



Closing Statement of the Regional Meeting on

“The Civil Society and Challenges of Failure to Protect Women”

Riviera Hotel, Beirut 12-14, December 2015

Supported by the Swedish Organization for Women, Kafa (Enough) Violence and Exploitation Organization has conducted a regional meeting on “The Civil Society and Challenges of Failure to Protect Women”. The meeting was organized in cooperation with the Iraqi Al Amal Association, Syrian Women’s League, Asfari Center for Civil Society and Citizenship, and the Lebanon’s branch of the Arab Institute for Human Rights,. Representatives of women’s organizations and legal professionals from 13 Arab countries participated in the discussions around the challenges to protect women, especially at conflicts and post- conflict situations.

The meeting included general discussion sessions addressing the mechanisms to protect human rights and women's rights, local and international obstacles hindering the application of the Bill of Human Rights, and relevant mechanisms of women’s protection within the Arab region specifically.

In the first meeting, United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon Ms. Sigrid Kaag took part and pointed out in her speech to the immense challenges in the Arab countries due to mishandling the resolutions of the Security Council and the ineffectiveness of mechanisms of monitoring violence against women. She emphasized on the need to report and document the information and GBV cases in order to bring the perpetrators of crimes of violence against women to justice and punish them later. She stressed out on strengthening the role of women in political life and in conflict resolution.

A special session was dedicated to provide factual accounts of violations against women's human rights and the suffering of women and girls at times of wars and armed conflicts in Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Libya. These testimonies and accounts reflected on the systematic brutal practices committed against women and girls, and civilians in general, such as: murders, abduction and captivity, trafficking, and sexual enslavement.

The attendees have applauded, particularly, the defenders of women’s human rights; who have been detained and of those who are forcibly hidden in a number of Arab countries. The attendees also strongly recommended questioning the concerned authorities about the fate of these women and releasing the detainees immediately. They also expressed their ample solidarity with victims of sexual violence who suffered the most savage forms of torture and humiliation committed by all categories of armed militias. They emphasized the necessity of putting more efforts to expose perpetuates of these crimes and making sure they do not escape impunity.





The discussion covered also the existing gaps within the same international mechanisms that allow the weakness of governments' commitment to comply with the international conventions especially CEDAW, the Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and the subsequent resolutions. It is, also, associated with weak mechanisms of the UN agencies to follow up and monitor the accountability of these governments in the implementation of their commitments. Attendees also pointed out to the incapability of the accredited international mechanisms to find solutions to stop and put an end to the armed conflicts, to save lives of the civilians, to guarantee protection for women and girls, and to meet the needs of women IDPs and refugees. These international mechanisms also marginalize women's role within the negotiation process of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The attendees also focused on the foreign policy of most countries and the way they deal with governments and civil society organizations in the region by giving a priority to their political and economic interests over human rights issues in general and women's rights in particular. It was also noted the visible imbalance in the funding policies adopted by these governments to the organizations, in terms of funding's weakness and inadequacy in ensuring the continuity of the programs and the sustainability of the work of organizations, as well as the imposition of priorities, which do not take into account the particular needs of each country.

The discussion refuted the ways in which governments' circumvent around their international commitments and obligations, either by imposition of reservations on the articles which constitute the essence of the human rights conventions under the pretext of cultural and religious privacy, or non adaptive with national laws, or lack of national mechanisms and financial resources to put these conventions and decisions into practice; such excuses that respond primarily to the absence or the weakness of political will, and the predominance of masculine mentality of the ruling political forces that rejects the principle of equality and women's rights. This has emerged through compromises among various political parties to consolidate the stereotyping of women, sustained discrimination against them in law, especially the Personal Status and Criminal Laws, and maintained marginalization of women and their participation in the public life.

Likewise, the participants in the meetings discussed the prevalence of violence practices against women, reviving the tribal traditions and customs and religious fatwa that degrade women's dignity such as girls marriage, polygamy, and the so-called "Honor" crimes.

Debate emphasized the important role of civil society organizations being played through various programs such as: Relief, raising awareness, education, empowerment, monitoring, documenting, projects of drafting laws and national plans relevant to the UNSC Resolution 1325 within insecure situations and lack of individual safety on the one hand, and facing legal restrictions on their work in addition to the abusive acts committed by the ruling authorities





against civil society organizations' members and defenders of human rights, under the pretext of fighting against terrorism and corruption on the other hand.

Attendees agreed on the need for networking and a joint action among the women's organizations at the national and regional level, and the necessity to develop a regional strategy to counter violence and discrimination against women, taking into account the following points:

First: Bridge the gaps in the constitutions and laws in accordance with the international conventions and agreements on human rights;

Second: Transitional justice must be gender-sensitive, especially for victims of sexual violence at conflict and post-conflict situations;

Third: Freedom of the work of civil society organizations and the protection of defenders of women's human rights under situations of terrorism and extremism.

These themes were elaborated within the working groups, which submitted their final recommendations at the closing session of the regional meeting. It was agreed upon continuing the efforts on the formulation of the strategic plan, and to gain a broad support for it from local civil society organizations and on the regional and international levels.

