



*Lebanese Republic
National Assembly*



Regional Workshop for Arab Parliaments on
Implementing CEDAW and ending violence against women

Beirut, 27-29 July 2010

organized by

the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Lebanese Parliament and the United Nations Development Programme-Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region (UNDP-PDIAR)

REPORT SUMMARIZING THE DISCUSSIONS*

Prepared by the rapporteur Ms. Fawzia El Saleh, Member of the Shura Council (Bahrain)

Representatives of Arab parliaments met in Beirut, Lebanon from 27 to 29 July 2010, for a regional workshop on the role of parliaments in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and ending violence against women. The workshop was organized jointly by the Lebanese Parliament, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, UN-ESCWA and UNDP.

There is a strong correlation between discrimination against women and violence against women, which has been described during the workshop as an extreme form of discrimination. Both discrimination and violence against women constitute serious threats to women's human rights. They jeopardize the emancipation and advancement of women and hinder the development of our societies.

CEDAW is the key instrument for the promotion and protection of women's rights. It is reinforced by several international and regional charters, conventions, declarations and resolutions. In particular, the Arab Charter on Human Rights - which enshrines the principles of equality and condemns discrimination - constitutes a precious tool to be used along with CEDAW by parliaments and parliamentarians in the region to advance equality and women's rights.

The implementation of CEDAW has advanced in the region. Progress has been achieved in the health and education of women. More Arab countries have recently ratified the Convention. Some countries have eliminated discriminatory provisions in legislation, such as those dealing with nationality or electoral or penal codes. Some of them have withdrawn reservations made to CEDAW.

This progress gives room for cautious optimism although serious challenges remain. The economic and the political participation of women in the region are the weakest worldwide. Introducing the definition of discrimination in the constitutions, withdrawing reservations to CEDAW, adopting special temporary measures, correcting stereotypes and changing mentalities, addressing the specific needs of rural women and eliminating discriminatory provisions from legislation remain among the most pressing and challenging questions that parliaments need to address.

Parliaments can initiate and implement legislative reforms, amend discriminatory provisions in legislation and engender new legislation under discussion in parliament. Parliamentarians

can raise awareness in all sectors of society, including with the religious community, about the Convention. CEDAW offers them a comprehensive framework against which to analyse and assess national policies, programmes and budgets and the implementation of laws.

It is a long process which benefits from being sustained and as comprehensive as possible. In all this, parliamentary mechanisms and structures as well as parliamentary caucuses and groups can help. Partnerships between men and women parliamentarians, with the government, civil society, international organizations and the media are also key to support parliamentary actions to implement CEDAW.

Legislating on violence against women is one of the most challenging priorities. Only one country has passed a law on violence against women in the region. Yet as in other parts of the world, the statistics on violence against women in the Arab region are alarming.

One out of every two women in the world is the victim of violence inflicted by her partner. Violence is not only physical but can also be psychological, sexual, moral, economic and financial. It threatens the rights, liberty, health, quality of life, and in some cases the lives of women, irrespective of their nationality, age or social status. Besides being a cause of death and permanent injury for some women, violence against women has enormous social and economic costs. More studies and updated statistics and data need to be made available to monitor the situation and shape responsive policies, strategies and plans.

National legislation addressing violence against women should refer to international conventions and treaties and regional instruments. It should criminalize acts of violence against women in all settings. It should also include measures to prevent violence, assist the victims - including by ensuring aid in all legal proceedings and free court support - and rehabilitate the perpetrators. Laws should mandate the formulation of national action plans to ensure their implementation. They should encompass training and sensitization and should provide for the necessary budget allocations. Gender budgeting helps to analyse the budget from a gender perspective and earmark funds to implement these laws. It also helps to assess its impact by using appropriate indicators.

To help raise awareness on violence against women and trigger legislative response, a regional parliamentary campaign to end violence against women should be launched as a regional component of the IPU's parliamentary campaign "Parliaments take action on violence against women".

* As a non-State party to CEDAW, the delegation of Sudan expressed some reservations on this report.