

Workshop Recommendations

"Europe and the Arab World Connecting Partners in Dialogue" Joint Initiative of Austria and the League of Arab States Ministerial Meeting Vienna, 19 December 2008

Workshop I

Strengthening Women in Society, Public Life and Dialogue

Participants discussed issues regarding the necessity to close the gender gap, to provide an open space and create opportunities for women to utilise their full potential and to play an effective role in the decision-making processes. In addition, participants address the need to strengthen European-Arab women networks and dialogue for the promotion of gender equality, conflict resolution and peace.

Participants urge Europe to further their engagement and to play a pivotal role for a just solution to end the suffering of women and their families living under occupation as well as ending the difficulties and challenges faced by women refugees and the internally displaced persons.

Participants are aware that aside from concrete projects, a long-term perspective is necessary for the achievement of human rights, women's rights, dignity, and justice. For this, partnership, dialogue and actions are essential.

Participants have identified common issues in Europe and the Arab World such as diversity management, minority rights violations, violence against women and women trafficking, low women political participation, and discrimination against women in the labour market.

Participants are concerned about some interpretations of religions adverse to women's full participation in society, the absence of women in intra-religious and inter-faith dialogue and the marginalisation of their role in peace processes and conflict resolution discussions.

Furthermore, participants agree that both regions need committed and progressive decision-makers to achieve gender equality, peace and stability, and the enhancement of active participation of women in political, economic and social life. For this purpose, the CEDAW and other international ratified conventions and UN resolutions (including 1325 and 1820) have to be implemented and reservations to the conventions need to be reconsidered.

Recommendations:

- Undertake curriculum reform for state, private and religious schools to include civil and human rights, women's equal rights in society, cultural tolerance, understanding and acceptance
- Support capacity-building workshops and programmes for women's political and economic leadership
- Encourage dialogue among women, men and religious leaders to advance women's role in public life, to strengthen the partnership and horizontal relationship between sexes and to eliminate gender stereotypes.
- Establish twinning and mentorship programmes between European and Arab state institutions, companies and civil societies
- Increase engagement of women in peace process and conflict resolution dialogue
- Provide exchange programmes about successful legal reforms in the European-Arab region
- Introduce gender-responsive budgeting programmes at national level
- Set up a documentation and archiving centre at the Library of Alexandria (e.g. thematic monographs, policy briefs, annual reports, databases on women organisations and women leaders in various fields, Arab Reform Observatory)
- Sponsor workshops for women theologians for an inter-faith and interreligious dialogue

- Utilise and expand existing scholarship schemes, and provide equal access for women to scholarships and bilingual exchange programmes, and enhance exchanges in language, cultural, social and natural sciences, technology, law and theology
- Fund joint art and media productions that promote cultural understanding, overcome stereotypes, and strengthen relationships and bonds among citizens in European and Arab countries.

Finally, the participants urge both European and Arab governments and institutions to follow up and monitor the implementation of the recommendations adopted, and to fund programmes and commitments made at this joint initiative of Austria and the League of Arab States.

Workshop II

Development of Civil Society, Pluralism and Diversity Management

Civil society has important contributions to make both in Europe and in the Arab World in the empowerment of the population in development, pluralism and democracy. Civil society organizations face many challenges, e.g. lack of managerial capacity and internal democratic processes and donor dependency as well as a lack of their recognition in law and in practice.

The question of civil society is closely linked with the issue of citizenship. There are challenges concerning citizenship both in the Arab World and in Europe. In the Arab World, the empowerment of citizens is sometimes seen as a threat. On the other side, there is widespread apathy and frustration among the population – with limited expectation from government and also limited tradition to engage in civil society. The loyalty of citizens can best be assured by governments being responsive to their needs and aspirations. Cooperation between governments and civil society is an essential element for sustainable development, in light of widespread poverty.

Civic education and human rights education were identified as key components in the strengthening of societies, including civil society, contributing to the promotion of diversity and good governance. While there are important differences among the different regions and individual countries, they all share a common basis and values in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other UN human rights norms.

Participants highlighted the importance of fully recognizing the potential of diversity and pluralism for all societies. While recognizing important challenges, diversity management offers great opportunities for the inclusive and stable development of societies. Such policies need to take into account the multiple identities of each individual – based on nationality, culture, religion, gender, or political affiliation. Identity should be used as a tool for generating pluralism and inclusion. A common challenge for all countries is to fully recognize and embrace marginalized communities of minorities within their societies, be they religious, ethnic, or generated by political or economic migration.

Recommendations:

- Promote capacity and awareness building programmes among the population about citizenship.
- Establish training programmes for public servants, including exchange programmes between Europe and the Arab World.
- Promote initiatives to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs), including the promotion of coordinated networks of CSOs within and among individual countries, including exchange programmes between Europe and the Arab World.
- Encourage the empowerment of civil society and their full participation in public life as an important contribution towards the strengthening of the social fabric and the stability and credibility of the State in general. In all efforts to strengthen civil society, the important role and contribution of women should be given particular attention.
- Seek regular contacts and dialogue with CSOs, thus building confidence and collaboration, while recognizing their autonomy and important role as advocates, thus contributing to pluralism.

- Encourage cooperation with civil society in the development of a culture of human rights, e.g. through implementation of human rights treaties and the integration of civic and human rights education into school and university curricula.
- Promote the use of the UNESCO sponsored Manual on Human Rights Education as a tool for concrete training programmes both in Europe and the Arab World thus contributing to the 2009 UN Year of Human Rights learning.
- Recognize that diversity is inherent in all societies in the Arab World and in Europe and requires management based on human dignity, equality and non-discrimination.
- Fully reflect the existing diversity in society in the composition of all state and civil society institutions and organisations.
- Share different models of relationship between state and religion and reflect them at academic and expert level in order to identify best practices of securing equal free exercise of religion while taking into account different contexts of religious life in society.
- Share experiences and good practices in mechanisms, policies and programmes for the inclusion of marginalised communities in all spheres of public life.
- Undertake special efforts to overcome stereotyping, misperceptions and double standards regarding Arabs and Muslims, as well as Europeans and Christians, in public life, including in the media, curricula and history. Europe and the Arab World should also work together in contributing to a lasting solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in order to ensure sustainable partnership.
- Recognize that intercultural and inter-religious dialogue is a useful instrument to highlight diversity, foster mutual understanding and promotes international cooperation and emphasizes that the dialogue between Europe and the Arab World should be undertaken on the basis of equal partnership and on the basis of identified needs. Dialogue should be focussed, structured and goal and results-oriented.
- Support cooperation between civil society organizations in the Arab World and in Europe to strengthen pluralism, democracy and in confronting terrorism and extremism.
- Facilitate the mobility of people and promote exchange programmes within and among the regions.
- Establish a data base for the collection of good practices of dialogue initiatives, as well as a website on human rights and dialogue in Europe and the Arab World.
- Establish an Arab-Europe forum on citizenship to foster respect and recognition of citizens, including their rights and responsibilities, and their contribution to the development of their country.

Workshop III

Promoting Intercultural Dialogue and Youth Participation in Politics and Civil Society

The discussion evolved around empowering young people across the Arab World and Europe irrespective of their background. The aim must be for youth to be able to reach their full potential as citizens and future leaders.

Issues discussed included the following:

- Individual and collective identities and the use of socio-, psycho- and linguistic terminology (identity formation and integration into host societies) regarding young Arabs in Europe and their role and potential as bridges.
- Experiences of exclusion in EU and within Arab countries.
- Challenges of intra-Arab discussion on youth.

Recommendations:

- The EU and the Arab League and their Member States should hold a Youth Forum, building on existing structures to review implementation of existing commitments and agreements on youth.
- Activate existing structures of one region in the other (embassies, cultural institutes etc.) to reach out more to youth and educational institutions. Use models for Arab reach-out in Europe,

e.g. creating an “Arab Council” devoted to linguistic, academic, cultural, artistic and media activities directed specifically to youth.

- Include an Arab-European intercultural element in the activities of the Cultural Capitals of the EU and the Arab League, and of the EU Youth Capital.
- Include socio-political aspects into the youth dialogue in the EU and the Arab World.
- Identify marginalized youth groups and ensure their full inclusion into dialogue activities, including the religious dialogue activities.
- Secure access to quality education, formal and non-formal, including vocational and civic education as the key way to enable young people to play a full role in society, especially marginalized or disenfranchised groups, including migrants, both within the Arab World and the EU.
- Enhance academic research on youth, including data bases on and dissemination of best practices of exchange and empowerment projects.
- Facilitate mobility of and exchange programmes for young people in particular of students, scholars, researchers, artists and journalists.
- Encourage civil society and private business to promote the entrepreneurial potential of young people in the economy.
- Intensify efforts to translate and distribute works published in both regions related to and read by youth.
- Facilitate formation, including the simplification of procedures, of youth groups and organizations and simplify procedures in order to enhance inclusiveness and social cohesion of youth across all segments of society.
- Encourage political parties and movements to better include youth in their policy formulations and structures and support capacity building for young political leaders.
- Ensure complementarity and coherence of initiatives of inter-cultural dialogue.