



Beirut, 24 May 2018

Press release

National Roundtable

“Following up on the 4th UfM Ministerial Meeting on Women’s Rights”

23rd of May 2018 at Hotel Riviera

The national roundtable on the follow-up on the 4th UfM Ministerial Meeting on Women's Rights took place yesterday in Beirut under the patronage of the Minister of State for Women’s Affairs Jean Ogasapian, and with the support of the European Union. It was organised by the Euromed Feminist Initiative and its members in Lebanon, the Lebanese Women’s Democratic Gathering and Association Najdeh. It gathered representatives of 13 ministries and institutions, 35 women’s and human rights organizations, as well as members of municipalities and women who had run for the parliamentary elections. The event initiated a discussion with stakeholders on mechanisms to follow up on the implementation of the Ministerial commitments as a part of the regional process to follow up the 4th UfM Ministerial Declaration, led by Euromed Feminist Initiative and supported by the EU. The participants discussed as well the outcomes of the National Civil Society Forum held in April, which resulted in policy recommendations to be implemented in Lebanon before the 5th UfM Ministerial Meeting.

In his opening address, Jean Ogasapian, Minister of State for Women’s Affairs, pointed out the important role of constitutional institutions in annulling discriminatory texts and laws and underlined that the Ministry of Women's Affairs have already submitted eight draft laws. He reminded the consequences for women of military conflicts and the on-going occupation of Palestine and addressed the importance of searching for political solutions to the conflicts in the region. “Women continue their struggle and play central role for achieving peace, social justice, freedom and gender equality.”

EU Ambassador Christina Lassen, highlighted the slight increase in the number of women in the newly elected Parliament, stressing on the fact that they only represent 4.7% of the new assembly, one of the lowest percentages in the world. While addressing gender inequality as a fundamental barrier for women political participation she urged the newly elected parliamentarians to continue to push for women's rights and for women to be part of the discussions on government formation. "We strongly assume that women will be appointed to ministerial positions – in plural".

Ms. Muna Abu Rafou, Director Gender Unit at Directorate of Policies and Strategies at the Ministry of Social Development, Jordan, presented the 4th UfM Ministerial Declaration. She underlined the role of Jordan as Co-Chair of the UfM and focused on the four areas on interventions addressed by the Ministries.

Ms. Leila El Ali, Co-President of Euromed Feminist Initiative, presented the Civil Society Conference Declaration highlighting the five policy recommendations and implementation mechanisms, and the outcome of the Civil Society Forum in Lebanon, with recommendations for short- and long-term policy actions.

The speakers of the second panel presented mechanisms for a multi-layered follow-up as well as success stories on the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration.

Lebanese Former Minister Wafa Al Dikah presented policy mechanisms focusing on the importance of a comprehensive, inclusive and clear legal framework, as well as the importance of inter-sectorial approach. She addressed the importance of a financial gender audit of the government budget as a key tool to follow up on the commitments, the impact, as well as for accountability.

Col. Elie Assmar, Head of the FSI Studies and Research Division, emphasized the importance of mainstreaming human rights in institutional strategies, as well as building capacities of institutional staff as a base for change. He pointed out the importance of involving women’s rights CSOs in the national mechanisms.



Ms. Fernande Abu Haider, shared the experience of the Ministry of Social Affairs in establishing different types of mechanisms in coordination with the CSOs, while Ms. Ghida Anani, Director of Abaad Resource Center for Gender Equality, addressed positive experiences of CSOs coordinating with national institutions and ministries.

The open debate that followed focused on current priorities for women in Lebanon and mechanisms for reaching gender equality. The participants emphasized that holistic, comprehensive and inclusive methodologies and approaches must be prioritized to ensure sustainability in implementation of gender equality strategies, policies and actions. They highlighted the necessity of reaffirming the international and regional legal and institutional commitments made by Lebanon to ensure the recognition and implementation of women's rights. This needs to be done through consultation and partnerships with the women's rights agencies, associations, and experts.

Priority recommendations included the urge for a gender quota in forming the government, for consultations with CSOs, for clear commitments to gender equality by the upcoming government in its establishment declaration, and the transformation of the Office of the Minister of State for Women's Affairs into a full pledged Ministry of Women's Rights. Other recommendations were related to the formation of a permanent coordination and consultation body gathering women's rights CSOs, national institutions and stakeholders to support and follow up gender equality strategies and policies. A common database gathering data from national bodies, ministries and service providers on for example violence against women and girls was seen as a necessity in order to reveal the situation of women. Finally, it was recommended to establish an inter-ministerial committee as an observatory body to ensure an inclusive and comprehensive cooperation on gender equality. This committee would be able to address the most disadvantaged in the society, including displaced and refugee women. The participants agreed to submit their recommendations to the new government, national stakeholders and relevant ministries after finalizing them in an action plan.