



Arab Labor Organization
Arab Labor Office

Speech of His Excellency
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The Arab Women's International Forum
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Mrs. Haifa Al Kaylani

Chairman of the Arab International Women's Forum

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I avail this opportunity to thank Mrs. Haifa Al Kaylani, and members of the Forum's Council, thank you for giving me this chance to be with you in this important forum which discusses a very important issue, having its slogan "Partners for Change" to boost woman's participation in both the public and private sectors.

We appreciate the forum's chairman and its council members for the great efforts exerted in recent years. Since established in 2001, we have witnessed successive achievements as the Forum has made its views clear and has managed to get support from major international corporations, international development agencies, boosted by active Arab partners.

The subject of this Forum is a step in the long road of the care the Forum gives to the Arab woman, especially if she is a business woman owner. The issue of partnership is closely connected to the status of woman in the new world order, to peace and means of benefiting from the positive opportunities globalization offers. These subjects have been the main themes of the Forum for the last few years.

The segment of female employers grows fast in the Arab region, especially in GCC states, as shown in the documents of the Forum and reports of the Arab Labor Organization. In this context, Abu Dhabi Investment House estimated that the fortune of businesswomen in GCC states is more than 37 billion US dollars in 2007. Subsequently, a bank for Gulf businesswomen was established in Manama in the same year.

Recent developments and activities of Arab businesswomen disprove the stereotype about Arab woman, the Arab World and Arab culture, especially in international media outlets. Whenever the Arab woman has the slightest opportunity, she shows her impressive abilities.

In Saudi Arabia, women run 10% of private businesses and the Saudi woman has 20% of the capital functioned in the common investment funds. There are also 13 bank branches dedicated only for women. In United Arab Emirates, women represent 66% of workers in the government, as 30% of them are in leading positions, while 43% of investors in Dubai Stock Exchange are women.

Women's participation increased significantly in the parliament, municipal councils and employers' organizations, i.e., Chambers of Commerce and Industry. Also, Businesswomen's Councils and NGOs for women expand to be hundreds all over the Arab World.

Education of the Arab woman expands and develops as the rate of female enrollment in the secondary education is higher than the rate of males in eleven Arab countries. Regarding the university-level education, the rate of females is still higher in ten Arab countries. Subsequently, health care and life expectancy for females improved.

This is the bright side, but we should not forget some deteriorating conditions of the Arab woman. Which I will refer to:-

- 1- Most Arab women live in rural areas and they suffer poverty, illiteracy, lack of health care, education services and their human rights. Therefore, the Arab Labor Organization considers a promising project for rural women to be covered by social insurance and social protection network. . We hope that this project shall be supported by Arab leaders, Employers' organizations and Civil Society organizations, especially those which care about women.**

- 2- Arab women suffer from unemployment in higher rates than their male counterparts. The general unemployment rate is around 14%, thus leaving around 17 million Arabs unemployed in 2007. Furthermore, unemployment among women is double and sometimes three times higher than unemployment among men. Unemployment among female youth is 2 times higher than unemployment among male youth. Besides, getting closer to realities clarifies more deteriorating conditions.**

- 3- Unemployment among educated women is the highest, among all. Despite the relative improvement in employment conditions in recent years, Unemployment levels among women get worse due to the disconformity between education systems and requirements of labor market. In the period 2000-2006, unemployment levels among women increased two times in Jordan and three times in Syria, Egypt and Yemen.**

- 4- One of the significant observations is that women older than 30 years represented 14% of career women workers in 2005, while they represented less than 11% in 1990. This can be explained in terms of improvements of girls' education, but also in terms of governments' retreat to employ especially that governments were the major employers of women, especially graduates.**

If current employment opportunities for Arab women are unsatisfactory, I am still afraid that such conditions may worsen in the future and the worst is yet to come, for different reasons, such as:-

- **Arab labor force grows in an annual rate of 3%, but women labor force grows in a rate of 4% and this figure is increasing due to expansion of women education, high living costs, awareness of the culture of right to work and other social changes.**
- **This decade witnesses the most important increase in labor force due to demographic reasons. Women represent about 36% of the new comers to the labor market every year. This means we need to create 1.4 million new jobs every year for women.**
- **We can not depend on the public sector for employment, as this sector has been saturated, while economic reform programs do not encourage more employment in the government and public sectors. Employment growth in recent years indicates that it is either in negative or too slow in the two sectors, with few exceptions such as Jordan, while real employment is achieved through the private sector.**
- **The informal private sector is the main source of employment. Work conditions are deteriorated in this sector especially for women (micro- enterprises and work in the family without payment). Therefore, employment may grow in these sectors, but at the expense of decent work.**

- Employment conditions for women are worsened because of fierce international competition, market conditions and lack of training opportunities for women. .

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In addition to that we can refer to more points:-

- The increasing number of woman-dependent families.
- Influences of wars, conflicts and occupation, as woman is the primary victim.
- Increasing discrimination at work against women, as this discrimination may be due to certain religious false conceptions, and thus accompanied by social tensions, especially in bad employment climates. This reduces opportunities of woman's participation and marginalizes her role.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the Arab Labor Organization, we work in different areas some of which:-

- Close monitoring for conditions of Arab career women through the committee of woman worker affairs, a committee that encompasses women leaders, employers' organizations and academic women. The committee is patronized by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdalla Queen of Jordan as her honor chairman.

- The Arab Labor Organization seeks to develop vocational training for women to increase her chances of promotion and employability.
- The ALO works to encourage NGOs concerned with woman and the Organization is keen on participating in other distinguished activities, like this successful forum.
- The ALO exerts all possible endeavors to support employment efforts in all Arab states and reduce unemployment for all categories. In this context, the Organization works hard to make employment atop the agenda of the forthcoming Arab Economic Summit as the problem of unemployment is a common problem and no country is immune against it. .

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a precious opportunity to support the role of international institutions in promoting Arab Women. Within this framework, I am glad to refer to a conference that the Arab Labor Organization shall organize in Morocco next October on the new role of the private sector, especially in employment. At the same time, a forum for Arab businesswomen shall be held. As well, another great event, a 3+3 conference on development and employment shall take place in Doha by the end of this year. Let's hope that international and civil society organizations shall have a pivotal role in these events.

In this meeting, it is important to rethink about the promotion of Business Women Associations. It is not simply to develop their contacts and give more opportunities for professional success. Their success will be reflected on Arab Women image ,their aspiration, their willing for fare participation, their capacities to use globalization and the knowledge Economy for their profit, and to surround obstacles of all kind :professional, social, and in some cases certain religious interpretations.

Their success is in the right direction of the Economic Reform, Promotion of the private sector, good governance, more participation, Gender equity, and of course sustained social and economic development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Perhaps I have troubled you with problems of Arab women .however, what encouraged me was the sincere care and efforts of this Forum and its members regarding Arab women in general and Arab businesswomen in particular.

Before I end my statement I must express great appreciation to the role played by the World Bank for hosting this important event and efforts excelled for the promotion of women in our region .the ALO wishes to confirm it's commitments to the further collaboration and extend all possible support.

I would like to reiterate my thanks and gratitude to Mrs Kaylani and all organizers of this Forum. I wish the forum all success and achieve the objective for which it was called.

Thank you.

Ahmed M. Luqman

Director General

Arab Labor Organization