular, as pretexts used by some major powers in order to interfere in the domestic affairs of countries of the Arab region. Some attendees called for international monitoring of the misuse of human rights and women's rights in this manner, and the necessity of pushing the UN to admit that the concept, in spite of its importance, of humanitarian intervention is being exploited to achieve the parochial interests of some countries.

Some attendees called on Arab countries to take a more positive stance in confronting this situation, and not to confine their actions to merely calling on the UN to condemn the misuse of human rights concepts, and the insecurity of Arab women in particular. In this regards, they asked the Arab countries to be positively active in the international community, trying to influence the scene within the United Nations organisation.

A third group said that intervention in the domestic affairs of the region, though part of it is attributed to the imbalance of power among countries of the region, on the one hand, and the inclination of major countries to pressure and interfere on the other, is mainly driven by the imbalance of power between men and women in the region. In fact, this cannot be denied, because interfering countries would not have the opportunity or the pretext to interfere under the banner of women's rights if their were not credible grievances or concerns. The solution, according to this group, is for countries in the region to embrace equality between men and women. This can be realised through spreading the values of justice and fairness. Moreover, cultural traditions with regard to the distribution of roles and power between men and women are not sacred - they are manmade. So they can be redrafted, because they were produced under certain historical conditions that are now no more.

In this same context, some referred to the schizophrenia some countries in the region suffer, allowing them to accept, even call upon, foreign intervention in some of the region s affairs, which makes them non eligible to refuse intervension in other affairs. The debate lead to the issue of war and the degree of protection for women inherent or absent in international humanitarian law.

8. International humanitarian law and its capacity to ensure protection for women

Participants in the conference raised several important points regarding the flagrant shortcomings of international law and the role it plays with regards to women's protection.

Although participants admitted that international humanitarian law criminalises violence against women, they drew attention to the fact that there is no consensus on practical mechanisms that can effectively stop violence against women. They considered this a serious shortcoming of humanitarian law.

Another group of attendees drew attention to the fact that most international laws, both those addressing conditions of war and times of after war, overlook women. They said that these laws only address the conditions of men during and after wars, although the first victims of wars and post-war situations are women and children. In response, they called for exerting more effort in international arena to improve international law by bringing together all international laws addressing violence against women so as to form one unit and also by trying to overcome the existing gaps in international law like its refrainment from considering rape during war an international crime.

Other participants called for reviewing existing international treaties and agreements to

be more responsive to all visions and cultures. By so doing, these agreements and treaties would be internationally legitimised and accepted. They also called for effecting decisive measures and mechanisms to ensure practical and fair implementation of international humanitarian law.

On the other hand, some participants said that charging international law with the mission of ending violence practiced against women was farfetched. Eliminating violence against women falls under the responsibility of the state for protecting its citizens. In this context, these participants deemed calls for reforming international law for the sake of protecting women as drawing attention away from the violence to which women are subjected in their countries and the inability of national systems of law to protect them. Adherents to this opinion believe that the protection of women'should start within the state. Accordingly, this requires legislative reform to be supported by a serious attempt to radically shift the predominant culture that justifies violence against women in times of peace and war alike.

Those advocating this opinion drew attention to the close link between the issue of international humanitarian law and its ability to protect women, on the one hand, and the issue of intervention in the domestic affairs of countries under the banner of the protection of human rights on the other. In fact, humanitarian intervention is often done under the umbrella of international law, or the claim of implementing it. So if Arab

countries reject the principle of humanitarian intervention, in order to be consistent they have to refrain from calling upon international law to offer protection to women and instead to enact local legislation and laws that can offer protection and security to women.

9. Globalisation and women's security

The issue of globalisation and women's security was raised amongst the attendees when some of them highlighted existing disparities between increasing opportunities for education available to women and the shortage of job opportunities that follow. Some participants remarked that gender equality is realised in the field of education but disappears thereafter in the field of employment.

In a bid to interpret the reasons behind this disparity, supporters of this point of view addressed the topic of economic globalisation and the policies of economic restructuring and privatisation. They claim that they have resulted in a reduction of the role of the public sector in Third World countries, including the countries of the Arab region, that traditionally embraced a large number of female employees and provided a friendly atmosphere for working women, unlike in the private sector, now dominating Arab countries under the effects of economic globalization. Indeed, the private sector is not ready to bear the cost that the public sector traditionally paid for supporting working Arab women.

Those of this opinion warned against the repercussions of this situation on the security and safety of women, stressing that opportunities of education for women are increasing under economic globalisation, but that this did not result in increasing their security. This could have negative consequences on women's participation in the field of education. In other words, the less job opportunities available to women, the less interest women will have in education. This is indeed the case in many Arab countries, where economies are shifting from dependence on the public sector to the private sector.

At the same time, another group explored the positive impacts of globalisation on women's security and safety. In this context, they referred to new patterns of work that emerged with globalisation and enhanced telecommunication and information technology systems. In fact, these new technologies made available new job opportunities, as people can work at a distance and engage in part-time work. Women benefited from these conditions, as it was difficult for women, during certain periods of their family life or because of predominant norms and traditions, to leave the home and join the labour market.

Supporters of this point of view see that the positive impact of globalisation was not only confined to making job opportunities available for women by bridging distance, but it helped women to break away from traditional professions _ such as handicrafts _ and join other services related work, such as telemarketing and project management through the internet.

Supporters also remarked that women's security in the education sector increases, not decreases, because of globalization of technology. Women benefited from programs of e-learning, skills enhancement and capacity building.

Supporters also highlighted that the flexibility offered by the globalisation of technology in the workplace and in education have benefited Arab women and should be positively reflected in the patterns of relationship within the family, in social practices and in cultural paradigms, in a way that would favour women's security and safety.

However, a group of attendees questioned such claims, calling for caution. They drew attention to the fact that a limited sector of Arab women benefited from new work prospects due to telecommunications, while a large section of Arab women remain illiterate. So technological globalisation will not enhance opportunities for security and safety for all. Some expressed concern even with regards to Arab women who benefited from remote education and work at a distance under the conditions of economic and technological globalisation. They believe that real empowerment of women can only be achieved in direct interaction with daily life activities. For instance, the experience of travelling offers huge opportunities for women's empowerment, regardless of its purpose. Moreover, many women who are obliged to work from home are deprived of employment rights that their regular counterparts get, such as a minimum wage. So we should be cautious while trying to assess globalisation, and we should objectively address its impact - especially its negative impact - on the security of Arab women.

10. The intellectual elite and their responsibility towards ensuring security for Arab women

While talking about the state as a key player in ensuring women's security and safety in the Arab region, some attendees asserted that in the real world, in spite of all sincere intentions of those in charge and all measures taken, including legislative reforms, the state could be blocked from improving conditions for women. This would be the case when societal awareness in comparison with that of the political administration is regressed. Societal awareness could be retarded when conservative societal powers are more powerful than other societal powers that believe in the importance of change.

Supporters of this opinion believe that tremendous efforts should be exerted to raise societal awareness. Hence, the more serious work should be concentrated in the field of culture. Work in any other field, such as legislation, education, employment and healthcare, will not bear its fruits, as patriarchal culture could abort all efforts aimed at improving women's conditions and security.

The question was then raised by conferees as to the means that countries could adopt in order to effect aspired to change in societal culture, to raise societal awareness on women's rights to security and safety. Answering this question, attendees raised several options, such as: restricting conservative religious discourse; controlling fatwas (religious

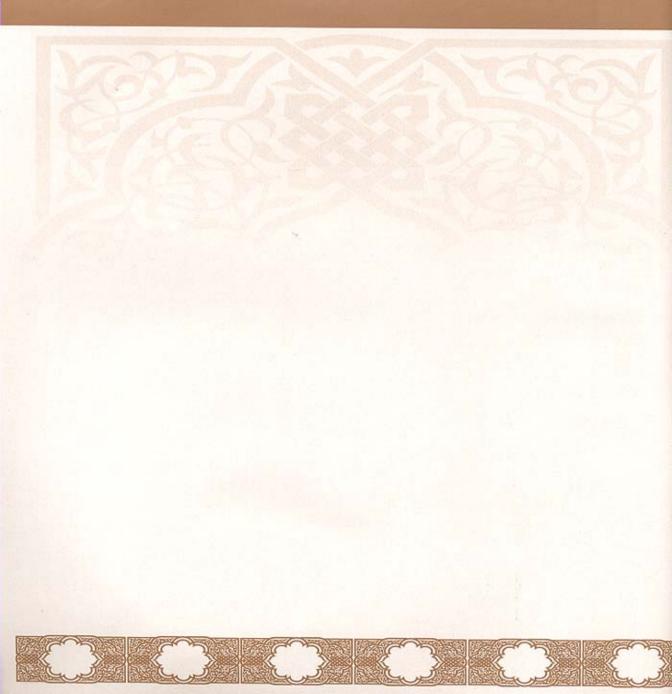
edicts); and increasing the awareness of those in charge of media with regards to women's security and safety. Attendees also highlighted an additional track; that the state supports the intellectual elite that believes in enlightenment and entrusts them with the reform process.

Although attendees agreed on the importance of giving room for the intellectual elites that believe in reform and enlightenment, others questioned their ability to play an effective role while using an elitist discourse which the public do not understand. Interaction between the intellectual elite and society is almost absent, in the view of this group, adding that the intellectual elite moves towards the state, leaving the ground open for conservative and extremist forces to further enhance their interaction with the public.

Supporters of this opinion indicated that it is enough to count the number of small places of worship spreading in each street in some Arab countries, and to monitor the religious discourse there, in order to realise how far this discourse can influence the feelings of the public. They warned against the fact that as long as the intellectual elite does not possess the tools to interact with the public, it would remain incapable of having a substantial impact, and would never introduce aspired for changes in favour of women.

Attendees called on the intellectual elite to restore their key role; namely, close interaction with the public in order to raise their enlightenment. They further called on

the elite not to isolate themselves in ivory towers, or to give room for the hegemony of personal political interests. If elites did not change their mechanisms of working, they would lose the trust of the public and would not be able to understand public culture. So it is not enough for states to give room to the intellectual elite to achieve positive change in societal culture; more serious actions should be taken to bridge the gap between the culture of the elite and the culture of the people. According to attendees, this is the main role and prime responsibility of intellectuals.



PART II: Proposals for action towards achieving women's security and safety

The first section of the second part of the report reviews the proposals made towards action in support of women's security and safety, based on presentations and discussions in each of the working sessions of the conference. The second section of this second part will include the text of the final communiqué issued at the end of the conference, which identifies the general principles and recommendations agreed upon by conferees.

Proposals based on presentations and discussions during conference sessions

- i. Working Session 1: World Visions of Security: How far have women been taken into consideration?
- Women's participation in processes of decision making at all levels is of utmost importance as it can serve to pave the way towards, and ensure, women's security and safety.
- Eliminating barriers between the world of women inside and outside the home is vital and can be achieved through creating a safe environment in which women enjoy physical safety outside the home.

- The importance of taking all possible steps to marginalise misleading interpretations of sacred texts, which produce concepts and behaviours contradicting with the values of justice and fairness.
- The necessity of a determined political will that acts through adopting measures of affirmative action for achieving women's security and which should be decisively implemented.
- The importance of an active and effective civil society that identifies the barriers hindering women's security and acts to overcome them.
- The necessity of popular will adopting the issue of women's security as an integral part of societal security overall.
- Legislative reforms are pivotal in countering the challenges that threaten women's security.
- The importance of developing mechanisms to bridge the gap on the ground between the positive spirit of fair legislation regarding women and its implementation.
- 9. The necessity of the UN ensuring respect for international humanitarian law.
- 10. The importance of spreading a culture of citizenship and equality, and the value of democracy, through the positive upbringing of youth.

ii. Working Session 2: Women's Security: A cultural perspective

- The importance of encouraging dialogue rather than conflict amongst civilisations and cultures. A culture of diversity and pluralism should be promoted.
- Systems of gender relations should be looked upon as traditions of cultural heritage that can be recast according to the prevailing conditions of new historical phases.
- The importance of bridging the gap between intellectual elites and the culture of the general public.
- The importance of bridging gaps that separate progressive governments from conservative societies.
- 5. The role of the media is essential in presenting a fair image of Arab women.
- 6. The necessity of legislative reform in the area of personal status law, as women cannot feel safe and secure to engage in the public sphere while they do not feel safe within the family.
- The necessity of paying more attention to the content of educational curricula, so education does not become a tool that nourishes discriminatory trends against women.

iii. Working Session 3: Globalisation and Women's Status in the Arab World: Blessing or curse?

- The importance of encouraging the private sector to shoulder its social responsibility, especially following the shift in Arab economies away from dependence on the public sector.
- Encouraging research into the relation between women's economic empowerment and enhancing their status within the family.
- 3. The necessity of creating a friendly working atmosphere for women.
- The importance of guiding women to study in areas of specialisation required by the labour market.
- The necessity of offering capacity building training for promoting skills in women required by the labour market.
- Reinforcing the rights of women working in the informal sector.
- Enhancing business incubators to back women's activities as junior investors, and encouraging studies that identify the impact of small and medium sized enterprises on the economic security of women.
- 8. Evaluating the impact of fostering economy on the economic empowerment of women.

- Paying special attention to the requirements of rural and bedouin women in order to ensure their security and safety.
- Undertaking rigorous study of the reasons for the breakdown of the causal relation between education and economic empowerment of women.

iv. Working Session 4: Women's Security and Health/Environmental Issues

- The necessity of making available to policymakers gender-sensitive health and environmental data which helps in creating a basis for health and environmental planning and policy making tailored to the needs of all citizens, both men and women.
- The importance of comprehensive reform of health systems in Arab countries, promoting transparency and accountability and assigning roles between the private and public sectors through effective partnerships.
- The necessity of promoting the professionalism of health service providers and establishing gender standards and indicators that can be adhered to, while undertaking a comprehensive scientific assessment of the quality of available health services.
- 4. While drafting general policies, governments must take into account health issues particular to women as vital components of the societal structure. The social, cultural, economic and political dimensions affecting the health status of Arab women'should be borne in mind when developing state policy.

- 5. The necessity of taking into account the particular conditions imposed by foreign occupation, and their negative impact on the health status of women, a situation which cannot be dealt with outside the overall call for just peace and the spread of security and stability.
- The necessity to move from describing domestic violence to developing effective means to address it.
- Supporting scientific research concerned with the relation between gender, on the one hand, and climate change and environmental pollution, on the other.
- Encouraging scientific research exploring prevailing health problems specific to the Arab countries.
- 9. The necessity of changing the approach adopted in raising awareness on health related issues from one that is top-down to one that is bottom-up, encouraging the participation of citizens in spreading awareness on sound health practices.
- 10. Promoting the capacity of women to adapt to environmental change through the provision of education and skills tuned to expanding their economic options and diversifying their sources of income.
- 11. The necessity of developing legislative frameworks aimed at improving opportunities for women to avail themselves of natural resources.

- 12. Enacting strict laws for the protection of the environment that take into consideration both women and children.
- 13. The importance of raising the awareness of women on environmental hazards stemming from daily behaviour based on predominant cultural frameworks.
- 14. The importance of women's participation in developing policies and programmes on combating pollution.
- 15. The necessity to pay more attention to environmental refugees and to develop policies and mechanisms that take them into consideration.
- 16. The importance of drawing more attention to poverty and its link to women's health and environmental safety.
- Arab countries should work together to standardise terminology and indicators used in environmental monitoring and data collection.

v. Working Session 5: Education: The effective route for women's security

- Paying special attention to educational curricula especially those inculcating values, so
 they enhance positive values, support the culture of democracy and citizenship, and
 enhance the culture of social peace.
- Paying more attention to the training of teachers in the culture of democracy and the values of human rights.

- Strict implementation of the mandatory principle of basic education (primary and secondary education) in view of being a human right for all, both males and females, on an equal footing.
- Ensuring gender equality in work opportunities so that education does not lose its significance as an essential element in achieving women's security and safety.
- 5. Taking the necessary measures to improve the percentage of females who take up vocational education and education in a wider array of fields of the so called hard sciences, in order not to confine women to certain professions and roles.

vi. Working Session 6: Women's Security and the Impact of Social Policies

- The importance of linking social policies to economic policies, as the social security of women is based on their economic security.
- The necessity of extending the umbrella of social insurance to cover aging women and dependent women, as well as those working in the informal sector.
- The importance of providing protection for women under a lifelong and comprehensive social insurance system.
- 4. The necessity of promoting the awareness of judges and policemen on gender issues and rights, and bridging the gap between legislative instruments that guarantee fair rights to women and their implementation on the ground.

- Underlining the importance of legislative reform as a key means of achieving social security for women.
- 6. The importance of social insurance networks addressing the financial needs of women.
- Encouraging the private sector to shoulder its social responsibility and to expand its
 participation in the implementation of appropriate social policies.
- Adopting participatory, gender-sensitive and human rights approaches while drafting social policies.
- Developing a strategy for eliminating violence against women within a definite timeframe.
- The importance of gender-sensitive budgeting.
- Supporting civil society as a key partner to government in ensuring women's empowerment, security and safety.

vii. Working Session 7: Armed Conflicts and the Security of Women

 The necessity of seeing each assault on women as individual case worthy of attention on its own merit, hence, the importance of avoiding generalisations about violence against women.

- The importance of not presupposing that all armed conflict is the same. Armed conflicts within the state, amongst competing groups is more common in the Arab region and is extremely harsh on women, as there is almost no difference between combatants and civilians.
- 3. Violence against women during armed conflict can never be separated from violence practiced against women in times of peace. To overcome both, societal culture should be changed and legislative reform should be introduced to criminalise all violence against women.
- 4. Sexual violence against women constitutes one form of violence against them. Despite its cruelty, other types of physical and psychological violence _ to which women are subjected should not be overlooked.
- More attention should be given to the seriousness of the erroneous claim that the urgent responsibilities and burdens that women'shoulder in time of conflicts is a good training that results in women's empowerment.
- The importance of involving Arab women in negotiating peace and during post-conflict reconstruction of society.
- The importance of finding practical mechanisms whereby international law, which protects women, can be activated.

- 8. The importance of considering rape at times of civil war as an international crime.
- Urging Arab countries to address the issue of domestic violence and refrain from viewing it as a private matter. Judicial institutions should be urged to deal positively with domestic violence.

viii. Recommendations emerging from the concluding panel discussion

- The importance of extending bridges of cooperation and coordination among all entities interested in the issue of women's security, not excluding the East, in countries like China, India, Malaysia and Singapore.
- Activating the role of law in protecting women is not realized only through legal reform, but also through enforcing already existing law that respects women's status and role.
- 3. The importance of differentiating, when working to enhance women's empowerment and security, between efforts exerted at the regional level, with regards to common issues between Arab countries, and efforts undertaken at the state level according to particularities in each Arab country.
- The importance of accurately identifying partners in implementation and funding before moving ahead with strategies on women's empowerment and security.
- The significance of gender-sensitive data for use by policymakers in the formulation of strategies aimed to alleviate women's suffering.

- Underlining the role of the media in guaranteeing the success of efforts aimed at women's empowerment and security.
- The necessity of recasting the culture of Arab societies in ways that bring women to the fore, via short, medium and long range plans.
- The necessity of recognising the causal and reciprocal relationship between poverty and gender inequality, and of exerting more effort to break this negative cycle.
- The necessity of focusing attention on the main reasons behind gender inequality, and not simply confining efforts to addressing its symptoms.

2. Final Communiqué of the Second Conference of the Arab Women Organization, "Women in the Concept and Issues of Human Security: Arab and International Perspectives", Abu Dhabi, 11-13 November 2008

As part of its effort to crystallise the concept of human security and the position of Arab women in relation to it, the Arab Women Organisation held its second conference in Abu Dhabi, the UAE, during the period 11-13 November 2008.

The conference, held under the patronage and chairmanship of Her Royal Highness Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak, chairperson of the AWO in its current session, was attended by the First Ladies of member states of the AWO: the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Republic of Tunisia, the Republic of Sudan, the Arab Republic of Syria, Palestine, the Lebanese Republic, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Kingdom of Morocco, and Mauritania, as well as by official delegates from Algeria, Oman and Yemen.

First Ladies of non-member states Somalia, Comoros, Kuwait and Djibouti, in addition to representatives of the Arab League and other regional and international governmental and non-governmental organisations were also present at the conference.

Her Highness Sheikha Fatima launched the Network of Arab Women in Immigrant countries, which will deliver useful services for an important segment of women living away from their countries of origin. The network will act as a communication hub between these women and upcoming generations in their homeland.

Sheikha Fatima also launched the Media Strategy for Arab women, which seeks to boost the efficacy of media establishments in presenting a fair image of Arab women that will contribute to raising social awareness about the position of women, their roles and contribution in building the future of their communities.

Sheikha Fatima also honoured winners of the Arab Women Award in Sciences and Technology for Development. The award is granted by the AWO to distinguished Arab researchers on issues related to women in the fields of science and technology.

The conference was concerned with analysing and assessing diverse dimensions of human security and its relationship to women.

During the working panels, themes related to culture, education, health, environment, economy, social policies and armed conflict were debated. The plenary session defined the theoretical concept and symbiotic relationship between national security and human security. The working programme ended with a panel discussion that proposed a future plan of action that will serve the human security of Arab women.

The conference assembled a rich line-up of male and female representatives of Arab governments and Arab and international research institutions, think tanks and NGOs to

explore how the concept of human security can assist Arab women in efforts to gain their rights, and to enjoy justice, protection and equality.

Participants, both men and women, commended the political commitment shown by Arab governments to the cause of women's empowerment, a development that has changed the lives of millions of Arab women for the better.

At the same time, participants addressed the negative impact of international political and economic crises on the capacity of women to secure their rights. The brunt of this global reality exacerbates the situation of women reeling under the burdens of poverty, disease, illiteracy and discrimination.

Participants also recognised the daunting challenges faced by women under occupation, siege and armed conflicts in Palestine and Iraq. Violence has become common to the daily life of those women.

Participants denounced the abuse of human security, human rights and women's rights as a pretext for intervention in internal affairs of other states.

Contending that the protection of women and the provision of security for them should be a key element of the pursuit of overall human security, participants emphasised the following principles:

 Urging states to adopt a comprehensive security concept that combines national security and state sovereignty with human security.

- Urging actors concerned with the rights of women and their human security to coordinate their efforts for better performance aimed at reducing threats to the security of women.
- Building community awareness that works to support women's rights, better the standing of women, and fulfil women's security related needs.
- Adopting principles that secure a positive place for women in Arab and Islamic cultural heritage.
- Confronting the exclusion of women from public life.
- Engaging women in decision-making processes at all levels as necessary preparation for their enjoying human security.
- Pursuing the empowerment of women in all walks of life, and notably in political life.
- Ensuring that women take advantage of information and communication technologies.
- Calling on governments, the international community and civil society to throw their weight behind initiatives seeking to enhance the human security of women in times of armed conflict.
- Urging states to take the necessary legislative and judicial steps to combat all forms of violence and discrimination against women and to create adequate mechanisms to implement positive reform.

In light of these general principles, the conference recommends the following:

First, initiating dialogue with the International Human Security Committee to draw Arab attention to the international approach to women's human security.

Second, establishing research on the human security of women in the Arab world and introducing clear-cut indicators for improving the human security of Arab women.

Third, raising the bar of awareness about international humanitarian law and spreading and promoting its culture - in particular in its relation to women - as well as creating adequate mechanisms to enforce it on the ground.

Fourth, integrating the human security concept into the AWO's overall strategy, policies and programmes.

Fifth, tuning the AWO's media strategy towards promoting and deepening the human security of Arab women.

Sixth, seeing women as a stabilising factor, rather than clients demanding security and protection.



In the concluding session of the conference, one of the foreign participants expressed the view that most theories of human security have not taken into consideration the issue of gender. Thus the authors of papers presented to the conference had made a valuable contribution, managing to highlight the links between the issue of gender and the concept and experience of human security.

From our side, we say that the success of the conference is also to be attributed to other factors. First is the deep concern of the Arab First Ladies over the issue of Arab women security and its impact on their empowerment. Their keenness to attend and to actively participate in the discussions during the sessions of the conference points to their committing to eradicating the factors that threaten Arab women's security and safety.

The second factor is the freedom of thought and the spirit of free discussion embraced by the conference organisers. Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak believed that in the absence of such freedam no effective solutions to the pressing problems could evolve. Last but not least, the distinguished attendees sincerely and responsibly raised and responded to the pressing needs of Arab women. In spite of disparities and differences of opinion, the objective observer will see that all the opinions offered are motivated by feelings of national responsibility and concern over the future of the region, which will not and cannot flourish without the contributions of women and an improvement in their status.

Ola AbouZeid

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Dr. AbouZeid is a member of research missions in several universities in the UK (Manchester and Northumbria) and the US (Columbia) on topics related to human rights and gender. Her research activities are focused on citizenship, civic education, gender equality, political participation of women, and women's position in the schools of modern political thought.

Dr. AbouZeid has held several prominent positions, including deputy director of the Centre for Political Research and Studies, Cairo University; board member of the Programme of the Dialogue of Civilization and a member of the International Relations Committee at the National Council of Women (NCW) in Egypt. She is currently director of the Planning and Programmes Department at the Arab Women Organisation (AWO).

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