



# Arab International Women's Forum المنتدى العربي الدولي للمرأة

## *2005 Programme Report & Recommendations*

Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World

المرأة كمحرك أساسي للنمو الاقتصادي في العالم العربي

29 September 2005 at the  
Foreign & Commonwealth Office, London

With the valued support of



Foreign &  
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The League of Arab States, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, UK

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe at the European Parliament, The World Bank,  
Instituto de Empresa Business School, Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura



With the support of the AIWF 2005 Programme Partners



In collaboration with

Women's Strategy Group of Egypt's International Economic Forum  
No Peace Without Justice



## Arab International Women's Forum

### *2005 Programme*

# Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World

## Chairman's Message

The Arab International Women's Forum Programme for 2005 centres on the concept *Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World*. Its focus is on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, launched in November 1995 in Barcelona and which is recognised as an excellent instrument for the promotion of women's participation in economic and social affairs.

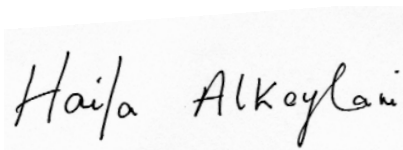
The Barcelona Process, a wide framework of political, economic and social relations between the member states of the European Union and partners of the Southern Mediterranean, has laid the foundations of a new regional partnership that is viewed as a turning point in Euro-Mediterranean relations.

Firmly recognising that the major challenge the region faces to achieve peace and prosperity lies in its economic development and a major engine of that growth is to fully utilise the skills and potential of women, AIWF provided its 2005 programme as a catalyst to spur this development.

The programme addressed the issues that will make a difference in the every day lives of Arab women and resonate deeply in their local communities as well as having an international dimension. Two linked conferences in 2005, in April at the European Parliament, Brussels and in June at the League of Arab States, Cairo, produced a frank exchange of ideas and views and brought forward a strong series of actionable and practical recommendations for policy makers and business leaders to consider.

This report is the outcome and becomes the platform for AIWF and its partners to advocate the necessary economic and social reforms they have identified. The best way to achieve these objectives is through the active participation of the important institutional stakeholders who are well positioned to remove barriers and make the recommendations a reality.

The impact of overcoming challenges and increasing benefits to women will be seen as the next major breakthrough in economic development in the Arab world. AIWF remains engaged with all parties and fully committed with them in achieving the greater participation of women as positive agents of change to move the agenda for prosperity and peace forward.



**Haifa Fahoum Al Kaylani**

Chairman, Arab International Women's Forum

# Arab International Women's Forum

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### Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World

#### Executive Summary

The Arab International Women's Forum developed its 2005 Programme around two linked conferences to look at the current status of women in the economy, accomplishments in the past decade and areas where further action is required.

- *Ten Years After Barcelona: Empowering Women as Catalysts for Economic Development* held at the European Parliament in Brussels, 7-8 April 2005, focussed on women in business, in corporate life, and as entrepreneurs.
- *Women and Integrated Rural Development* held at the League of Arab States in Cairo, 12-13 June 2005, focused on women in rural areas looking more closely at education and training, micro-financing, integration into the business world, rural-urban integration and equality.

The programme involved leading European and Arab organisations putting the women's agenda at the centre of public policy for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The conferences featured plenary sessions which explored challenges, identified best practices and provided ample opportunity to share experiences around important themes about women and economic development, women's contribution to the economy and women in business. The actionable recommendations that came forward at the conferences represent a significant body of opinion.

#### Priority Recommendations

In order to improve the prospects of women in the region and to facilitate their full integration in the economy the following priority recommendations are highlighted for action by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and Arab Governments:

##### Public policy

- Improvement of the institutional support and legal framework to provide increased opportunities and incentives for the participation of women in business
- Coordination of collective strategies among all stakeholders (i.e. local agents, governments, private sector and NGOs) towards integrating women at all levels into local and international economies

**by**

- Establishing an independent public body to promote equality
- Improving statistical research in each country in order to be able to implement gender based policy analysis
- Ensuring that women are accorded equal rights in legal and political frameworks and women's equal status is formalized in the different instruments and agreements at the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's disposal

## **Education**

- Initiation of educational campaigns aimed at enabling women to compete equally in the workforce
- Expansion of educational opportunities and skills training for females at all levels and ages

**by**

- Creating university courses on human rights
- Ensuring that school text books reflect new realities of diverse communities to help overcome gender stereotypes
- Offering career counselling for girls in higher education focused on labour market needs
- Setting and monitoring annual targets to ensure that rural women's access to education and skill training increases year on year

## **Finance**

- Increased access for women to sources of finance for business development
- Increased financial resources to help women to obtain the necessary skills

**by**

- Initiating public awareness campaigns to inform women of sources of financial assistance
- Working in partnerships with public, private and civil society organizations and financial institutions to improve financing opportunities for women
- Making EU/Government funding more readily available to women

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Recommendations

Whilst certain recommendations have been highlighted this does not lessen the importance of the more general recommendations which are grouped under the themes on which both conferences were based.

**Education Opportunities and Training Programmes**

Government bodies, universities and other educational establishments are called on to review and reform the education system to:

- a. Ensure the availability of quality learning and equal educational opportunities for women at all levels
- b. Reform the school policies/curriculum to improve opportunities for young women to acquire university scholarships, funding, and access to courses on business related topics, i.e. economics, finances, trade, and career counselling. The formulation of the new curricula should be designed to meet the needs of women managers, ensuring the inclusion of training in technical and soft management skills
- c. Extend E-learning and information technology education to women, with particular emphasis on introducing aid schemes to facilitate women's access to IT equipment
- d. Ensure that school text books reflect the realities of diverse communities to help overcome gender stereotypes

***With regards to targeting rural women:***

- e. Continue to combat illiteracy by ensuring that there is education for all, including programmes for women, older people, the disabled and those who live in remote areas
- f. Promote knowledge of local and handicraft methods of production and how such skills must be integrated to create a more sustainable development programme
- g. Promote awareness on preserving biodiversity and genetic resources with an environmentally sustainable approach
- h. Spearhead conscious building campaigns on local, national and international levels on the value of traditional/local products and its artisans

## Entrepreneurial Capacity Building

- a. Implement programmes that promote self-confidence and allow women to develop assertive attitudes towards their visibility within the workforce
- b. Commerce and trade organizations/institutions should develop an Arab Women's Small and Medium Enterprises Alliance (SMEA) with links with European counterparts
- c. Governmental, public and private organisations and NGOs should create mentoring programmes for upcoming women entrepreneurs which will provide role models and enhance the development of individual initiatives
- d. Strengthen linkages between the business sector and schools and include women entrepreneurs as role models
- e. Assess the current state of women's entrepreneurship in the Arab world by developing factual data and statistics so that policy makers can make informed decisions based on empirical data

## Public Policy

Stakeholders are called upon to adopt clear and concise policies reflected in supported programmes aiming to change attitudes towards women in business and to help facilitate visible increases in women entrepreneurs. As such governments are to:

- a. Support families, not just mothers, by introducing parental leave, childcare, financial support, and regulation of working hours
- b. Establish an independent public body to promote equality
- c. Affirm the role of Arab women in the implementation of the Arab Free Trade Zone
- d. Integrate the diverse roles of community institutions into the development and decision-making process supported by improved cooperation between the public and the private sector
- e. Maintain and advance the reform of the legal and political frameworks to give women full rights
- f. Implement gender-based policy analysis to help identify the links between gender, equality, economic growth, poverty reduction and the efficacy of public policy
- g. Improve statistical research in each country, and adapt the design of household surveys
- h. Integrate gender issues into programme design and government policies in their initial planning stages
- i. Implement strategies to integrate various sectors, with emphasis on developing judicial, institutional and financial tools to allow for sustainable rural development
- j. Governments need to favour maximum decentralization to facilitate increased participation of local governance and local actors
- k. Implement adequate and necessary mechanisms/instruments to:
  - i. Establish the framework whereby local projects/activities are coordinated
  - ii. Mobilize resources to fully capitalise on their value
  - iii. Insure the viability of actions

***People in the Media are urged to:***

- a. Develop a strategy for combating social stereotypes, targeting both men and women.
- b. Design media campaigns to achieve equal gender competence in education, business and human rights
- c. Improve the image of women in the media by focusing on the new role of the Arab woman

***Civil Society is encouraged to:***

- a. Assert the role of women in making use of resources that will stand up to the levels of investment and economic development
- b. Create institutions that address the specific needs of women

**Financial Resources and Economic Reform**

- a. Increase and accelerate the delivery of funding allocated by the EU to the Arab Region to ensure that a focus is placed on empowering women as human capital and that funding is targeted to ensure that more efficient and effective programmes are available
- b. Joint commitment by the European Commission and the governments of partner countries to improve funding for institutions providing scholarships for vocational training and basic education in order to eradicate illiteracy and to promote networks
- c. EU to work in partnerships with public, private and civil society organizations, to improve financing opportunities for women and increase access for women to income generating activities and economic empowerment

***With regard to integrated rural development:***

- d. Improve market conditions to bolster involvement of small-scale farmers in agriculture economy
- e. Abolish barriers against importation of agricultural goods to help poor countries develop the agricultural sector
- f. Improve standards and quality control of agricultural goods
- g. Give people the right to control water and natural resources within clearly defined international borders
- h. Encourage and increase investment in agriculture/agro-business to create jobs, boost income and ensure food security
- i. Examine territorial redistribution options of infrastructure (with emphasis on constructing well equipped schools, markets, and roads) allowing those in rural areas to have increased access/opportunities for education and work in an economic friendly environment
- j. Support the realization of economically feasible projects which are ecologically sustainable
- k. Apart from agricultural reform, increase other economic activities to rural areas, such as environmental/adventure tourism and industrial incubators

## Partnership

- a. Governments to work more closely and collaborate with the NGO community, co-operatives, businesses and local governments on development issues
- b. Create national debates at regional levels to discuss issues about rural development and implementation of policies and programmes – especially policies relating to the social, educational, health, and financial services offered by various stakeholders
- c. Strengthen the role of NGOs as catalysts between various stakeholders by means of:
  - i. Clearly outlining objectives and target groups of programmes.
  - ii. Encouraging dissemination of information among varying target audiences
  - iii. Being accountable to rural society

### ***In the spirit of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership:***

- d. The European Commission should work with its partners to encourage and accelerate the necessary reforms at the political level, and ensure that women's rights are formalized in the different instruments and agreements at the Partnership's disposal. Determined efforts should be made to mainstream women's issues in all sectors

## Corporate Involvement

### ***Corporations and business organizations should:***

- a. Promote positive flexible dynamic attitudes to employment and entrepreneurship
- b. Encourage business exchanges
- c. Establish business networks allowing for the recruitment and development of women
- d. Be involved with women participating in public life; and support grassroots/community organizations and other initiatives for women
- e. Enhance steps to further the dialogue between the EU, Arab nations and the corporate sector
- f. Encourage women showing high potential from junior/middle management to attend conferences concerning women and economic empowerment
- g. Set annual targets for the number of women in management and executive positions
- h. Through surveys/focus groups, document input from women employees about career challenges and take action to remedy issues
- i. Provide work-balanced programmes at corporate levels. Corporations need to support working women by introducing parental leave, child care and flexible working hours
- j. Develop career development plans, including coaching, mentoring, and leadership programmes
- k. Promote more women to board positions in order to make women more visible at the top, using female leadership positions to help mentor other women
- l. The finance and execution of programmes implemented must be ethically conscious and have respect for social and religious traditions

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## Women in the Arab World

The inclusion of women in the economic process can be a fundamental catalyst for dynamic social and economic development. Women's contributions to the local, national and global economy is substantial and rising, while, at the micro level, they help improve competitiveness. Still too many women remain excluded from the economic mainstream, to the detriment of their societies, their families and their own individual lives.

Women in the Arab world have achieved significant advancement in recent years. However, women in the region are still facing difficulties in reaching leadership positions in corporations and/or running lasting and efficient entrepreneurial ventures. One of the reasons identified is lack of awareness of the opportunities available. Another is the need for specific management skills and competencies, as well as the need for more solid links with partners in Europe and other regions.

As we approach the 10th anniversary of the Barcelona Process and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, it is now the right moment to enhance the economic conditions of women, as well as to develop new bridges between civil society on both sides of the Mediterranean. This is an imperative for both the Arab and the European world.

***Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World - has sought to draw public attention not only to the problems and challenges of bringing more women into the economic life of the region but also to the huge advantages to be gained by making it happen. The two linked conferences have produced specific recommendations, and recommendations that will add value to existing considerations. The first step, the identification of the issues at hand, is well advanced. What is now needed is a more concrete and concerted effort on specific concerns.***

***Doing nothing is not an option.***

The value of women's contributions to the economy and to society remains at the heart of the Arab International Women's Forum, when women prosper, families and communities also prosper. Women's contributions to the economy help nurture a secure, stable and peaceful society.

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## The Arab International Women's Forum

Building bridges, building business has been the guiding principle of the Arab International Women's Forum since its launch in 2001.

The Arab International Women's Forum is the voice of Arab women in business, government, civil society and all aspects of public life, showcasing their contribution to economic development and growth in the Arab world and globally. It is the first non-profit organisation of its kind bringing together Arab and international business and professional women to provide a unique network for them to build their knowledge, develop their potential and promote their economic and business activities in Arab and international markets. AIWF works to break stereotypical images of women and create greater public awareness of their success and prospects within an international context. The Board of Trustees are all successful women giving voluntary support and advice to this organisation.

AIWF acts as a conduit for its Arab and international members to widen key contacts and friendships, foster co-operation, enhance their business and marketing and investment skills, and keep up to date with current issues affecting women in all aspects of public life. AIWF provides a programme that focuses on capacity building and effects change to empower women in the region.

The Arab International Women's Forum helps to facilitate greater debate in public policy areas that are crucial to women in the Arab world. Since 2002, AIWF has initiated a series of conferences in European and Arab capitals – themes building from one to the next – that promote the role of women in the economies of the Arab world and in Arab society at large. The series has added incremental value to, and impacted on the continuing scrutiny of women's role, participation and life in the region.

It is through international and Arab partnerships and collaborative projects that the Arab International Women's Forum strengthens its activities and reaches out to new audiences. Working at the highest levels, AIWF's growing role is acknowledged in very many leading Arab and international organisations – among them, the League of Arab States, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, UK, the World Bank, the Commonwealth Business Council, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, National Women's Commission in the UK, and the National Council of Women in Egypt. AIWF has been represented at meetings and conferences of the Arab Labour Organisation, the World Economic Forum, the OECD and the Jeddah Economic Forum. Many of our members are involved locally in their respective business and women's associations, Chambers of Commerce and NGOs.

The Arab International Women's Forum greatly appreciates the valued and ongoing support of our Annual Corporate Sponsors: Shell, Pepsico International, Hildon, Procter & Gamble, PricewaterhouseCoopers, HSBC, IBM and General Motors.

The Arab International Women's Forum is a membership based organisation. For more information about members' benefits, the AIWF programme and a membership application, kindly contact our office.

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**Programme Partners**

The Arab International Women's Forum would like to thank our Programme Partners for their valuable contribution to the 2005 programme.

**Instituto de Empresa Business School, Spain**

Founded in 1973, Instituto de Empresa (IE) is an independent, international business school located in the heart of Madrid, Spain's capital and business centre. IE is characterized by its markedly global approach, its innovative and entrepreneurial spirit, and its commitment to promoting socially responsible business initiatives. The school is fully recognized by the three leading international accreditation agencies in business education: AACSB, EQUIS and AMBA, and is consistently ranked as a leading European business school.

**Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura, Spain**

Launched in 1989 as a non-governmental organisation, the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture promotes human, social and economic development and cultural identity in the Mediterranean region. It has had general consultative status with ECOSOC of the United Nations since 2004.

The Foundation's main areas of intervention are education, vocational training, integrated rural development, management of water resources, housing, promotion of democracy, basic human rights and public freedoms, capacity building and institutional strengthening of the civil society as well as promotion of women's full participation in the society and empowerment of women.

**Conference Partners**

The Arab International Women's Forum would particularly like to thank our Conference Partners whose generous support made the 2005 Programme possible.

**Foreign & Commonwealth Office, UK**

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office works for the United Kingdom's interests in a safe, just and prosperous world. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Jack Straw, is responsible to Parliament for the work of the FCO.

The Foreign Secretary launched the Global Opportunities Fund in 2003 to focus FCO spending more closely on its strategic priorities. The Engaging with the Islamic World programme within that Fund was established to encourage positive engagement with the Muslim world and political and economic reform in Arab countries. The programme aims to strengthen the rule of law, promote good governance and increase the participation of women in the democratic process within the countries in which they live.

**The League of Arab States, Cairo**

Since its establishment 60 years ago, the League of Arab States has served as a forum where common Arab interests are debated. The League of Arab States, an association of independent Arab-speaking countries, was founded in 1945 to strengthen ties among its 22 member states, co-ordinate policies and promote common interests. The Arab League is involved in political, economic, cultural and social programmes. The Arab League

serves as a forum for coordinating policy positions, deliberating on matters of common concern and promoting economic integration. It convenes twice a year and in special sessions as the need arises. It is supported by a number of Permanent Committees and a General Secretariat which is divided into 14 departments concerned with political, economic, environmental, social and legal affairs. As part of their women's initiative, the League of Arab States has supported the establishment of the Arab Woman Organisation.

Building on strong and traditional ties, the Arab League is pursuing closer relations with various groups in Asia, Africa, Latin America and elsewhere in the developed world. It maintains and upgrades channels of dialogue and co-operation with the United States and the European Union.

### **The Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)**

Formed in June 2004, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe is a political group in the centre of the European Parliament bringing together 88 MEPs from 19 different countries. Its members are from Liberal, Democrat and Centrist Parties across the European Union who share a common vision and ambition for Europe – that more can be achieved by acting together in certain areas than each of the Member States acting separately. ALDE recognises the importance of collective action and European collaboration in areas such as preserving the environment, combating terrorism and promoting international human rights.

### **The World Bank**

The World Bank is one of the two Bretton Woods Organizations that were established after World War II. It is made up of 184 countries which, as shareholders, are jointly responsible for how the institution is financed and how its lending is carried out. One of the world's largest sources of multi-lateral development assistance, the World Bank supports the efforts of developing countries' governments in policy advice and in project preparation and implementation. Its lending operations cover such areas as education, health, provide water and electricity, fight disease, private sector development, and protect the environment through its many programmes. In 2004 the World Bank provided \$20.1 billion for 245 projects in developing countries worldwide, with its finance and/or technical expertise aimed at helping those countries reduce poverty.

## **Corporate Partners**

The Arab International Women's Forum is proud to have as corporate partners for the 2005 Programme:

### **Shell**

Present in over 130 countries, Shell aims to meet the energy and petrochemicals needs of society in ways that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

Shell produces more oil and gas than any other private company. They integrate business from seismic surveys and drilling, through trading and refining, to the marketing of fuels, electricity and chemicals to over 20 million customers a day. Shell has pioneered much of the world's oil and gas technology in use today and continue to innovate in all other activities, including their growing renewable energy business.

Shell's partnerships in the Middle East stretch back over a century. Today they are involved in exploration and production in Abu Dhabi, Egypt, Iran, Oman and Syria and are developing business in Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Corporate social responsibility is very much on the Shell agenda with the view to maximizing employment opportunities and providing sustainable development as part of their ongoing activities.

### **IBM**

At IBM, workforce diversity is a business imperative as fundamental as delivering superior technologies and services to the marketplace. They strive to be a great company not only for their customers, suppliers, partners, and other stakeholders, but for their 320,000 employees and the communities in which they work and serve. At IBM they benefit from and participate in the diversity of 164 countries throughout the world. Diversity is a global priority. They are committed to making workforce diversity a bridge between the workplace and the marketplace everywhere they operate.

IBM is the world's largest information technology company, with 80 years of leadership in helping businesses innovate. Drawing on resources from across IBM and key IBM Business Partners, IBM offers a wide range of services, solutions and technologies that enable customers, large and small, to take full advantage of the new era of e-business. For more information about IBM, visit [www.ibm.com](http://www.ibm.com)

### **Commercial International Bank (Egypt) S.A.E.**

The Commercial International Bank was established in 1975 as a joint venture between the National Bank of Egypt (51%) and the Chase Manhattan Bank (49%) under its original name 'Chase National Bank of Egypt'. Following Chase's decision to divest its equity stake in 1987, National Bank of Egypt increased its shareholding to 99.9%, and the Bank changed its name to Commercial International Bank (Egypt) S.A.E.

In 1999, CIB launched its Retail Banking activity offering a wide range of products and services aiming at diversifying CIB income mix, and capitalizing on CIB strong corporate base. CIB started an ambitious 4-years plan to centralize the bank (investing in the future). The IT conversion was finalized early in 2003 and the bank became fully centralized. Over the last few years, CIB added Commercial International Life Insurance (CIL), CONTACT Car Trading Company, and CorpLease for Financial Leasing to its affiliates.

## **Local Programme Partners**

The Arab International Women's Forum would like to also thank Local Programme Partners who helped to deliver the AIWF 2005 Programme.

### **No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ)**

No Peace Without Justice is an international non-profit human rights organisation, established in 1993, working for the rule of law and for the promotion of accountability for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. To date, NPWJ has organised 25 major inter-governmental regional conferences to mobilise international political will on its campaigns. NPWJ has also undertaken a wide ranging programme of technical assistance through the secondment of legal experts to governments and has carried out a number of country-specific programmes using its expertise in international criminal law.

### **Women's Strategy Group**

The Women's Strategy Group (WSG), of Egypt's International Economic Forum, encourages women's active involvement in economic, social and political life. It strengthens the economic capacity of WSG members and builds strategic alliances, coalitions and affiliations through regional and international networking opportunities.

The WSG adopts fresh approaches to engender a culture of women's role in business at large and influences public opinion and policy. The Group raises awareness about corporate social responsibility and promotes gender sensitive policies in government plans.



Arab International Women's Forum  
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