

**EMHRN Position on the Ministerial Conclusions on 'Strengthening the Role of Women in Society', Euro-Med Conference in Istanbul 14-15 November 2006**

**EMHRN POSITION ON THE 5 YEARS PLAN FOR ACTION ADOPTED AT THE EUROMED MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY, IN ISTANBUL 14-15 NOVEMBER 2006**

*Background*

At Barcelona+10, in the Five Year Work Program, it was stated that Partners would adopt "measures to achieve gender equality, preventing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the protection of rights of women". It was suggested to hold a Euro-Med conference during 2006 to adopt a 5 year Plan of Action to achieve the stated goals.

The EMHRN decided to prioritize coming with input to this process, and participated actively in the preparatory conference in Rabat which took place in June 2006, as well as circulated recommendations ahead of the Istanbul conference to representatives of the EU Commission, the EU Council (including the Finnish Presidency which took the lead in preparing the Ministerial conference) as well as the European Parliament. The EMHRN also lobbied on national levels, especially in Morocco and Jordan in order to push for our recommendations. We issued a report: Change is possible and necessary<sup>1</sup> – focusing on the achievements within the promotion of women's rights in the region since 2002 – and included our recommendations for the 5 year Plan of Action. The recommendations were adopted by the Civil Forum in Marrakesh and presented at the Ministerial conference, where the Finnish Presidency specifically thanked the EMHRN for its constructive inputs.

Despite the fact that many of the EMHRN recommendations are included in the Ministerial Conclusions<sup>2</sup>, it is worthwhile to evaluate the Ministerial Conclusions and make recommendations for a follow up.

*Common Platform to Promote Gender Equality*

The EMHRN welcomes that the Partners at the Euro-Med Ministerial Conference on 'Strengthening the Role of Women in Society', under the auspices of the Finnish Presidency, succeeded in agreeing on a common platform for promoting gender equality in the region. The EMHRN has previously noticed the lack of integration of women's rights from the Middle East and North Africa into the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership<sup>3</sup> and thus welcomes this initiative for a more structured and concerted effort. The EMHRN also welcomes the fact that the Ministerial Conclusions were inscribed in the Tampere Conclusion of the Meeting of Euro-Med Foreign Ministers<sup>4</sup> indicating the joint commitment and hopefully political will by the EMP for promotion and protection of women's rights.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.euromedrights.net/74>

<sup>2</sup> See: [http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external\\_relations/euromed/women/docs/conclusions\\_1106.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/euromed/women/docs/conclusions_1106.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.euromedrights.net/pages/91>

<sup>4</sup> See Tampere conclusion:

[http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external\\_relations/euromed/2006\\_tampere\\_conclusions.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/euromed/2006_tampere_conclusions.pdf)

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***Reference to shared international, regional and national commitments***

The EMHRN also welcomes the clear reference to shared international, regional, and national commitments of the EMP partners, not at least the reference to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

***Language of gender equality, non discrimination and gender mainstreaming***

The EMHRN welcomes the Partners' commitment to achieving gender equality, preventing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the protection of rights of women. Gender equality is essential for men and women to participate on equal bases to develop their societies. The most widely accepted and comprehensive strategy to achieve gender equality is gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming means the systematic integration of gender issues and the (re)organisation, improvement and evaluation of political processes so that male-female equality is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages.

The EMHRN is therefore pleased to notice that the Euro-Mediterranean Partners will strengthen the role of women through mainstreaming of full enjoyment of human rights by women and needs into all plans, projects and other relevant activities of the EMP, as well as supporting specific measures in favour of women, however, stresses the need for implementation of this ambitious program.

***An indivisible and holistic approach to women's human rights – political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights***

The EMHRN also welcomes the Partner's holistic approach to women's human rights as indivisible and thus including political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights that are interdependent and interlinked. The EMHRN want to stress the importance of not confining women's rights to the cultural or religious spheres, but to acknowledge that women's role in society can only be enhanced through a right based approach comprising all rights.

***Shared financial commitment***

The EMHRN welcomes the commitment by ALL Euro-Mediterranean Partners to mobilize financial resources to support the implementation of the Plan, which will be matched by EU funding through its financial instruments. The EMHRN strongly believes that shared financial means contribute to ownership and commitment to the process and strongly encourage the Partners to make sufficient funds available to implement the Plan.

***Foster the role of civil society – but regrettably within the realm of national legislation***

The EMHRN welcomes the recognition that a strengthened dialogue and cooperation between governmental and non-governmental actors across the Euro-Mediterranean region is necessary, including civil society organizations as well as women's associations. It also appreciates that the Partners will foster the role of civil society organizations to work for promotion of women's rights and that they will contribute to the strengthening of the capacity of and networking among civil society organizations. However, the EMHRN strongly regrets the reference that it will be done in 'accordance with national legislation as appropriate'. In order for civil society to play its appropriate role, its independence from government interference need to be guaranteed. In many countries in the region, national legislation does not comply with international human rights standards, and impedes the room of manoeuvre of civil society organisations, including women's associations. Hence the document should have made reference to international human rights standards and not to national legislation.

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***Review Mechanism – but no clear mandate and responsibility for implementation***

The EMHRN welcomes the incorporation of a review mechanism proposed in the Plan (the annual meeting of the EuroMed Committee, a Euromed ad hoc meeting at expert senior officials level to review the implementation and to inform the EuroMed Foreign Affairs Ministers Conference; as well as a follow-up Ministerial conference in 2009). However, the EMHRN is worried about the lack of a clear mandate for such a review mechanism, and that, in lack of a clear mandate and lack of reporting mechanisms, there is a serious threat of lack of monitoring and implementation of the Plan.

Furthermore, the Plan of Action does not specify the level at which responsibility for the implementation of the different actions lies - whether at national level of individual Partner States, at EU level or at regional level, which also threatens to hamper proper implementation as none would feel ownership and responsibility.

Finally, a follow Euro-Med Ministerial conference in 2009 to evaluate progress made seems late as only one year of the 5 year plan would remain to redress possible short comings in implementation.

***EMHRN Recommendations in relation to implementation of the Plan of Action for 'Strengthening the Role of Women in Society':***

1. The EMHRN recommends that a Work Plan is developed to accompany the Five Year Plan which should be clear, explicit and specific in the goals it wants to achieve in the short, medium and long term and the time frame within which to achieve these goals. It should develop clear indicators and benchmarks in order to measure progress towards its goals. It should make recommendations for working tools to be used in the implementation of the proposed plan.
2. A Follow-up Committee should be established to clarify the composition, and mandate of the review mechanism and ensure regular input in and monitoring of the implementation. The reporting process as well as the financial resources at its disposal should be specified. The Plan should entail a periodic and systematic evaluation<sup>5</sup>. Representatives of relevant civil society organisations with track record in this field should be part of the Follow-up Committee.
3. The Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference in 2009 evaluating the progress in the implementation of the 5 Year Plan of Action, should ensure the participation of NGO and that an important role is given to the NGOs to enrich exchanges between civil society and the Ministerial conference.
4. The EMP should support the setting up of observatories in each country consisting of representatives of civil society to monitor the implementation of the Plan of Action and to make a yearly report on their findings.
5. The European Union and the Partner States should strengthen information and consultation with NGOs on the gender equality dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the

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<sup>5</sup> One such evaluation mechanism could be the distribution of a questionnaire which the Partner States (with the support of the delegations) should fill in measuring the process made in the implementation of the Istanbul Plan of Action on a yearly basis.

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European Neighborhood Policy (ENP).

6. The Democracy Facility should be made available to countries which also make progress in the field of women's rights.
7. The European Parliament and the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly should be encouraged to be more involved in the implementation of the Plan, especially at the level of follow-up of the implementation of the Plan.
8. The Euro-Med Foreign Ministers Conferences should regularly evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the Plan of Action and Gender should become a high priority on national levels as well as on EU levels, and it should be worked on by high level bodies.
9. Coherence and synergies should be ensured between the Plan of Action and the EMP and ENP frameworks in relation to gender mainstreaming and promotion of women's rights.
10. Funding necessary for the implementation of the Plan should allocated by the EuroMed governments.