

**Economic and Social Commission  
for Western Asia**

**ARAB PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF  
WOMEN TO THE YEAR 2005**



**UNITED NATIONS**  
**New York 1994**

95-0091

## CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. STATEMENT OF MISSION . . . . .	1-8	1
II. GENERAL FRAMEWORK . . . . .	9-22	2
III. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF ARAB WOMEN DERIVED FROM THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN AND ACTION TO BE TAKEN . . .	23-44	5
A. Safeguarding the right of Arab women to participate in power structures and decision-making mechanisms . . . . .	23-25	5
B. Alleviation of poverty for Arab women . . . . .	26-27	6
C. Ensuring Arab women equal access to all levels of education . . . . .	28-29	9
D. Ensuring women equal access to health services . . . . .	30-31	11
E. Promoting Arab women's economic self-reliance and capacities to enter the labour market . . . . .	32-34	13
F. Overcoming the effects of war, occupation and armed conflict on Arab women . . . . .	35-37	16
G. Elimination of violence against women . . . . .	38-39	18
H. Participation of women in managing natural resources and safeguarding the environment . . . . .	40-42	19
I. Using the communications media effectively to effect changes in roles in society and promote equality between men and women . . . . .	43-44	21
IV. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS . . . . .	45	23
V. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE ARAB PLAN OF ACTION . . . . .	46-53	24

## I. STATEMENT OF MISSION

1. In implementation of resolution 37/7, adopted by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, on the preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in 1995, and in implementation of resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States, a preparatory meeting was held in Amman from 6 to 10 November 1994 under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Basma Bint Talal, Chairperson of the Jordanian National Committee for Women. The meeting was divided into two parts. The first was an Expert Group Meeting on the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women. The second was a High-level Segment to adopt the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005. The Meeting was organized and convened by the ESCWA secretariat in collaboration with the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR).
2. The objective of the Meeting was to formulate the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women and to unify Arab visions and positions for the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) as a contribution by the Arab region to the global Platform for Action.
3. The Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005 (Arab Plan of Action) is based on the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, the international covenants relating to human rights and the rights of women and children, and the international conferences relating to women and children, especially the World Summit for Children (1990), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992), the World Conference on Human Rights (1993) and the International Conference on Population and Development (1994).<sup>1</sup>
4. The Arab Plan of Action emanates from the tenets of Arab civilization and the divine religious and human values that respect the rights of women as human beings. It emphasizes the belief that women's participation in the development process and the fruits thereof is a precondition for comprehensive and sustainable development. Based on the potential of those tenets for cultural adaptation to changing conditions, the Arab Plan of Action focuses on changing the negative image and stereotyped roles of women in order to ensure their advancement towards equality, full participation and full use of their capabilities.
5. The Arab Plan of Action includes the objectives, policies and measures aimed at enabling women to exercise fully their rights and assume their responsibilities within the context of the global Platform for Action, which in turn aims to accelerate the removal of the remaining obstacles to the full integration of women in the sustainable development process.
6. The Arab Plan of Action is largely based on the national reports and the national plans of action which included the statistical indicators on women adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women and which the Secretariat of the Fourth World Conference on Women circulated to the States Members of the United Nations. The Arab Plan of Action takes into consideration the recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting held in Amman from 6 to 8 November 1994, the Platform of Action of the non-governmental organizations for the Arab region adopted by the Amman Forum for Non-Governmental Organizations, held from 3 to 5 November 1994, and the recommendations of the Consultative Meeting on Youth in the ESCWA region, held in Amman from 3 to 7 November 1994. The Arab Plan of Action aims at addressing regional priorities in the light of the issues included in the first draft of the Platform for Action adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-eighth session (E/CN.6/1994/10, annex). Those issues are the following:

---

<sup>1</sup> The delegation of the Republic of Sudan expressed reservations regarding the title "International Conference on Population and Development (1994)".

- (a) Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels;
- (b) Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women;
- (c) Lack of awareness of, and commitment to, internationally and nationally recognized women's human rights;
- (d) The persistent and growing burden of poverty on women;
- (e) Inequality in women's access to and participation in the definition of economic structures and policies and the productive process itself;
- (f) Inequality in access to education, health and related services and means of maximizing the use of women's capacities;
- (g) Violence against women;
- (h) Effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women;
- (i) Insufficient use of mass media to promote women's positive contributions to society;
- (j) Lack of adequate recognition and support for women's contribution to managing natural resources and safeguarding the environment.

7. The Arab Plan of Action provides narratives for the sections on the statement of mission, the general Arab and global framework and critical areas of concern, as well as an elaboration of the strategic objectives and priorities for the advancement of Arab women derived from the common critical areas of concern and the action to be taken to achieve them. The assessment of changes that occurred in the status and role of women since the Nairobi Conference in 1985 necessitated the preparation of a document reviewing and appraising the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies as well as the formulation of the present Arab Plan of Action for the medium term.

8. In the preparation of a draft (global) Platform for Action to be submitted as an official and basic document for adoption by the Beijing Conference in September 1995, the Secretariat of the Fourth World Conference on Women (at United Nations Headquarters in New York) will rely on the plans of action adopted by the five regional commissions of the United Nations including the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005.

## **II. GENERAL FRAMEWORK**

9. As the Arab States approach the twenty-first century, they are faced with several complex economic, social, cultural and technological challenges and prospects within a regional and international climate of accelerating changes, and a tendency towards greater economic and political domination, all of which have particularly affected women. The region is also witnessing tendencies towards extremism which distort the image of Arab women. Therefore, the Arab Plan of Action, for the implementation of which governmental and non-governmental efforts will be joined to those of Arab, regional and international organizations, is based on an accurate diagnosis of the conditions of the Arab region in general and of Arab women in particular.

10. Recent years have been characterized by the formation of regional economic blocs and a move towards the liberalization of international trade. The region is also witnessing the implementation of economic reform and economic structural adjustment policies and programmes in many Arab countries, resulting in a shrinking of the public sector's role and a contraction in public expenditure on services. The 1980s also witnessed an increase in indebtedness and a slow-down of economic growth in some Arab countries. In the absence of Arab economic cooperation, the above has adversely affected the Arab economic situation in general and the employment opportunities of women and their access to social services in particular.

11. The Arab region is facing numerous challenges which call for effective and innovative methods to deal with them. One of the major challenges lies in the area of natural resources, characterized by unevenness in the distribution of scarce water resources and imbalances in the allocation of energy sources, lack of articulated national and regional strategies for balancing environmental concerns and developing and exploiting natural resources, and inadequacy of planning and planning machinery.

12. Another challenge facing the Arab States is the inadequate conceptualization of human development which fails to ensure security of the people, expand alternatives and opportunities to achieve justice and gender equity for full participation of women and youth; create conditions conducive to democracy based on pluralism<sup>2</sup> and greater participation of citizens, including women at the grass roots, in the decision-making process, thus allowing the society to achieve its desired goals in accordance with a systemic, integrated and holistic approach to development under a democratic climate.

13. In this connection, reference should be made to an absence of dialogue in some Arab countries as a means of participation in many cases and to the occasional resort to violence in all its forms that produces tension and conflict, leading to family and social disintegration. It should also be noted that most of the causes of tension in society are essentially economic and social, though they sometimes assume a political and military character; often they are dealt with as a political and security phenomenon only. Some hostile parties exploit social tension to destabilize society.

14. The success of the peace process depends on the immediate implementation of international resolutions that secure Israel's complete withdrawal from all occupied Arab land in Palestine, southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan. These resolutions also guarantee the right of the Palestinian people to return, self-determination and the establishment of an independent State on their land with Jerusalem as its capital, as well as the respect of the right of the Lebanese people to full sovereignty over their national territory. A comprehensive and just peace and stability in the region are prerequisites to development and equality. A comprehensive and just peace would free the human and financial resources that are being spent on military equipment and wars, when they could be geared towards development that provides women with equal opportunities for participation.<sup>3</sup>

15. In spite of the progress achieved in the agricultural sector of some Arab countries, food security has not yet been attained. This may be attributed to a scarcity of water resources, their irrational use, mismanagement and uneven distribution; the low level of the technology; inadequate physical and social infrastructure—especially in rural areas—and a largely unfavourable socio-economic environment for carrying out the modernization of agricultural activity and techniques in a manner consistent with the goals of food security and environmental protection.

16. The development of both the agricultural and industrial sectors is closely linked to international trade through the heavy dependence of these sectors on the outside world for virtually all their needs for machinery, equipment and intermediate goods. The interdependence and horizontal linkage between

---

<sup>2</sup> The delegation of the Republic of the Sudan expressed reservations regarding the term "pluralism".

<sup>3</sup> The delegation of the Republic of the Sudan expressed reservations regarding the phrase "the success of the peace process".

agricultural development and external trade is also evident in the region's critical dependence on food imports and the predominance of agricultural raw materials in the export trade of the non-oil economies of Arab States. Therefore, the region's susceptibility to exogenous developments is nowhere more evident than in the oil sector—the mainstay of development in many countries, especially because the prices of crude oil exports are falling on the international markets at the same time that the prices of manufactured goods are tending to increase.

17. Furthermore, rapid technological achievements at the global level have led to a further widening of the technological gap between the Arab and industrial nations. Moreover, inadequate scientific policies and a weakness of regional cooperation in this field as well as the unfavourable exogenous developments could have a limiting impact on the ability of the national scientific and technological institutions to cope with rapid scientific and technological changes and to adapt them to the development needs of the Arab region.

18. Environmental concerns are expected to become increasingly important in the efforts of the Arab region to achieve sustainable development. Issues such as desertification, industrial and non-industrial waste management, surface-water and groundwater pollution, environmental degradation due to urban expansion, and the environmental aftermath of wars, armed conflict and occupation will have to be addressed. Environment is to be viewed in the broad sense of Agenda 21, adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), with emphasis on sustainability of development.

19. The basic deficiencies and weaknesses in the field of statistics, information and surveys carried out without disaggregation of data by gender remain a major impediment to Arab Governments' efforts to formulate effective development policies concerning women in an age when possession of information and the ability to store, retrieve and transmit it have come to assume a crucial role in determining the competitiveness of nations to keep abreast of the times.

20. Swift action to eliminate the effects of war, occupation and armed conflict in the Arab region and the suffering they have caused, especially the Gulf war, is a fundamental condition for rebuilding Arab cooperation and solidarity and putting an end to the suffering of women, children and the elderly.

21. Policies of Arab countries should be conducive to increasing the participation of women in the management of resources and should improve women's access to quality education and opportunities for work to enable them to contribute effectively to the development process, and to face the regional and global challenges and changes affecting them throughout their life cycles.

22. Based on the above, the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005 urges the Arab Governments to speed up the formulation of policies and take action necessary for providing the appropriate environment and preparing the prerequisites for effectively responding to women's critical areas of concern including: acquisition of legal rights, participation in decision-making, raising awareness, improvement of the level and quality of education, eradication of illiteracy, rehabilitation, creation of job opportunities, alleviation of poverty, provision of health services including medical and psychological counselling services, protection of the environment and the utilization of the media as a means for development. The Arab Plan of Action also urges these Governments to pay particular attention to establishing at the highest executive level of authority a central machinery or mechanism to deal with women's issues where such a mechanism does not exist, and to strengthening the existing mechanisms and programmes concerned with women and to assisting non-governmental organizations in capacity- and institution-building.

### III. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF ARAB WOMEN DERIVED FROM THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN AND ACTION TO BE TAKEN

#### A. SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHT OF ARAB WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN POWER STRUCTURES AND DECISION-MAKING MECHANISMS

23. Most Arab Governments are anxious to improve the situation of women in power structures and in the decision-making process. To that end, they pass laws and legislation to promote the status of Arab women. However, women's participation in power structures is still far below the 30 per cent target set for 1995 by the Economic and Social Council (recommendation VI in the annex to Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/15). This calls for action on the part of Governments and non-governmental organizations and for support from regional and international organizations.

24. The rights of women are an integral part of the social, economic, political and cultural rights defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; therefore, they may not be violated under any circumstances or for any reason.

##### 1. General objective

25. Efforts should be made to achieve the target set by the Economic and Social Council (annex to resolution 1990/15) for the participation of women in power and decision-making structures and to mobilize society—both men and women—and raise awareness in order to change the negative and biased attitude of society towards women and their role in decision-making, and to adopt mechanisms and measures which enable them to achieve that goal.

##### 2. Proposed practical steps and measures

###### At the governmental level

(a) Mechanisms concerned with women's issues should be established or strengthened and made permanent, including national committees for women. These committees should include representatives of ministries concerned with women's issues and representatives of non-governmental organizations concerned with women's rights and issues. They should be linked with the highest national political executive authority and mandated to follow up and implement the Arab Plan of Action in conformity with their national legal systems;

(b) The international Convention on the Rights of the Child and the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women should be ratified and implemented in line with the constitution and laws of every country;

(c) All laws and legislation related to women should be reviewed in order to develop and amend them in line with the rapidly changing economic, social and cultural conditions in Arab society. Efforts should be made to bridge the gap between laws and their implementation by establishing special mechanisms to monitor and follow up their implementation;

(d) The right of women to exercise their political rights should be safeguarded, including the right to vote and run for public office in national legislative councils and local government bodies. Efforts should be made to ensure that women occupy at least 30 per cent of the seats in those bodies, provided that this does not contradict constitutional laws. Provisions should be incorporated into the constitutions and legislation of countries, where such provisions do not exist, to guarantee the full exercise of women's political rights;



(e) Women should be accorded equal opportunity to occupy senior executive and representative posts in the various political, economic and social organs of the State at both the local and central government levels. Qualifications, ability and efficiency should be the only criteria for assessing the suitability of women to fill such positions. Women should also be trained for public office and particularly for diplomatic and judicial positions;

(f) Measures should be taken to encourage women to participate in public life, provide them with support services, and enable them to reconcile their family duties with their professional responsibilities and activities in public life.

#### At the NGO level

(a) Women's activities, institutions and non-governmental organizations should be assessed with a view to formulating a plan of action that includes specific recommendations to improve the rate of women's participation in political parties, trade unions, professional associations and similar social and political institutions. Such institutions would serve as pressure groups for persuading legislative authorities to enact laws that would guarantee women's rights and increase their participation in political life;

(b) Women should be encouraged to run for local and national elections through the provision of institutional support, organization of training programmes for leadership positions at the various political and administrative levels, and provision of the requisite resources and technical support. Action should be taken to ensure that women exercise their electoral rights in countries with legislative councils;

(c) Awareness-raising seminars, workshops, and intensive training courses covering large geographical areas should be organized for the eradication of legal illiteracy and for raising community awareness of the legal rights of women from a contemporary gender-specific perspective. Programmes to provide legal advice and technical assistance upon request should also be organized. The use of audiovisual mass media to raise public awareness, and the preparation and dissemination of publications, bulletins and periodicals on women should be encouraged;

(d) Autonomous democratic mechanisms should be created and existing ones should be strengthened with a view to developing and supporting the role of non-governmental organizations to be representative of women at the national level, which would enable these organizations to promote women's participation in decision-making, and to plan and implement programmes to that end.

#### At the Arab and international levels

(a) The Arab Plan of Action calls on regional and international organizations and bodies to provide support and assistance to national organizations and bodies concerned with women's affairs for institutional and capacity-building to enable them to assist women in exercising their political rights and participating in decision-making;

(b) The Arab Plan of Action calls on the United Nations system to increase the percentage of Arab women in its general staffing table and especially in higher-level posts and decision-making positions through preferential recruitment and promotion as well as through special measures.

### B. ALLEVIATION OF POVERTY FOR ARAB WOMEN

26. Despite the lack of accurate gender-disaggregated data on poverty in the Arab States consistent with the indicators adopted by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, it is obvious that the effect of global economic recession combined with structural adjustment policies and programmes in some Arab States, the transition to a market economy and the associated shrinking in the role of the public sector

in creating job opportunities and providing social services, as well as the exacerbation of the problem of foreign debt and its servicing and the dwindling of revenues and financial resources for development, have undermined the capacity of Governments to provide for the basic needs of their populations, and as such have undermined anti-poverty initiatives, especially those benefiting women and children. This situation, coupled with war, civil strife, armed conflict, Israeli occupation, arbitrary measures imposed on States, and environmental degradation, has exacerbated the suffering of women and resulted in an overall increase in the number of households living in poverty and in the number of poor, female-headed households.

### 1. General objective

27. The general objective is to eradicate poverty, eliminate its causes and alleviate its effect on women, within the framework of comprehensive development based on principles such as self-reliance, especially for female-headed households.

### 2. Proposed practical steps and measures

#### At the governmental level

(a) There is a need for the compilation and dissemination of accurate gender-disaggregated data on poverty in the Arab States to be used to assess the severity and magnitude of poverty as a basis for the formulation of both comprehensive and partial economic policies that ensure the elimination of structural factors that cause poverty in general and poverty of women in particular;

(b) Efforts should be exerted to urge Governments to take the needs of women into account in the development planning exercise with a view to raising the awareness of planners and developing their skills in this respect;

(c) Strategies and programmes should be formulated to attenuate the effects of poverty and to give priority in granting loans and concessional credit facilities—to be guaranteed by government, if the need arises—to poor and rural women, women who are forced migrants, working women, women returnees, women refugees and displaced women. This would enable women to contribute to the production process, and ensure that the basic rights of poor women are safeguarded and that they are not exploited;

(d) Efforts should be made to provide basic foodstuffs to poor and deprived women at minimum prices, assist them in securing adequate housing facilities and ensure that they receive social security benefits;

(e) Vocational and technical training centres should be developed and supported to build institutional capacity to receive low-income, poor and disabled women. Priority should be given to these women in order to equip them with the requisite skills to develop their potential and capabilities and to achieve self-reliance as a means of limiting unemployment and reducing poverty;

(f) A study should be undertaken to identify the dimensions of the poverty problem among female-headed households, with a view to formulating development programmes aimed at raising the income of these poor women and helping them to acquire skills by providing the resources, opportunities and, where applicable, appropriate technology for rural areas, and recognizing these poor women as the legal and social heads of household;

(g) Projects for productive households should be set up and special mechanisms established to market their products, especially the products of the agricultural and informal sectors. This could be carried out through the establishment of a network of national and regional trade enterprises to broaden the marketing base. Productive and income-generating pilot projects should be replicated throughout the Arab world;

(h) Efforts should be made to expand the creation of sustainable, income-generating projects for women that would also help in the treatment of environmental pollution, such as projects for recycling solid and agricultural waste;

(i) All basic social services should be extended, with provisions for expanding the number of nurseries and kindergartens, particularly in poor rural and urban areas and at the workplace, in order to enable poor women to participate in productive employment. Fringe benefits should be provided, whenever possible, such as exemption from payment of nursery fees and transportation to and from the workplace, and subsidies for food products;

(j) Action should be taken to provide job opportunities for poor and rural women and to limit reliance on expatriates and foreign labour, whenever feasible;

(k) The private sector should be urged to promote and invest in small-scale and cottage industries for household and local goods in order to provide employment opportunities for women, especially poor, widowed and divorced women. Ample job opportunities should also be created for women in advanced scientific and technical fields commensurate with their capabilities to raise their income level, and increase their contribution to the economy, with precautionary measures taken against exposure to health hazards from industries;

(l) Development institutions should be urged to assist bedouin women in establishing productive projects compatible with resource endowments of desert areas.

#### At the NGO level

(a) Identify those productive projects for women that would meet market needs and satisfy women's requirements, provide the requisite training to equip women for these projects, and support them in designing and executing them;

(b) Organize workshops to train poor women for work in traditional and non-traditional occupations and for new technological areas in order to enable them to enter the labour market. Establish specialized offices to assist poor women in their search for job opportunities and in facilitating their placement in these jobs as well as in marketing their products and securing for them a regular income;

(c) Secure sufficient funding to ensure that as many children as possible go to the nurseries, crèches and kindergartens established by non-governmental organizations, to expand those services to those rural and remote areas not covered by government institutions and to charge nominal fees as an encouragement to poor working women to place their children in these nurseries.

#### At the Arab and international levels

(a) Arab and international funds should accord priority in their funding to programmes oriented towards the advancement of women;

(b) Non-governmental organizations and national research centres should be assisted in conducting studies and field surveys for the measurement of poverty in the Arab States, and in defining the concepts, terminology and taxonomy used for comparative purposes with the aim of formulating an operational framework for these studies.

## C. ENSURING ARAB WOMEN EQUAL ACCESS TO ALL LEVELS OF EDUCATION

28. During the past three decades, Arab women have been exposed to various factors and changes in the field of education, especially following the oil boom of the 1970s which led to an increase in school enrolment rates and the commitment of a considerable number of Arab countries to social welfare policies for their citizens. However, despite the reduction of illiteracy rates in the Arab countries and the rise in the enrolment rates at the various levels of education, the absolute number of illiterate people increased as a result of the rise in drop-out rates as well as other economic, political and social factors. Gender disparities still exist in some Arab countries since the drop-out rates from schools are high among young girls, especially in rural and remote areas as well as in occupied territories. Even in those Arab countries that did achieve gender equity in school enrolment rates, girls continue to enrol in stereotyped female-labelled disciplines, which limits their growth potential in non-traditional scientific and technological fields of education.

### 1. General objective

29. The general objective is to give females equal opportunity in education and to ensure that women benefit from education, eradication of illiteracy programmes and vocational training to achieve self-reliance.

### 2. Proposed practical steps and measures

#### At the governmental level

(a) Action is needed to execute the Arab Strategy for Development of Civic Education, which aims at the eradication of cultural illiteracy among both males and females, and similar strategies calling for the provision of Education for All by ensuring equal opportunity, compulsory and free education at least for primary education and extending the period of compulsory education until the age of 15. Steps should be taken to combat illiteracy in order to reduce it by 30 per cent by the year 2000 in most Arab countries, and by 50 per cent by the year 2005 in some other Arab countries. The gender gap in school enrolment rates between girls and boys should be bridged;

(b) Priority in public expenditure should be given to spending on enforcing compulsory education for boys and girls for the first 10 years of schooling;

(c) Women's basic literacy programmes must also include functional training in everyday skills, especially in proper hygiene and related health practices, to improve the situation of women and the family. This would provide women with opportunities for economic participation and increase their awareness of their human rights and their participation in various aspects of public life, including politics;

(d) Special awareness programmes should be formulated to provide vocational and civic educational guidance and counselling;

(e) Audiovisual communications and information media should be employed in awareness campaigns and in combating illiteracy, particularly among females;

(f) Varying programmes for adult education and literacy programmes for the family should be organized and disseminated nation-wide by means of community-based informal training in functional literacy, civic education, environmental awareness and income-generating skills for women in rural, remote and peripheral city areas to enable them to discharge their multiple roles in society. Channels linking adult and formal education need to be established to enable women to pursue education as far as their aptitudes take them. To that end, the requisite resources and incentives should be provided along with increasing expenditure and budget allocations to implement all basic literacy programmes;

(g) Parallel education plans should be formulated to pursue non-formal continuing education programmes; allow women who have missed earlier opportunities to enrol in formal education programmes; encourage illiterate young women, particularly in rural and remote areas, to enrol in specially designed schools that use modern methods for continuing education; and introduce special classes to eradicate illiteracy in women working in factories, as field workers and in other workplaces in view of the effects this would have on improving the health situation of women, their performance, income, and their standard of living and providing them with new employment opportunities;

(h) Directors of literacy centres and teachers of basic functional literacy skills should be trained to acquire the necessary qualifications. Public expenditure should be increased to establish new literacy centres and develop existing ones in order to eradicate illiteracy among women as soon as possible;

(i) The necessary financial and human resources should be allocated and steps should be taken to ensure equal opportunities and gender equity in school enrolment and to prevent young girls from dropping out by means of increasing the number of schools and expanding coverage of teaching services to reach rural and remote areas;

(j) Legislation should be enacted to compel guardians of females in poor and rural families to send their daughters to school, to reduce their household chores, to refrain from the practice of child labour or sending girls out to work before they have completed their primary compulsory education and to delay their marriage until they reach maturity. To that end, incentives and related services could be provided, such as free transportation, meals, textbooks and school supplies;

(k) Mechanisms should be established to monitor and review progress in the implementation of measures to promote the education of girls in the ministries concerned. Particular attention should be paid to the development of education in those remote and rural areas where discrimination in the education of girls continues to constitute an obstacle to raising the level of their education. These mechanisms should also follow up the execution of laws banning child labour since this practice prevents children from pursuing their education;

(l) School curricula should be reviewed, evaluated and reformed to ensure that education is gender-neutral. Women should participate in the formulation and reform of education policies and curricula for all phases of education to maintain the cohesion of the Arab family, safeguard the rights of women and their dignity, and highlight their role in the development process. Gender awareness should be integrated into all aspects of teacher-training programmes to eliminate gender stereotyping. The curricula, all teaching materials and textbooks should project a positive image of women in their multiple roles, eliminate gender stereotyping, and guarantee gender equity in knowledge, specialization and skills offered to all students in all fields;

(m) Adequate funding should be allocated to establish specialized institutes of higher education in different disciplines and encourage women to enter professional, scientific, technological and non-traditional fields of specialization in which they can play an innovative and creative role;

(n) Gender equity should be applied in filling positions for internships, fellowships and trainee programmes and in selecting candidates for pursuing higher education opportunities at home and abroad, and a specific percentage of scholarships for specialization should be allocated to females;

(o) Assessment and aptitude policies and guidelines should be pursued in recruiting and evaluating teachers on the basis of competence and merit. An ongoing training system should be designed to develop practical and professional know-how, especially of women. Incentives should be provided to encourage young people to take up the teaching profession in order to meet the current and future needs of the labour market, especially with regard to women. Furthermore, emphasis should be placed on quality education rather than the number of graduates;

(p) Restrictions should be lifted on the exchange of Arab cultural printed matter that reflects development and scientific progress in step with the advancement of women in scientific and cultural fields.

#### At the NGO level

(a) Informal training courses should be organized in local, rural and remote communities to increase gender awareness among families and awareness of the importance of education for girls;

(b) Institutions of civic society should be encouraged to participate actively in various basic and functional literacy campaigns, and to mobilize all their voluntary resources to support official efforts in this respect;

(c) Parent/teacher associations should be mobilized to participate effectively in addressing educational issues faced by schools;

(d) Non-governmental organizations should coordinate their efforts to complement those of Governments, especially in rural and remote areas, in order to achieve educational goals.

#### At the Arab and international levels

(a) The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) should be urged to provide financial and technical assistance to update the Integrated Arab Project for Eradicating Illiteracy, limit female drop-out rates and guarantee the availability of compulsory education;

(b) A pan-Arab project should be designed to organize non-formal education programmes for women through correspondence courses, the mass media and other similarly conducted methods of education;

(c) Workshops, seminars and conferences should be organized to discuss, evaluate and exchange information about projects and policies which were successfully implemented in the Arab region, formulate detailed programmes of action and design gender-awareness programmes for guardians of children on female education as a worthwhile investment in human development. Adequate funding for the execution of those programmes should be provided.

### D. ENSURING ARAB WOMEN EQUAL ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

30. Although Arab women's health has improved in recent years, according to the United Nations human development index (HDI), it is still below the standard and varies from one Arab country to another. Most Arab countries continue to have a relatively low female life expectancy at birth, in comparison with developed countries. Maternal mortality and morbidity rates are considered high. Infant mortality and morbidity rates are also high, especially for females. Environmental pollution leads to various diseases, while high fertility rates lead to a deterioration in women's health as a result of too early, too late or too frequent pregnancies, especially for women living under dire economic conditions. Malnutrition leads to an increase in the number of mothers and children suffering from anaemia. Lack of awareness in respect of reproductive health, including family planning, inadequacy and poor quality of health services, is one of the problems still unresolved in some Arab countries. Some Arab countries are still suffering from inadequate health care as a result of economic, social and political factors such as wars, occupation, conflicts, or siege.

## 1. General objective

31. The general objective is to safeguard the right of women to participate actively in the formulation and implementation of health plans and policies which meet their needs and ensure good physical, mental and social health for women throughout their life cycle and in all areas.

## 2. Proposed practical steps and measures

### At the governmental level

(a) Legislation should be enacted to eliminate practices that are hazardous and harmful to the physical and mental health of women, and to make premarital medical tests obligatory;

(b) Physical and mental psychological health services should be developed and made easily accessible to women in all urban and rural areas, by establishing treatment and psychiatric guidance centres across the nation as well as in economic and educational institutions. Special attention should be accorded to the rehabilitation of disabled women, by enacting legislation that would guarantee them employment in both public and private institutions;

(c) Policies and measures should be enforced to make spouses aware of reproductive health, including the spacing of pregnancies, in order to safeguard maternal and child health. Preventive health care services, including routine annual check-ups for early detection of breast and uterine cancer as well as HIV/AIDS blood tests and tests for infectious liver diseases, should be developed. Prospective spouses should undergo medical tests for hereditary diseases;

(d) Spending on the health sector should be increased to cover rehabilitation and training of women in this sector as well as training of medical and paramedical technicians to monitor diseases resulting from environmental degradation, with the aim of ensuring the outreach and comprehensiveness of the various health services provided such as preventive services, family planning and child care;

(e) Mass media family-awareness campaigns and programmes should be designed to disseminate information on public health, preventive health, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation and to include such programmes in educational curricula;

(f) Action should be taken to increase the participation of women in the design and execution of plans and policies in the fields of health, agriculture, nutrition and environment and to secure basic foodstuffs for the family and their equitable distribution among family members;

(g) Primary health care systems should be developed and improved and health care services made available to all, especially in remote, rural, desert and coastal areas, as well as to schools and all educational institutions;

(h) Measures should be taken to halt the deterioration of the health situation and the inadequate medical treatment of women, infants and children as a result of captivity and economic blockade.

### At the NGO level

(a) The contribution of grass-roots organizations and associations in providing health services to women, especially poor women, women refugees, displaced women, women captives and detainees and women under siege should be encouraged and increased. Popular medicine and traditional health concepts should be developed in order to eliminate practices that are detrimental to the health of women and children;

(b) The participation of the institutions of civil society, in particular women's organizations, should be encouraged in executing preventive health care programmes, including reproductive health, and in disseminating health education and promoting environmental awareness;

(c) The role of civic society, including its institutions, non-governmental organizations and local female leaders, in contributing effectively to health service programmes in general and to family planning programmes and child immunization campaigns in particular should be supported.

#### At the Arab and international levels

(a) Governmental and non-governmental national efforts to improve the health situation of women and children should be supported, including the provision of financial assistance for the design and implementation of reproductive and preventive health programmes by Governments with the support of the United Nations system, especially the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund;

(b) Support should be provided to governmental and non-governmental national efforts in disseminating information and gender-sensitive indicators, preparing studies and undertaking research, and participating in the organization of panel discussions for the formulation of health programmes and projects appropriate to the situation and needs of Arab societies, especially women and children, including programmes aimed at rehabilitating and training women and providing health services, especially to women.

### E. PROMOTING ARAB WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SELF-RELIANCE AND CAPACITIES TO ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET

32. The social and economic changes in the Arab region have led to a quantitative and qualitative increase in the female labour force, reflected in a rise in the rate of female education which has resulted in diversifying the demand for women working in modern economic sectors such as industry and in services and a relative increase in the participation of women at all levels in the workplace, including management and decision-making positions requiring high-level scientific and technical skills. Despite the progress achieved, women's work in the agricultural sector, which employs the largest share of the female labour force in most Arab countries, remains seasonal and mostly unremunerated. The migration of men from rural areas has placed a heavier burden on women while at the same time raising the value of their contribution to that sector, whether remunerated or not. Furthermore, educated women are facing unemployment because of the lack of job opportunities commensurate with their qualifications and fields of specialization and also because of some traditional values reinforcing stereotypes and preventing women and men from working in fields considered male or female preserves.

33. One of the most important factors limiting the productivity of women is the uneven distribution of time between their duties in the workplace and their familial role as mothers and wives within a social context that discourages men from sharing domestic responsibilities with women; in addition there is an inadequacy of nurseries, day-care centres and related support services that assist women in performing their multiple roles.

#### 1. General objective

34. The general objective is to enable women to strengthen their capabilities, promote their economic self-reliance and increase their contribution to economic activity including participation in the development planning exercise.



## 2. Proposed practical steps and measures

### At the governmental level

- (a) Laws and legislation should be revised, enacted and enforced to ensure equal access to job opportunities, gender equity in recruitment, employment, financial remuneration, promotion, training and upgrading of skills, and insurance and social security coverage for working women. Legal instruments should be enacted to guarantee the right of women to legal recourse in cases of sexual or social discrimination against them. Action should be taken to follow up and monitor the execution of legislation by the private sector;
- (b) Laws and by-laws should be issued in order to guarantee normal career development curves based on flexible working environments that allow men and women to choose from among different flexible working systems the pattern most suited to each one's personal and family circumstances. These include, for example, part-time work that guarantees for them, especially for women, the right to return to their jobs after interruptions because of family duties. The specific laws, legislation and mechanisms needed to test the Third Choice, a solution proposed by the ESCWA secretariat to increase the productivity and contribution of Arab women and reconcile their productive and reproductive roles in society by adapting market needs to family chores and duties, should be seriously considered;
- (c) Working women should participate in making and drafting civil service codes to guarantee their right to promotion on the basis of merit and experience rather than gender;
- (d) Laws should be enacted to grant women paid leave for carrying out their family responsibilities, provided that the related costs are not borne by the employer alone;
- (e) Adequate measures should be taken to increase job opportunities for women, including limiting the resort to foreign labour; rehabilitating and training women for high-level managerial posts in productive structures commensurate with their qualifications and experience; formulating educational and vocational training plans; and setting a quantitative target to double the number of women in the labour market by providing the material and moral incentives for that purpose;
- (f) Action should be taken to increase the percentage of women working in agricultural extension programmes, provide the necessary incentives to enable women and promote their active participation in the private sector and in the agriculture and fisheries sector, including the financing of new, appropriate and small-scale productive enterprises;
- (g) Action should be taken to increase the number of vocational and technical training centres; to provide incentives to industrial enterprises to rehabilitate and train women in new fields previously not open to women, such as manufacturing industries; and to overcome social obstacles to women's entry to new fields of work as a means of reducing unemployment. Within the framework of manpower planning, women should be equipped to meet labour market needs for the most advanced specializations in the scientific and technical fields;
- (h) Intensive campaigns should be organized and programmes prepared to raise legal awareness among women; guarantee their recourse to and enjoyment of their legal rights in the workplace; promote women's employment as a basic right and as a major factor contributing to human development; and enhance the value of work and the work ethic among younger generations by using the mass media and by integrating related cultural materials in school curricula;
- (i) The establishment of nurseries and crèches in factories, institutions and the workplace should be expanded to cater to all groups of society as well as to cover rural and remote areas, and for that purpose

there should be collaboration with local communities, social welfare institutions and employers. Support services such as transportation and quick meals should be provided to enable women to reconcile their domestic and public responsibilities;

(j) A comprehensive gender-disaggregated database in line with standard international classifications should be established in order to facilitate the formulation and implementation of programmes aimed at increasing women's participation in the labour market.

#### At the NGO level

(a) Women should be encouraged to enter non-traditional fields and occupations; to that end, training courses and rehabilitation programmes should be organized in new fields in the light of technological progress, and seminars should be held to upgrade and refine decision makers' management skills;

(b) Women working in the informal sector should be trained in order to improve their productivity and their links with production and marketing for development purposes. Training courses should be organized for institution-building, including small-scale productive enterprises and cooperatives as self-reliant financial institutions;

(c) Women's committees in labour unions and professional associations should be created and promoted in order to provide opportunities for women to participate in the labour market, especially in the industrial and private sectors, and to share in leadership and decision-making positions, as well as to provide support to women to improve their working conditions, raise their awareness of their rights in the workplace and extend services to young and unemployed women by setting up placement offices;

(d) Joint fairs and exhibitions should be organized by the non-governmental organizations network to familiarize participants with the different skills of Arab women, exchange expertise, and create business interests among Arab women such as the possibility of joint marketing of goods and products.

#### At the Arab and international levels

(a) Support should be provided to carry out studies and research projects and estimate the supply and demand for skilled labour by gender, and link this to those fields of specialization offered in the light of the rapid technological changes that led to the emergence of new non-traditional occupations and functions. Symposia, panel discussions, seminars and training courses should be organized to promote women's self-reliance and to exchange information on policies and programmes aimed at eliminating discrimination against women in the workplace, with support from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Arab Labour Organization (ALO), UNESCO, ALECSO, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND), and others;

(b) Scientific terminology should be standardized in cooperation with ALO, ILO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNIDO, the United Nations Statistical Division and ESCWA. The value of women's domestic work should be recognized and reflected in the gross national product (GNP). In this regard, ILO urges Governments to develop concepts and statistical indicators to measure the value of women's unremunerated work in agriculture and in the family, and estimate the real economic value of women's contribution to raising average industrial, agricultural and food production;

(c) United Nations specialized agencies and development funds such as ILO, UNIDO and UNIFEM should be invited to increase their support in providing training and technical assistance to set up small-scale projects, especially development projects, to promote the private sector and to support trade unions to enable them to play an effective role in increasing job opportunities for women.

## F. OVERCOMING THE EFFECTS OF WAR, OCCUPATION AND ARMED CONFLICT ON ARAB WOMEN

35. Arab women are never involved in decisions leading to wars and armed conflict. Nevertheless, they bear a disproportionate share of the consequences of these conflicts, and conflict resolution has remained largely a male domain. Paragraph 261 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women until the Year 2000 states that "armed conflicts and emergency situations impose a serious threat to the lives of women and children, causing constant fear, danger of displacement, destruction, devastation, physical abuse, social and family disruption, and abandonment. Sometimes these result in complete denial of access to adequate health and educational services, loss of job opportunities and overall worsening of material conditions".

36. The Arab region has witnessed several wars as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iran-Iraq war, and the Gulf war as well as civil strife and armed internal conflicts. The people of some Arab countries suffered from different kinds of exile, expulsion, captivity, imprisonment, disablement, siege, embargo, deportation and displacement of thousands of families. It is well known that recurring wars and conflicts in the world have negative effects such as heavy public expenditure on defence budgets for armaments at the expense of development projects, an increase in the number of prisoners of war, refugees, displaced persons and exiles, most of whom are women and children. Moreover, women living under conditions of war are victims of violence, torture, kidnapping and rape as well as psychological disorders.

### 1. General objective

37. The participation of women in conflict resolution and in efforts to maintain peace should be increased and women should be protected against the effects of conflict.

### 2. Proposed practical steps and measures

#### At the governmental level

(a) Efforts should be made to resolve existing disputes through dialogue and diplomatic means before they turn into armed conflicts and wars;

(b) Women should be involved in peace negotiations and conflict resolution as well as humanitarian relief operations;

(c) Expenditure on armaments should be redirected to development projects, and defence budgets should be reduced;

(d) Violence against women under conditions of war, armed conflict, occupation and siege should be considered a war crime punishable by law and should be treated as such by all national and international organizations;

(e) Efforts should be made to free all male and female prisoners from Israeli jails;

(f) Peace education, teaching about non-violent measures for conflict resolution and the teaching of human rights principles should be incorporated in school curricula;

(g) Financial and technical assistance and concessionary soft loans should be provided to non-governmental organizations carrying out social and humanitarian projects in order to combat the effects of war, occupation, armed conflicts, siege and captivity on women and children.

#### At the NGO level

- (a) Field surveys, studies and research on the effects of war, occupation, siege and captivity should be undertaken, and appropriate mechanisms proposed to alleviate these effects on women by organizing training courses and providing rehabilitation services to enable women to work and exercise their rights fully;
- (b) National awareness of the dangers and threats to humanity posed by the arms race should be created, and assertive positions should be taken with regard to negotiations on limiting armaments;
- (c) Courses should be organized on peace education, conflict resolution, justice and democracy and brought to the attention of decision makers and the public.

#### At the Arab and international levels

- (a) The principle of non-discrimination among States and peoples should be adhered to, and this issue should be addressed in accordance with the tenets of international law and codes of conduct. Double standards and selectivity in the way the United Nations deals with all political, economic and social issues should be eliminated;<sup>4</sup>
- (b) All weapons of mass destruction in the region, particularly in Israel, should be subject to inspection and all stocks of weapons of mass destruction that endanger the security and stability of the peoples of the region should be destroyed under the supervision of the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency;
- (c) International organizations should provide financial and technical assistance to Arab States in order to do the following:
  - (i) Review the activities of international organizations and familiarize them with the critical concerns of regional and international civil society and the effects on gender equity, equal opportunity, development and peace, especially disarmament, as well as on "globalization" of the economy and on cultural norms and values, racism and discrimination;
  - (ii) Collect and disseminate data on the effects of war, occupation, siege, captivity and armed conflict on women, and in particular statistics on the number of women refugees, captives, detainees, deportees, displaced women, migrants, women who have been raped, women undergoing psychological treatment, women who have been widowed or women whose husbands were killed in action and who became heads of households, as well as the number of women who missed the opportunity to acquire any qualifications because of war, and any other data to show the number of women affected by armed conflict;
- (d) The resort to instruments such as siege and economic sanctions contradicts all codes, norms, laws and conventions on human rights. These should be categorically rejected by the international community for violating human rights and as non-viable instruments of conflict resolution because of the dire effects they have on the family, women and children;
- (e) Schools and universities should not be closed during occupation, internal conflict and civil war;

---

<sup>4</sup> The delegations of Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates expressed reservations regarding the phrase "double standards and selectivity in the way the United Nations deals with all political, economic and social issues".

(f) Existing disputes leading to war and armed conflict should be resolved by peaceful means and within the framework of the Arab community and the League of Arab States, whose role in containing those disputes should be activated, with respect for States' sovereignty and abstaining from interference in their internal affairs;

(g) The United Nations and the League of Arab States and their specialized agencies should take corrective action to raise the inadequate representation of women, in particular at the decision-making level in the United Nations and the League of Arab States systems.

#### G. ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

38. Some women suffer from violence in its various forms, such as violence in the family, in the workplace and in public life. Violence is considered a violation of basic human rights. For instance, forcing young girls to quit school, sometimes forcing them into marriage, battering of girls by family members and sometimes putting pressure on women to waive their legal, personal or civil rights because of social customs and traditions are all considered forms of violence against women. Women in particular are subject to violence and rape during wars, under occupation and all sorts of armed conflict (especially women refugees, deportees, displaced women, prisoners of war, and detainees). Women are also subject to violence in the absence of democracy and respect for human rights.

##### 1. General objective

39. The general objective is to enforce, international conventions that guarantee women's civil rights in general, and during occupation, wars and armed conflict in particular, to provide women with adequate protection from all forms of violence, and to strengthen the preventive means and measures by ensuring the participation of countries at the Arab, regional and international levels in combating these phenomena and limiting their incidence through education, awareness and the enforcement of laws.

##### 2. Proposed practical steps and measures

###### At the governmental level

(a) The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women should be acceded to or ratified in accordance with the constitution and laws of every country, and in accordance with the Convention against Torture, and all necessary measures should be taken to protect women from violence;

(b) Legislation and administrative measures should be reviewed in the light of international norms and covenants to ensure that women receive legal protection against violence;

(c) Educational programmes should be formulated to sensitize police forces and to raise their awareness in order to recognize abuses perpetrated against women and minor girls;

(d) Bulletins, periodicals and awareness-raising publications on the protection of women against violence should be prepared in order to educate and sensitize social workers and others working with the local community to the issue of violence against women;

(e) Data and indicators on violence against women should be compiled and disseminated; studies and field research should be undertaken and findings published to raise awareness and mobilize public opinion;

(f) Standards of human rights in general and women's rights in particular should be incorporated into curricula of judicial and security officers training institutes;

(g) Special institutions should be established to take care of the victims of violence, including rape, address the impact of violence against women, and monitor, follow up, provide guidance and raise awareness;

(h) Violence against women during times of war should be considered a war crime without a statute of limitations.

#### At the NGO level

(a) The execution of various programmes and activities should be emphasized to foster solidarity among non-governmental organizations, especially in regard to protecting women against violence;

(b) Adequate services and assistance must be provided to women who are victims of violence;

(c) Educational programmes and campaigns to raise awareness in society should be organized to confront the problems relating to violence against women and to identify measures that may be taken to eliminate such violence;

(d) Educational programmes and training courses should be organized to raise women's legal awareness of their rights and to acquaint them with available services when they are exposed to any form of violence.

#### At the Arab and international levels

(a) Arab and international cooperation should be fostered to formulate regional strategies to combat violence against women;

(b) Meetings and seminars should be held to create or raise public awareness of violence against women;

(c) Arab and international funds should provide material and technical assistance to private institutions that take care of victims of violence;

(d) Adequate support should be extended to governments and non-governmental organizations to confront the various forms of violence;

(e) Legal and paralegal counsel should be offered to women who are victims of violence;

(f) The United Nations system, its specialized agencies and the specialized Arab agencies should pay special attention to women subjected to physical and psychological violence and rape under conditions of aggression, occupation, armed conflict, and economic sanctions.

### H. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES AND SAFEGUARDING THE ENVIRONMENT

40. External factors play a significant role in the Arab region's environmental degradation and pollution. Chief among these are nuclear waste and industrial adjustment policies of the industrially advanced countries requiring that factories and plants producing environmentally polluting waste should be established outside their territories. These factors have adverse environmental implications for the Arab countries.

41. Environmental endowments and limited natural resources in the Arab region are factors that constrain the ability to meet fully and satisfy adequately the growing population needs, especially those of women and children. It is therefore imperative to accord special consideration to environmental issues and the factors

that lead to environmental degradation in Arab societies and their impact on the health, social and economic conditions of women and the family.

### 1. General objective

42. The general objective is to promote the capacities of women and guarantee their effective participation in the protection of the environment and the rational and sound management of natural resources.

### 2. Proposed practical steps and measures

#### At the governmental level

(a) Agenda 21 (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) for the environment and sustainable development should be implemented;

(b) Women should participate in the formulation, follow up and monitoring of implementation of plans for the management of natural resources and the environment, and become members in standardization committees and health and environment control authorities;

(c) Women should participate in making environmental laws and legislation that have a direct bearing on the health and welfare of women and on their families, and work on implementing existing legislation;

(d) Information, rehabilitation and training should be provided; environmental education and sound management of natural resources issues should be integrated in school curricula, and women's capabilities in this field should be developed;

(e) Energy sources should be provided to rural women to do away with the unplanned cutting of trees for fuel, which causes deforestation and desertification;

(f) Potable drinking water should be made available and sewage systems installed in rural areas, and ways should be identified to make use of environmental waste in land reclamation and agriculture.

#### At the NGO level

(a) Women's non-governmental organizations should focus their efforts on becoming an effective instrument in forming public opinion; in taking assertive positions in implementing decisions related to sound management of natural resources and environment; and in enacting legislation and monitoring its implementation in order to limit environmental degradation and the depletion of natural resources;

(b) The unique experience of women and the wisdom and knowledge they have accumulated over the years should be utilized in environmental management to carry out income-generating environmental projects, such as planting endangered medicinal plants or recycling waste and agricultural by-products. To this end, funds and technological support for their execution should be secured;

(c) Research, surveys and studies should be undertaken and data collected and disseminated on women's management of environmental resources such as water, energy and fuel; on the effects of environmental degradation on the health and welfare of women and their families; and on women's participation in environmental decision-making;

(d) Governments should be urged to emphasize environmental protection and to support environmental protection programmes, especially those for combating logging, soil erosion, and water

diversion; they should also be urged not to use or import chemical products that are banned internationally and to avoid operations that adversely affect the environment and its protection.

#### At the Arab and international levels

(a) A regional data bank should be established under the supervision of the United Nations Environment Programme for indicators on women's participation in environmental management and the effect of environmental pollution on the health of women and their families in the Arab region;

(b) Training programmes, seminars, and workshops should be organized on the role of women in safeguarding the environment as well as on collecting data and indicators on women's health and the environment at the grass-roots level. Studies and research on the involvement of women in planning and executing policies for the development of environmental resources, their management, protection and conservation should be undertaken;

(c) The dumping of nuclear and toxic waste in Arab countries under the pretext of environmental experiments or any other pretext should not be allowed;

(d) Support should be given to women's non-governmental organizations that are active in raising awareness and implementing environmental projects;

(e) Programmes to limit environmental and industrial pollution should be financed and supported;

(f) Environmental pollution should be prevented as well as wars and their effects on the environment.

#### I. USING THE COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA EFFECTIVELY TO EFFECT CHANGES IN ROLES IN SOCIETY AND PROMOTE EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

43. The communications media—whether printed or audiovisual—in the region sometimes portray the Arab woman by reinforcing her traditional stereotyped role and downplaying her positive and changing role in which she shares with man the new concepts related to improving the quality of life and participating in the process of social, political and economic development. The mass media in the world focus on a distorted image of the Arab in general and Arab women in particular. Mass media are effective instruments in accelerating the process of sustainable development and because of their strong impact on people's behaviour and perceptions they are catalysts of change in social customs and behaviour. The media are highly influential in creating new perceptions and behaviour and in spurring action for "development, equality and peace".

##### 1. General objective

44. The mass media—in various forms—should be sufficiently and appropriately used to project a positive image of the active and effective role of Arab women in the family and in society. They should aim to develop women's capabilities and skills, through carrying out well-studied media programmes with messages containing concepts, values, perceptions and images reinforcing those of Arab and international strategies for the advancement of women.



## 2. Proposed practical steps and measures

### At the governmental level

- (a) A clear, unified strategy and plan should be developed and formulated for mass media and communications on women's issues and concerns and their role in social, economic and political development;
- (b) The role of working women in the media should be promoted, including their involvement in the planning and decision-making of the various media programmes;
- (c) Women in the mass media should be trained in programming, directing, producing and writing, to enable them to execute purposeful media programmes and sponsor activities covering issues specific to women;
- (d) Women and men should work together, programme, produce and participate in the media dialogue, to produce a common favourable perception of women's social, economic and political issues;
- (e) Films, television series and other mass communications programmes and materials should be produced to highlight women's national role and their struggle against occupation, and to document this positive image for future generations;
- (f) Media watch committees should be established to read, listen to and view local mass media and to monitor standards in terms of content and then take steps to regulate communications that are derogatory to and project a negative stereotyped image of women in Arab society, including the use of women as advertising instruments to promote consumer goods;
- (g) In order to bring about and promote socialization based on gender equity, the mass media should be urged not to reinforce the gender discrimination from which the girl-child living in cities and in rural areas suffers, especially in the poorer strata. This discrimination also has adverse implications for the girl-child's education, health and psychological well-being.

### At the NGO level

- (a) Communications materials should be prepared and disseminated to the mass media for use in programmes on women and in various other programmes to promote the role of women in sustainable development;
- (b) Seminars and lectures should be organized to address women's issues and concerns and their integration in the development process and the mass media should be used to publicize and transmit these lectures to the public at large in order to raise the awareness of women, especially illiterate women, and educate them with regard to their rights, role and positive image;
- (c) Mass media communications material should be produced on video and used as a tool for educational and cultural purposes to reach women and men in rural and remote areas where other media of mass communications are not available;

### At the Arab and international levels

- (a) Production of sound joint Arab programmes should be encouraged to project and promote a positive image of Arab women;

(b) ARABSAT should be used to transmit programmes that promote the value and roles of Arab women in a changing society and their integration in the development process;

(c) The Arab media should be encouraged to take advantage of foreign media material that has a purposeful humanitarian, cultural, social or educational content;

(d) A communications network among regional and international organizations and institutions should be created to exchange information materials in order to create a better understanding of Arab women's issues and help change their negative image in the international community;

(e) Specialized international organizations should provide financial assistance to Governments and to non-governmental organizations to train men and women working in the media on the production of information materials related to promoting the status of women in development and their role in humanitarian assistance and in international peace-keeping and security.

#### **IV. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS**

45. In order to implement the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005, Governments and regional and international organizations as well as financial institutions and funds will join to make the following financial arrangements, provided they are not inconsistent with the prevailing economic policies in each Arab State:

(a) Adopting measures and policies to finance and reallocate adequate resources from within the budget of development projects for promoting the advancement of women;

(b) Allocating budgetary resource requirements necessary to implement programmes and plans for the advancement of women, including allocations to promote and establish national mechanisms and machineries for women's issues;

(c) According priority to supporting and implementing non-governmental organizations' plans of action for the advancement of Arab women, promoting their self-reliance and increasing their contribution to the development process;

(d) Providing financial support to non-governmental organizations, especially those grass-roots organizations with activities in rural and poor peripheral city areas;

(e) Facilitating the administrative procedures for securing the tools and equipment requirements of non-profit, non-governmental organizations, including the possibility of tax and tariff exemptions, especially inputs into productive projects for the advancement of women and children, and for the benefit of the most needy, particularly women;

(f) Executing small-scale, income-generating productive projects (inside or outside the household), taking into consideration the social conditions of women and their need to earn a livelihood;

(g) Establishing coordination schemes between regional and international financial institutions and funds in order to avoid duplication in the provision of support for the establishment of projects and execution of programmes within the Arab Plan of Action, aimed at achieving comprehensive economic, social and political development for all strata of women and for all regions, including the rural and remote areas.

## **V. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE ARAB PLAN OF ACTION**

46. Regional and international programmes and activities organized by the Commission on the Status of Women, ESCWA, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the regional bureaux and bodies of the United Nations specialized agencies, the Department of Women's Affairs in the General Secretariat of Arab States, CAWTAR and the African Centre for Women, should be coordinated and streamlined.
47. Action must be taken to continue providing support for the Commission of Arab Women and the Department of Women's Affairs in the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, and to coordinate their activities with the other specialized bodies and foster cooperation between them and the secretariats of ESCWA and ECA.
48. Additional financial and technical support should be provided to the secretariats of ESCWA and ECA to enable them to continue reviewing and monitoring developments in the situation of Arab women and to provide technical assistance to the members of the two Commissions, in order for them to meet their increasing responsibilities to achieve the objectives of the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005.
49. Support should be given to the regional technical bodies and the scientific research institutions and centres concerned with social research and studies to allow them to compile statistics on women and gender-disaggregated data and to establish standards and classifications of rural, urban, desert and remote areas by undertaking field studies in the Arab countries. These bodies should also carry out social research, studies and field surveys on the situation of women under changing social conditions. Particular support must be extended to CAWTAR, to provide it with the institutional and technical capabilities for carrying out the tasks with which it has been entrusted.
50. Research and training mechanisms in Arab and international organizations, notably the Department of Women's Affairs in the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, the Women and Development Section in ESCWA, CAWTAR in Tunis and other research institutions dealing with women's issues, must be supported as mechanisms for follow-up and monitoring progress in the implementation of the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005. By building the research and institutional capacities of these mechanisms, and fostering coordination and cooperation among them, they will be able to set up a regional data bank on Arab women and identify indicators on the status of women in the Arab world.
51. Technical and financial support must be provided to non-governmental organizations to build their institutional capacity and mobilize their capabilities and potentialities, to foster collaboration and coordination among them and address the real needs and critical areas of concern to Arab women.
52. An official mechanism concerned with women's issues should be established and directly linked to the highest executive authority with its own budget sufficient for the implementation of the programmes and projects for the advancement of women contained in the national plans and strategies.
53. Support should be provided to developmental quality non-governmental organizations concerned with the advancement of Arab women to form an Arab network in order to exchange expertise, coordinate efforts to improve the status of women and their advancement in all fields, and foster intra-NGO cooperation. Coordination between non-governmental organizations and the specialized organizations concerned with women's issues on the one hand, and networks of regional and international organizations on the other hand, must also be promoted.