



Translating the SDGs to Action:

Participating for Peace for Women and Girls in the Middle East and North Africa

UNITED NATIONS—By 2030, the world aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, but the new development agenda to be adopted by the United Nations (UN) in a few days does not live up to the previous, hard-fought commitments toward gender equality and provides only a fragmented plan to empowering half the world's population.

During the UN Sustainable Development Summit, from 25 to 27 September 2015, the 193 Member States will adopt the new development agenda with an outcome document titled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” The 2030 Agenda – to be implemented over the next fifteen years – includes the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the next generation of global goals to address extreme poverty and which build upon the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Unlike with the MDGs, the process to develop the SDGs was inclusive, involving consultations with civil society and women’s organizations and other stakeholders. As the SDGs will impact every woman and girl in the world, their meaningful participation and leadership and greater investments in gender equality are required to implement the global goals and achieve sustainable development.

However, the 2030 Agenda, although ambitious, contains critical gaps in several important issues for realizing the full rights and empowerment of all women and girls.

Although the outcome document encourages the role of women in peace- and state-building, the text fails to connect gender equality and women's rights with disarmament and peace and security, and lacks any commitment to the mandates of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). Resolution 1325 urges actors to increase women's participation and incorporate gender perspectives in UN peace and security efforts as well as take measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence in conflict.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, increased militarism, terrorism, conflict, and foreign occupation are key sources of violence against women and girls, who also face marginalization and exclusion in decision-making processes. Greater participation and leadership from women is therefore crucial to provide a gender-responsive approach to peace and security efforts and protection measures.

“The participation of women’s groups with State institutions is of paramount importance in overcoming terrorism and in building social peace and family cohesion,” stated Fatemah Khafagy from Egypt.

“International political will is needed to stop all foreign occupations, war, and conflicts so that the SDGs will impact every woman and girls in the MENA region,” stated Victoria Shukri of Women Media and Development (TAM).

Identifying Israeli occupation as the key source of violence against Palestinian women, children and families, she added, “The advocacy and activities of civil society and women's organizations at the international level are crucial in pressing for political will at the United Nations to hold states accountable to end Israeli occupation, respect the Arms Trade Treaty in the MENA region, and stop the inflow of weapons which are used by the occupying forces.”

Moreover, the growing strength and influence of religious fundamentalists within major and minor religions and across regions of the world is a serious concern among women and feminists.

“The 2030 Agenda is evidence of the world's failure to recognize the impact that religious fundamentalism has on women and development, including perpetuating violence against women and girls,” stated one feminist of Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID).

“Now is the time to remain vigilant and remind States of their obligations to stand for the improved status and increased autonomy of women, as well as recognize new frameworks for human rights,” she added.

State governments will be primarily responsible for ensuring the full and effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and civil society organizations and other stakeholders will be instrumental in holding governments accountable.

“The true test for this agenda will be in the implementation; how to translate words from New York into action in our lives, in the streets, and within our communities, to end impoverishment and transform all forms of oppression,” remarked Ana Ines Abelenda of AWID.

“Without active mobilization to transform a deeply unjust global governance system, this process will not achieve gender justice and human rights for all,” Abelenda added.

“This will take more than a document.”

The Post-2015 Women's Coalition is an international network of feminist, women’s rights, women’s development, grassroots, and social justice organizations working to challenge and reframe the global development agenda. For more information, please visit our website at www.post2015women.com and follow us on Twitter @Post2015Women.

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