



DECLARATION

On June 3rd 2008, in Lagonissi - Athens, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece, Ms. Dora Bakoyannis, hosted the fifth meeting of the Women Leaders' Working Group, which consists of First Ladies, women Prime Ministers, Ministers, Deputy Ministers, European Commissioners, Members of Parliament and Ambassadors, and addressed political, economic, legal and educational empowerment for women at the grassroots level and in a comprehensive integrated approach. The Group further stressed the need to remove obstacles that impede women's empowerment including armed conflict, military occupation and internal traditional attempts at discrimination and exclusion.

During this meeting, the Women Leaders' Working Group endorsed the proposals of the Middle East Regional Forum of Local and Regional Women Entrepreneurs, which aim at advancing corporate cultures attentive to growing cultural and religious diversity in the MENA region. As active corporate citizens, local and regional business leaders can also bring a vital, results-oriented philosophy to the challenges of inter-cultural dialogue. In this spirit the Women Leaders' Working Group welcomed the Next Generation Initiative launched by Greece with the additional aim to encourage civil society mutual confidence by hosting meetings between youngsters from the MENA region.

The Women Leaders' Working Group strongly supports initiatives to:

- Discuss key issues and identify best practices for promoting Local and Regional Women Entrepreneurship in the Middle East;
- Secure progress and training in information and communication technologies (ICT) for local and regional Women Entrepreneurship and ensure access to the media;
- Establish new business and professional contacts;
- Strengthen and expand links among women's business associations;
- Develop home grown strategic directions for policies and programmes at local, national, sub-regional and regional levels;
- Propose recommendations for programmes and activities to be implemented with all interested partners;

- Adopt appropriate legislation and provide suitable support systems and safety nets for women entrepreneurship and economic initiatives;
- Develop technical and professional training/educational programs with clear linkages to the work/market place and to economic opportunities;

Our efforts are well founded on the conviction that women empowerment should not and could not come as an imported recipe from other parts of the world but it should be home grown based on genuine social forces and the rich cultural tradition of the area.

Entrepreneurship in the local, national or regional level would be fertile ground where women can contribute to their household and national prosperity and thus strengthen their role in their society, offer more incentives for women's education and enable women to take part in their countries' decision making process.

Our Initiative seeks to invest in the vast human resources of youth and women in the Middle East and North Africa by empowering them, educating them and enabling them to harvest the advantages of the Information and Communication Technologies.

The Forum calls for the **Establishment of a Fund for Promoting Local and Regional Women Entrepreneurship in the Middle East and North Africa**. It is acknowledged that there is considerable gap of co-ordination and information among various micro-finance schemes in the region. The Fund will serve as an umbrella organisation, co-ordinating relevant activities in the region, to ensure that they do not run counter to each other and do not overlap.

We call upon U.N. agencies and international organizations, the G8, the European Union, the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to support this Fund fostering Women Empowerment in the region.

We call for co-operation between state and private sector in the region in supporting this Fund, overcoming current discrepancies and strengthen local and regional women business.

The Working Group will appoint a committee to prepare a report for the establishment of the Fund and ensure the participation of women representatives from the MENA region in it. The committee will present its plans in the next Women Leaders meeting.

We believe that the Middle East Regional Forum of Local and Regional Women Entrepreneurs should not be an one-off event. It should reconvene every two years, closely linked with the Fund, in order to utilise project experiences and develop new strategies.

The Forum will establish an **Award for Excellent Women Entrepreneurs** in the MENA region, as a means to create a culture supportive of women empowerment through positive role models.

In its endeavour to enhance the economic empowerment of women, the Forum will also establish an **internship program**, through which young women in conflict regions will have an opportunity to train for a brief period in a state or private enterprise in another country. Through this effort, these young women will gain needed experience and know how, which they will apply to their own endeavors at home.

Women empowerment means that women must be central partners in building a brighter future in the region.

This is what Our Initiative is all about: it is about Next Generation's Dividend in the Future.

ANNEX:

CONCLUSIONS OF WORKSHOPS (I) and (II)

CONCLUSIONS WORKSHOP I

Women entrepreneurship in conflict resolution contexts: Women as agents of peace-making

1. The Workshop stressed the need for a balanced and sustainable development in the Middle East region, through women taking on leadership positions as the face of entrepreneurship and as significant contributors to and players in public policy.

2. The contributions from the participants and the panel brought to the fore 6 actionable and clear recommendations, stated as follows:
 - A. The importance of widening the opportunities for women to play an active and effective role in public life, at all levels, from municipalities, to parliament to cabinet.
 - B. The role of private sector was acknowledged as absolutely crucial in recruiting, training and retaining women professionals, and fostering women is entrepreneurship.
 - C. The role of government and donor organizations was highlighted specifically in relation to the opening up of opportunities and access for women entrepreneurs in procurement contracts.
 - D. The role of the media in exonerating success stories of women in business through wider and more positive coverage was stressed. This is important at local, and international levels.
 - E. In addressing women's access to finance, it was affirmed that all opportunities must be opened up for women entrepreneurs wishing to engage in business on equal footing as their male counterparts. Whilst we all acknowledged the importance of micro credit in the region, we believe that women entrepreneurs should be able to move freely

from micro credit to venture capital and have their business proposals judged on their merits.

F. The role of NGO's in fostering exchange of experiences and knowledge through sharing of best practices and cross-cultural networking initiatives was emphasized by all.

3. While the participants looked at how business can bridge communities, it was acknowledged by all that the end of occupation is key for laying the foundations for cooperation at all levels.

4. It was accepted that the EU has been instrumental in impacting positively the role of women within its boundaries. The participants brought to the fore the necessity for women in the MENA region to benefit from the experiences of their counterparts in Europe and more importantly for the EU through its partnership with the region to support and endorse women's entrepreneurship and leadership at all levels.

5. Finally, all participants applauded the valuable initiative of H.E. Mrs. Bakoyannis, the Foreign Minister of Greece, as a long-standing valuable strategy, building on sound and credible endeavors emanating from the region to nurture stable and durable peace in the Middle East.

CONCLUSIONS WORKSHOP II

Female entrepreneurship in post-conflict contexts: businesswomen as stakeholders and pillars of stability in the nation-building process.

All participants praised Her Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, Mrs. Dora Bakoyannis for undertaking the initiative to organize such a high-level event and expressed their confidence that this event will significantly strengthen relations and networking between women entrepreneurs from the MENA region and other countries.

Participants of the 2nd workshop agreed that consolidation of peace is crucial so as to enable women's entrepreneurship in a post-conflict context. Peace is necessary in order for women's business to operate and develop.

Without creating the enabling environment, it's impossible to build entrepreneurship

A distinction between women that are still in need, struggling for securing the absolutely necessary and those that have surpassed the "glass ceiling", namely those who have overcome the obstacles and difficulties facing women of the first category, should be made. These women should find practical ways in order to assist women of the first category.

Change in legislation focusing on family law should take place in order to secure first women's rights as a mother, housewife and a wife and then provide them with incentives to undertake business activity. Change should start from family life. Women's rights should be acknowledged and implemented as human rights.

Practical ways in order to address women in need should be adopted. Ensuring access to direct finance for women, establishing women's

business organizations that can undertake joint ventures and investments should be promoted.

Synergies between politicians, local civil society, international organizations and the private sector should be created so that there is a consensus over the policies followed.

Donors should give a priority in subcontracting local women entrepreneurs when publishing call for tenders in recipient countries.

Women face significant obstacles in accessing business: Offering them incentives and practical ways to access local and international markets is very important: business incubators, one-stop shops on how to start business and business development centers are useful tools in order to accomplish that goal.

Education and capacity building to local women entrepreneurs is very important: access to information on international marketing standards, marketing skills, mentoring are all very important tools in capacity building for women entrepreneurs. Exporters and marketeers from other countries should encourage local women entrepreneurs so as to create partnerships with them.

Transfer of knowledge and of best practices are essential for increasing awareness of local women entrepreneurs.

Participants pointed out that some change in gender relations is of primary importance. A new type of education among women of the new generation is emerging. The role of Information Technologies is playing an increasingly important role in women's education.

New technologies are an invaluable tool in order for women to overcome many of their obstacles, such as mobility problems and create new markets.

Participation of women entrepreneurs in regional forums and organizations coming from both from the MENA region and countries that share common values, such as Greece should be enhanced. Greek women entrepreneurs expressed their readiness to participate more in regional business organizations.

Global partnerships and networking among women business leaders of this generation should be promoted. These partnerships should be inclusive and address business irrespectively of their size, having as a task to elaborate concrete and practical business proposals.

Agriculture is an important sector that should be given special importance. It is a family-oriented type of business that can enable women to combine family and professional life.

It has been highlighted that a triangle of empowerment should be considered: 1) empower women's personalities, such as promoting their self confidence, integrate them into democratic and non-discrimination processes and change the cultural stereotypes, 2) mainstream gender in politics, policies and procedures, engage the private sector, establish networks, lobbying, introduce Information Technologies in Commerce and exports, engage donors in this process 3) create added value for local women entrepreneurs' products, apply marketing strategies in order to promote their products, increase their awareness about the international branding and marketing standards.

A Fund that will coordinate all efforts and provide micro-credit programs and assistance to women entrepreneurs that start from scratch, curtailed to the needs of each country should be established.

Peace and Prosperity go together, and they are also in women's hands.

Participants in the Fifth Meeting of the Women Leaders' Working Group:

Austria

H.E. Dr. Ursula Plassnik

Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

Bosnia and Herzegovina

H.E. Ms. Ana Trišić-Babić

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

Chile

H.E. Ms. Sofia Prats

Ambassador of the Republic of Chile to the Hellenic Republic

European Commission

Ms. Androulla Vassiliou

Commissioner for Health

European Parliament

Vice-President

Ms. Rodi Kratsa

Finland

H.E. Ms. Märta Elisabeth Rehn

Minister of State

Greece

H.E. Ms. Dora Bakoyannis

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Iceland

H.E. Ms. Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir

Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade

Iraq

H.E. Ms. Hero Ibrahim Ahmed

First Lady

Jordan

Ms. Asma Khader

Secretary General, National Commission for Women

Moldova

H.E. Ms. Zinaida Greceanîș

Prime Minister

Morocco

H.E. Ms. Nouzha Skalli

Minister of Social Development

Oman
H.E. Dr. Sharifa bint Khalfan al Yahya'eyah
Minister of Social Development

Palestine
Dr. Hanan Daoud Khalil Ashrawi
Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council

Romania
H.E. Ms. Răduța Dana Matache
State Secretary for European Affairs

Saudi Arabia
H.R.H. Princess Mashael bint Faisal bin Turki bin Abdulaziz Al Saud

Serbia
H.E. Ms. Milica Delević-Đilas
Assistant Foreign Minister for European Affairs

Syria
H.E. Ms. Buthaina Shaaban
Minister of Expatriates

Tunisia
Sen. Leyla Khaïat
Upper House of the Parliament

United Arab Emirates
H.R.H. Princess Haya Bint al Hussein

USA
H.E. Ambassador Shirin R. Tahir-Kheli
Senior Advisor for Women's Empowerment to USA Secretary of State Dr.
Condoleezza Rice

Yemen
H.E. Ms. Huda Ali Abdul-Latif al-Ban
Minister for Human Rights