

TALKING POINTS

Version: 8 February 2021; 10:30h

MEETING SPECIFICS

- Arab Regional CSW Preparatory Meeting for the 65th Session of Commission on the Status of Women "Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls"

Wednesday, 10 February 2021, 9:30h – 13:00h; GMT+2

RUN OF SHOW

- 9:30h - 10:00h

Order of Opening Remarks (30 Minutes)

1. H.E. Dr. Haifa Abu-Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Social Affairs Sector of the League of Arab States
2. Dr. Hala Altuwaijri, Secretary-General of the Family Affairs Council of Saudi Arabia- Chairperson of the Previous session of Arab Women Committee
3. H.E. Moumina Houmed Hassan, Minister for Women and Family - Republic of Djibouti, Chairperson of Arab Women Committee session
4. **Mrs. Susanne Mikhail, Regional Director, UN Women Regional Office for Arab States (5 minutes)**

- 12:45h – 13:00h

Order of Closing Remarks (15 Minutes)

1. H.E. Dr. Haifa Abu-Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Social Affairs Sector of the League of Arab States
2. **Mrs. Susanne Mikhail, Regional Director, UN Women Regional Office for Arab States (5 minutes)**

TALKING POINTS

OPENING REMARKS

- Excellency, Dr. Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary General, Director of Social Cluster, League of Arab States,
- Excellency, Minister Moumina Houmed Hassan, Minister for Women and Family - Republic of Djibouti,

TALKING POINTS

- Dr. Hala Altuwaijri, Secretary-General of the Family Affairs Council of Saudi Arabia-
Chairperson of the Previous session of Arab Women Committee,
- Excellencies, Ministers, Honourable Representatives from the Arab States,
- Dear colleagues and friends,
- I am honoured to join you today for the regional preparatory meeting for the sixty-
fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.
- At the onset I wish to extend my appreciation to the League of Arab States, as well as
to the Government of Djibouti for their able leadership in convening us today to reach
a common Arab position and identify priorities of the Arab region regarding this years
priority theme, ‘women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public
life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the
empowerment of all women and girls’.
- Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
- While the full impact of the COVID-19 is still unfolding, early research suggests that
women, already more vulnerable to shocks before the spread of the virus, will be
disproportionately affected by the pandemic’s indirect impacts, and the UN Secretary-

TALKING POINTS

General has warned that 'COVID-19 could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women's rights' .

- The challenges, globally as well as in the Arab States, are too big to continue business as usual,
 - Lockdowns have exacerbated pre-existing social inequalities throughout the region. This is particularly true for contexts that had prior deteriorating economic conditions or ongoing conflict aggravating the spread of the pandemic as fragile health systems struggled to respond to the new challenges.
 - Already before the pandemic, under-reporting of domestic and other forms of violence, has been a challenge, with less than 40% of women who experience violence seeking help or reporting the crime. The lockdown measures have made the situation even more difficult and in addition disrupted service provision to survivors of violence.
 - In the MENA region, women make up the large majority of health care personnel and women are the backbone of the health response, putting them at higher risk to be exposed to the virus.
 - At the same time, as evidenced by a recent regional research publication of UN Women in the Arab States, women in the region spend about five times more hours than men in unpaid care work, the highest ratio in the world, and COVID-19

TALKING POINTS

has additionally increased the burden of unpaid care and domestic work for both men and women in the region.

- Projections from last year showed that Arab women stand to lose 700,000 jobs particularly in the informal sector where they constitute 62% of workers. This is critical as regionally, women's participation rate in the labor market is only at around 18%, the lowest rate among all the world regions.
- Had the immense gender gap in the labor force participation been narrowed over the past decade, the GDP growth rate in MENA could have doubled or, in other words, the overall output could have increased by about US\$1 trillion.
- It is now the time for a true paradigm shift and transformative action, join forces and accelerate progress, through collaboration, innovation, and change.
- Women play a crucial role in this change, and it is of utmost importance that women are represented within all level of decision making in the COVID-19 response and recovery process.
- We must accelerate women's representation through the implementation of international and national commitments and norms, including the use of temporary special measures such as quotas.
- A lot has been achieved already and I commend you for having addressed the issue and putting it so prominently on the regional agenda. Concrete commitments

TALKING POINTS

including tangible recommendations were made during the ‘High-level Meeting on Progress in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years (1995)’, held in Amman in November 2019, and the ‘Arab Regional CSW Preparatory Meeting for the 64th Session of Commission on the Status of Women’ and its subsequent Declaration that has been issued in February 2020.

- It was here that Member States of the League of Arab States committed to women’s access to decision-making positions by providing tools and measures, including information and communications technology, to ensure equal participation of women and men, and continue to develop, enforce and activate legislation, policies and laws that support women's access to leadership positions in official institutions and legislative, executive and judicial bodies at all levels with a minimum of 30%. ¹
- And indeed, Arab countries have made significant progress in appointing more women to leadership positions, as reflected in a noticeable increase in recent years in the numbers of women Ministers and representatives in Arab parliaments, female judges and Ambassadors as well as Members of the Diplomatic Corps, women in leadership positions in academic circles, and female members of corporate boards and chief executives.
- However, women still only represent 16.5% of members of parliament in the region and 17% of the public administration decision-making positions, the lowest regional averages recorded.

¹ League of Arab States, Arab Declaration issued by the Arab Regional CSW Preparatory Meeting for the 64th Session of Commission on the Status of Women, "Towards Beijing +30 Declaration and Platform for Action", February 2020

TALKING POINTS

- These figures highlight that the current implementation pace of the Beijing Platform for Action in the region remains too slow to effect real change in time to achieve the SDG Agenda 2030. Additional targeted efforts to accelerate action are therefore essential.
- In response, we have witnessed an increased commitment to women's political participation, from your respective Governments, but also from dedicated electoral management bodies, civil society organizations, and parliaments alike, which will be the greatest allies to pursue gender equality in public life and decision-making, end impunity for all forms of gender-based violence and respond to threats of regression through relevant policies and fora.
- Building forward better will also require developing clear and comprehensive monitoring mechanisms and improve the collection and use of globally comparable data, disaggregated by sex, age, disability and other factors, thus capturing the SDG principle of leaving no one behind.
- This progress has started with the development of indicators to measure progress towards gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development but must continue with an increase in the capacity of national statistical systems to collect data regularly and systematically.
- Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

TALKING POINTS

- Women play an influential role in public life outside formal public institutions through civic engagement. For instance, pressure applied by women's rights organizations has been instrumental in the adoption of quota laws in many countries and, in conflict and fragile contexts, women's organizations and feminist movements often take the lead in aid provision, social cohesion and conflict prevention.
- Women's organizations should therefore be visible in the civil space, including online, and add their loud and clear voice to the groundbreaking fora organized in 2021, including those around COVID-19 recovery, CSW65, the 2021 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and of course the Gender Equality Forum organized in Mexico City in March and in Paris in June.
- The Generation Equality Forum is an unprecedented initiative that brings together Governments, corporations and change makers to define ambitious gender equality commitments and assign clear funding envelopes for the respective investments needed.
- The Generation Equality Forum will drive innovation and change, which I mentioned earlier, are pre-requisites for accelerating progress and removing barriers to gender equality. We very much look forward to your engagement in these conversations.
- In concluding, I want to flag one critical aspect we must not neglect: gender equality in decision-making for a will not be possible if women continue to face violence in political and public life, both offline and online, and if gender norms do persist.

TALKING POINTS

- It is our joint responsibility to combat this distinct form of violence against women and to develop mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable.
- Be assured that UN Women remains fully committed to promoting women's participation in public life, in all forms, and we look forward to strengthening our cooperation with all stakeholders to achieve gender equality in all areas.
- I thank you.

CLOSING REMARKS

- Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
- I thank you for the joint efforts in adopting a regional position on the priority theme of the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which goes far in enabling us to address women's participation in public life, access to leadership positions and ending violence against women.
- We know that 'progress will be faster if more leaders set and meet parity targets, including through appointments for all executive positions at all levels of government, as has occurred in the few countries with gender equal cabinets' ².
- Undoubtedly, the Arab States' rigorous work on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action After 25 years review process acknowledges the importance attached to addressing inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and highlights women's equal access to and full participation in decision-making as a

² Corporate CSW65 Key message.

TALKING POINTS

critical and effective strategy to achieve equality for women and girls; and the 2030 Agenda.

- Never has this been so urgent and pressing as in these testing times of COVID-19 which races across the globe from region to region, country to country, household to household.
- The pandemic has brought to light that gender equality is ‘perhaps the world’s greatest human rights challenge’ as declared by the UN Secretary General.³ Poverty and violence, disproportionately affecting women and girls, will not prevent us from witnessing the leadership role that women can play in combatting the pandemic, in keeping people and communities alive.
- Excellencies,
- Today you have collectively committed to the CSW65 Arab Declaration which is a solid expression of your commitments to accelerate women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, to eliminate violence against women, to achieve gender equality and to empower every Arab woman and girl.
- I congratulate you for paving the way to build forward better. And I assure you that UN Women stands ready to close gaps, remove barriers, and evidence all the reasons why women and girls can and should be in the frontstage.
- We stand ready to support you in this journey to move from deeds to action, and to propel forward Gender Equality and Women’s empowerment for all in the Arab states’ region.

³ UN Secretary General, Antonia Guterres, Secretary-General's remarks to Member States on Priorities for 2021, 28 January 2021, available at: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2021-01-28/secretary-generals-remarks-member-states-priorities-for-2021-bilingual-delivered-scroll-down-for-all-english-version>

TALKING POINTS

- Thank you very much.