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İnsan Hakları Derneği

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

Final Statement

Gender Equality in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: From Framework to Action Istanbul, 24-25 October 2009

On 24-25 October 2009, over 120 representatives of independent civil society, women's rights and human rights organizations from the Mediterranean and European countries met in Istanbul to make recommendations to the Euro-Med Ministerial meeting on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, which will take place in Morocco 11-12 November 2009.

These recommendations were based on an assessment of the implementation of the Ministerial Conclusions on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, commonly referred to as the Istanbul Plan of Action (IPA). This evaluation is examined in the 'Shadow Report on the Implementation of the Istanbul Plan of Action: Gender Equality in the Euro-Mediterranean Region: From Plan of Action to Action? (See: [http://en.euromedrights.org/files.php?force&file=emhrn-publications/istanbul action plan shadow report ENG 896104668.pdf](http://en.euromedrights.org/files.php?force&file=emhrn-publications/istanbul%20action%20plan%20shadow%20report%20ENG%20896104668.pdf))

The endorsement of the IPA in 2006 by EU member countries and Mediterranean partners was welcomed by civil society as a regional tool for enhancing gender equality in the Euro-Med region in spite of lack of concrete benchmarks, indicators and binding provision. However, three years later equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life, considered a crucial element of democracy, is far from being reached.

The Shadow Report reveals poor implementation of the IPA and limited impact on promoting gender equality and women's rights in the region. The potential of the IPA in effectively developing a gender policy has been seriously hampered by the lack of concrete, efficient and binding measures. For the time being, the IPA remains declaratory and a real commitment to promote women's rights in the region is still needed in the three spheres of action set by IPA: women's political and civil rights; women's social and economic rights and sustainable development; and women's rights in the cultural sphere including the role of communications and the mass media.

The Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit, 13 July 2008, initiating the Union for Mediterranean omits mentioning the promotion of gender equality and women's rights as a priority. Political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights have not been mainstreamed into the Association Agreements between the EU and its Partners or into the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans. While the international community will celebrate the 30th anniversary of CEDAW in November 2009, women in the Euro-Med region remain victims of gender-based violence and exposed to patriarchal discrimination in the family, community and society migrant women, women in conflict and military occupation being particularly vulnerable groups. Many countries did not lift their reservations to the CEDAW, especially article 2, which reads: "States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women". Even in the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region which have adapted their legislation in accordance with CEDAW, the laws are not sufficiently implemented. There has even been a regression over the last years.

Several factors have exacerbated obstacles to gender equality in the region. The economic crisis and its effects on human security, the Israeli occupation, armed conflicts, the lack of democracy and fundamental freedoms, restrictive policies affecting refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, the rise of religious and patriarchal fundamentalisms and their instrumentalisation by governments have increased the vulnerability of women and require urgent stands and action from all Euro-Mediterranean countries. The lack of political will in the south and the lack of real interest in the north have negatively affected the advancement of gender equality in the region as well as the implementation of the IPA. With this in mind, how can we expect achieving gender equality when the participation of civil society is hampered and its representatives harassed?

We, the participants at the civil society conference in Istanbul 24-25 October 2009,

Consider that the Marrakech meetings offer an unprecedented opportunity to redress the IPA track and develop it into a concrete tool for the promotion of gender equality and protection of women's rights, in complement and coordination with existing national, regional and international mechanisms. It is now time for Euro-Med governments to set higher benchmarks and initiate immediate and effective action.

Recommend the Ministerial Conference in Marrakesh to:

- a. Reaffirm their collective commitment to gender equality and women's rights as a universal value and as a clear and explicit objective of the IPA or any regional plan of action within the Euro-Med space dealing with women, in accordance with European treaties and international conventions.
- b. Respect their commitment to CEDAW by lifting all reservations and ratifying the Optional Protocol as well as taking all necessary measures to harmonise the constitutions and national laws with CEDAW and ensuring its full implementation.
- c. Recognise the full citizenship of all women living in the Euro-Med space including migrant women and ensure their social, political, economic and legal empowerment. This includes, among others, ensuring their equal inheritance rights, access to and property of land, as well as equal access to employment and equal pay for equal work, etc.
- d. Make urgent, joint and efficient efforts to protect women and girls under military occupation and in conflicts, especially Palestinian women, from violence, human rights violations and war crimes and to create mechanisms that involve women into the peace and security mechanisms by establishing national actions plans in accordance with UN SC Resolution 1325.
- e. To formulate and adopt specific laws against violence against women, and enforce existing laws, ensuring their implementation.
- f. Ensure that the outcomes of the Euro-med Ministerial Conference in Marrakesh are included in the conclusions of the next Euro-Med Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Ministers, and that gender is mainstreamed into all conclusions of all Euro-med Ministerial meetings.
- g. Create effective and credible mechanisms supported by concrete work plans to make the IPA operational and to follow up on the progress in all Euro-Med policies in relation to strengthening gender equality, e.g. through the establishment of national independent observatories. These mechanisms should be provided with the necessary financial

resources. The European Parliament and the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly should be involved in the design and follow-up.

- h. Ensure that the IPA will be fully and efficiently integrated into the existing frameworks, namely the ENP, the UfM and the national action plans of the Partner countries and in all regional partnership agreements. Guarantee consultation with civil society and especially with women's rights organisations, on national as well as regional level in the follow-up and evaluation of the ENP.
- i. Recognise the role of civil society organisations and support their work and defend their independence as well as their freedom to act as effective partners in promoting the IPA following-up on its implementation, and ensure their consultation and participation in any policy making process in relation to women's right and gender equality in the region. The Euro-Med Ministerial Meeting should ensure the participation of independent civil society in its diversity, specifically the Euro-Med NGO Platform, the EMHRN and women's rights organisations, take their recommendations into consideration and support any further coordinated initiatives to promote gender equality in the region.
- j. Support a follow-up meeting of the Euro - Med Ministerial Conference in Marrakesh in 2010 with a wide participation of independent civil society in its diversity, especially women's rights and human rights organisations, to evaluate the outcomes of the Conference and explore how to work together on this process in order to support gender equality and women's rights in the region. This meeting will ensure that gender equality and women's rights are mainstreamed into the Civil Forum 2010.

We recall that gender equality is the *sine qua non* condition of democracy and development and that there is no excuse what so ever for delaying the advancement of equal rights for women and men and for ending violence against women.