



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

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

Final declaration

Euromed Civil Forum

Gender Equality:
outcome and prospects of the Istanbul-Marrakech process

Brussels, 3 - 4 September 2013

At the initiative of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) and the Euro-Mediterranean Non-Governmental Platform (ENGP), and in partnership with the European Feminist Initiative (IFE-EFI), 85 organisations met in Brussels on 3-4 September 2013 to raise the voice of civil society before the ministerial conference of the Union for the Mediterranean that will be held on 12 September 2013 in Paris.

This work, in much the same way as the conclusions of the Amman conference of 7-8 June 2013, has led to the following recommendations, which will be presented to the representatives of all the country members of the Union for the Mediterranean.

The associations welcome all measures aimed at achieving gender equality and preventing any form of discrimination against women, in line with the conclusions of the ministerial conference held in Marrakech in November 2009.

They note that the next ministerial conference, which is to be held in Paris, will be taking place in a totally different context because of the fundamental changes that have occurred in this region as well as in the European Union.

Through fieldwork, the associations were able to follow the situation closely. They welcomed the events that took place in the Maghreb and Middle-East countries, as they gave reason for hope in terms of freedom, equality and democracy.

At the same time, they express their deep concern about the fact that the situation of women is deteriorating, despite their active and full participation in the pro-democracy movements, in those countries currently undergoing a process of transition.

A degraded political environment, patriarchal practices and conservative politico-religious principles, together with financial and political austerity measures, have led to serious violations of women's rights and to the decline of gender equality at all levels and in all spheres. Gender-based sexual violence, for instance, is used as a weapon of war in Syria.

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Cases of sexual violence, committed with utter impunity, have regularly been reported in several countries across this Region. Women who exercised their right of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly were, and still are, subjected to abuse in several southern countries. In Europe, hundreds of thousands of women live in highly precarious conditions and are victims of the rise of extremist and conservative movements whose policies are contrary to their fundamental right to have control over their lives and bodies. In Europe, foreign women face multiple difficulties in claiming their rights, especially the right of asylum and residence.

The associations have also voiced their concern about the ever-increasing rejection of religious and cultural minorities that go as far as denying them their citizenship, in certain countries in the southern Mediterranean area and also within the European Union.

The associations also note that the political situation in this region remains highly unstable. Recalling, inter alia, that the Syrian regime is bombing and killing its own people, that Tunisia, Egypt and Libya are still struggling to assemble their parliaments, that the parliamentary elections in Lebanon have been postponed to 2014, that Israel continues to expand its colonies.

Within this context, the associations firmly demand that the inter-ministerial meeting taking place in Paris on 12 September reaffirms and strengthens the conclusions of the previous meetings in Istanbul and Marrakech which are still relevant today.

The Ministers are expected to renew their commitment to promote, *de jure* and *de facto*, equality between men and women, and to respect the economic, social and cultural rights of women in the same way they respect those of men, as stipulated by the international instruments on fundamental human rights, in particular the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women).

Country members of the Union for the Mediterranean should commit themselves in favour of freedom of association and the total independence of civil society. These conditions are crucial for women's rights associations to fulfil their mission. Any restrictions on these freedoms, including restrictions on funding given to associations, constitute unacceptable obstructions.

The Ministers are expected to adopt an action plan aiming at:

- a) ensuring gender equality and non-discrimination as laid down in article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- b) fully implementing the CEDAW, to sign the Optional Protocol of the Convention and therefore withdrawing all reservations concerning this convention;
- c) combating gender-based violence by adopting and implementing national and regional restrictive legal frameworks against sexist violence, including sexual harassment (including the Convention of the Council of Europe on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence of 2011);



- d) developing and reforming judicial systems so as to ensure their independence and impartiality, and also guarantee full and equal access of women to these;
- e) ensuring women's participation in political, civil, economic and public life, inter alia by coming to an agreement on mandatory quotas as a means to promote such participation (a minimum of 30% with a view to achieving gender parity);
- f) abolishing any discriminatory articles that are laid down in personal status laws, penal codes and so on;
- g) pass laws that guarantee equal rights and fully enforce these laws in the countries where they exist and establish equality committees within Parliaments.

The action plan should define specific objectives, activities, timeframes, benchmarks, indicators, a follow-up mechanism as well as the allocation of responsibilities. More particularly, this action plan is expected to:

1. support (also financially) civil actions, especially feminist organisations, that aim to achieve full implementation of the CEDAW and to abolish any discriminatory articles in personal status law, penal code etc.;
2. support the establishment of an independent regional observatory whose task will be to monitor legislative developments in the region regarding violence against women, provide a rehabilitation program for victims of violence, especially sexual violence, and a regional initiative to end impunity for violent acts against women both in legislation and in practice;
3. develop legal aid programs for women in order to ensure that they have access to justice and to ensure equal treatment before the courts;
4. support projects that aim to promote equal economic, social and cultural rights for women (including women in rural areas), and in particular their right to work and education;
5. develop gender equality educational programmes in schools and in the media.

Brussels, 4 September 2013