

Speech in Plenary Session III – Kalliopi Boudara – Dec 10 2007

Mrs President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy and honored to be in Dubai in this first Conference of the Arab International Women's Forum representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece and especially the Minister Mrs Dora Bakoyannis, the first woman Minister of Foreign Affairs in Greece, a world-wide known personality. She sends her greetings and best wishes to all Arab women who are taking part in this Conference and struggle for equality, a better future for them and their children and peace.

Greece has traditionally had good and friendly relations with the Arab world. It is a bridge between East and West. Many Arab communities make their home in Greece these days. Some of their members are well-known abroad for their business activities in construction, banking, consultancy etc. Arab women are also involved in business in my country as we are informed by the Arab-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce.

In Greece women have successfully been involved in business for the past half century. The educational system that gave women access to higher education, constitutional reforms, the law system as well as programs of institutional and financial facilities have opened up for Greek women the opportunity to achieve significant advancement in many areas and assume positions in the fields of politics, civil society and

business in big cities and in provinces. Associations and networks of women have been created in order to promote women's involvement in social and business life. Nowadays women are owners of medium-small enterprises and are elected presidents and members of boards of directors as well as executives of big enterprises.

Greek women also have the opportunity to work for EU-financed programs especially involving local authorities, new technologies e.t.c. I shall give you an example: the programs for agro-tourism. In small cities and villages old farmhouses have been restored and turned to elegant small hotels run by women. Women's associations have been created in order to promote traditional crafts and culinary specialties of the regions.

Women's associations collaborate with their counterparts in other South-Eastern European countries, organizing forums and establishing joint programs to promote social and business development in these new democracies. In the same spirit, women of Greece and the Middle-East can also collaborate in many fields and share experiences of tradition and modernity in the context of E.U. and World Bank programs.

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