



**CSW57 New York,
8th March 2013**

Ending Discrimination and Enhancing Women's Security in the MENA region

"Alaan walaysa gadan" - "Now not tomorrow"

We, women human rights defenders from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen, met at the 57th Commission on the Status of Women in New York after a twenty-month process of national consultations and strategic planning.

The biggest threats in our region are poverty, unregulated weapons trade and a lack of democratic oversight of the armed forces. Therefore, achieving full accountability and transparency in military spending and decision-making is essential. We reaffirm our belief that promoting women's equal rights throughout the Arab world is an essential first step to safeguard women from gender-based violence and promote peace and security in our homes and our nations. We stand firm in our call for both CEDAW and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 be implemented in our region today.

Women of Middle East North Africa (MENA) re-state our demand for peace, dignity and human rights for all citizens in our region. We make our call from our position at the front line of peaceful protests. We strongly object to the daily violence to which we are subjected, which not only threatens our safety and security but, is clearly designed to prevent us from fully participating in every aspect of state-building.

We condemn the on-going assaults on women and men, and the growing use of sexual violence; we oppose the arbitrary detention and military trials of civilian protestors and human rights defenders in our region. We refuse to be manipulated by religious extremists whose opposition to women's rights threatens to undo the work of decades of activists.

We also remain steadfast in condemning the impunity of human rights violators. We remain appraised of the legal case of Azza Helal Soliman (Egypt), and renew our call for her military assailants to be brought to justice in fair trials. We renew our call for justice for other women and men attacked as they peacefully exercise their rights.

We observe with concern that militarization is increasing in our region. Defence spending, fed by the global arms trade, is taking away vital resources from social and economic justice. The results of this reckless flooding in of weapons are inevitably an increase in violations of human rights and dignity, further human insecurity, and a spillover of arms into neighbouring countries. We do not want more uncontrollable weapons systems in our region: the deadly effects of the dispersal of Libya's arsenal have already been seen in Mali.

We continue to stand in solidarity with women and men struggling against occupation and oppression in Palestine. We join in grieving the death in Israeli of custody of Arafat Jaradat; we stand in solidarity with the four prisoners on extended hunger strikes; and we

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express our concern that the daily injustice of Israeli violence towards Palestinians remains unaddressed by the global community.

We express our solidarity with women and men in Syria who are victims of the global community's political divisiveness and their resulting failure to protect civilians.

We call on the international community to honour commitments made at the United Nations, specifically the Secretary-General's Seven-Point Action Plan on gender-inclusive peace-building. We note with concern that these commitments have not been honoured in the case of Libya. No women were present in the last two high-level discussions on security sector reform in that country even though they were hosted by the international community including the UK and France, and supported by the United Nations. We also remind the international community that our sisters in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Yemen and Syria, in which conflicts are ongoing, stand ready and able to shape inclusive security – if only they are asked.

We conclude with a strong call to our Governments, all States and international actors of obligations ratified in international human rights law, the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW and SC Resolutions on women, peace and security, to honour their obligations and actualise promises made in the Security Council. We urge the following:

- 1) Fulfil promises already made at the international level to fully engage women in all aspects of peace and security.
- 2) Prioritise women's economic inclusion and public participation as key vectors of human security.
- 3) Stop sales of all arms, including so-called 'non-lethal crowd control' systems such as teargas and rubber bullets, to any country that violates human rights. In this regard, support a criterion on preventing gender-based violence in the upcoming March 2013 Arms Trade Treaty negotiation. Insist on accountability in all arms trade, both on the supply and the demand side.
- 4) In preparation for peace negotiations, ensure that a broad gender analysis is undertaken; and then, that it is endorsed by committed male and female negotiators, political representatives and stakeholders around the table.
- 5) Increase the numbers of women in all security reform processes, peacekeeping operations and disarmament initiatives including national and UN efforts.
- 6) Harmonize national constitutions and legislation with international law (including CEDAW) to guarantee non-discrimination and promote women's rights and gender equality.
- 7) Support the development of 1325 National Action Plans, in partnership with civil society, with accountability mechanisms and ensure adequate and sustained funding for women's organisations.

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