

**OIC-IPHRC 9th SESSION:
OUTCOME DOCUMENT OF THEMATIC DEBATE ON
'IMPACT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT ON SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT OF MEMBER STATES'**

Jeddah 04 May 2016: The OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) held a thematic debate on “*Impact of Women Empowerment on Sustainable Development of Member States*” during its 9th Regular Session, on 04 May 2016. H.E. Iyad Ameen Madani, Secretary General of OIC and IPHRC Chairperson Amb. Abdul Wahab inaugurated the debate. Key panelists for the thematic discussion were Dr. Abdul Salam Al Abadi, Secretary General of International Islamic Fiqh Academy, Amb. Ismat Jahan, Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and Dr. Suhair Hassan Al Qureshi, President/CEO of Dar Al-Hekmat College, KSA.

The Commission Members, OIC General Secretariat, panelists and representatives of Member States had an exhaustive and fruitful discussion that covered the conceptual, institutional and practical aspects of the subject. Besides making valid observations on the existing state of women empowerment, the participants made valuable recommendations for integration of women and girls into sustainable development strategies within existing programs as well as ensuring their effective participation in all future national action plans of Member States.

Based on the comprehensive discussion and specific discussion made in the thematic debate the Commission adopted the following pronouncements on the subject.

Guided by equal rights and inherent human dignity of women and men, as enshrined in the Holy Quran, Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI), United Nations Bill of Rights and other international human rights instruments, including the CEDAW, the Commission affirmed that women’s rights are human rights and their empowerment and full participation in decision-making process and access to power and resources are fundamental not only for fulfillment of their moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs but also achievement of equity, equality, development and peace within each society. It accordingly urged full realization of the human rights of women and girls at all levels. The IPHRC also:

Recalled that the advent of Islam heralded an unprecedented era of women emancipation and empowerment where in status of women was exalted to claimants of codified rights to own and inherit property, take part in economic activities, choose life partner and seek and transmit knowledge. In the development paradigm too, Islam’s concept of development provides for substantive equality, equity and distributive justice according to the needs and circumstances of every segment of population including women who are seen as complementing rather than competing forces in building progressive and peaceful societies.

Underlined the important role of women (who in most countries constitute more than 50% of the total population) in the development of their countries, in particular ensuring the sustainability of social, economic and ecological development. Hence, the need for adopting gender¹ sensitive

¹ For the purpose of this document, it is understood that the term “gender” refers to the two sexes, male and female, within the context of society. The term “gender” does not indicate any meaning different from the above.

approaches to sustainable development by taking into account women's needs, concerns, knowledge, enterprise and skills to enable policy makers develop appropriate policy actions to ensure equitable distribution of resources for just and inclusive societies.

Noted that gender sensitive development strategies register stronger economic growth than gender-neutral strategies. Also, women participation in public policy arena has resulted in more allocation of resources to human development priorities including child health, nutrition and access to civic amenities.

Reiterated that as described in Art 16 of UDHR, family is the basic unit of society, which should be respected, protected and promoted by States. Islam has emphasized women's empowerment in raising a strong and integrated family through harmonious partnership with other family members, which is not at the cost of some one's disempowerment but for the overall betterment and sustainable development of all societies. It, therefore, necessitates access to all opportunities in every field enabling them to contribute effectively in building prosperous and sustainable societies.

Welcomed international commitment to empowerment of all women and girls through full and effective implementation of the internationally agreed development goals contained in Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its follow up through Beijing +20, UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UN Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled '*The future we want*' and the Agreed Conclusions of the 60th Session of Commission on Status of Women through a gender sensitive approach.

Appreciated OIC's commitment to women empowerment as reflected in its revised Charter, 2nd Ten Year Program of Action (TYPOA), OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) with its comprehensive implementation mechanism as well as establishment of Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) and 'Women Development Organization (WDO)' for enhancing the role of women in the development of Muslim societies. In this regard, once again, Member States are urged to expedite ratification with a view to its entering into force.

Identified some of the key underlying drivers of women disempowerment as (i) regressive and discriminatory socio-cultural mindset, norms and laws that restrict women and girls' access to opportunities, resources and power (ii) gender insensitive chronic under investment in social sectors of health and education (iii) asymmetry in awareness and access to information (iv) exclusion and non-participatory planning, decision making and resource allocation; and (v) violence against women. Member States were urged to address these concerns, on priority.

Reaffirmed that violence and discrimination against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace and accordingly urged Member States to adopt or implement and periodically review legislation to ensure its effectiveness in eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.

Recognized the important role and contribution of all actors of civil society, media, human rights institutions, other non-governmental and community-based organizations in realization of objectives of empowerment of women and girls and their full integration into the development process.

While welcoming the progress made by Member States towards gender equality and women empowerment over the past decades, the Commission expressed concern that the progress remains slow and uneven with glaring inequalities and deficiencies in terms of (i) low literacy and labor participation rates (ii) high maternal mortality and morbidity rates, (iii) inadequate laws to prevent and prosecute domestic violence; and (iv) feminization of poverty, which continue to pose serious threats to the well-being of these societies. Also, many women and girls continue to experience vulnerability and marginalization due to multiple forms of discrimination and lack of access to resources throughout their lifecycle. In this regard, the Commission made following specific recommendations:

- Build high-level political commitment and ownership from Member States for the OIC and international transformative initiatives on gender equality and women empowerment including by repealing or amending discriminatory laws, as and where required.
- Adopt gender-sensitive, rights-based and inclusive national action plans, laws, and policies that respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of women and girls in Member States. Such measures may include, reserved quotas and other incentives to strengthen women's representation in political processes, all government institutions, economic enterprises and social organizations;
- Cognizant of prevailing low literacy rates in Member States, the Commission identifies investment in women's' and girls' education as one of the most potent ways to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development. The Member States should endeavour to allocate at least 5 percent of their respective Gross Domestic Product to education with positive discrimination for skill oriented vocational trainings to women and girls including science and technology to enable women and girls to actively participate in economic, social and cultural development on equal footing;
- Close data gaps by investing in national statistical capacity to systematically collect, analyse and use gender sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data in policy, program design and monitoring frameworks that will help governments in preparing and implementing informed policies and plans for the sustainable development of their societies;
- Benchmark progress on (i) assessment of national legislative developments concerning women rights in the Member States; (ii) assessment of the role and contribution of the civil society and media in the advancement of women's rights in Member States; (iii) revision of OPAAW to bring it in conformity with the relevant international human rights instruments and to create linkages with the 2nd OIC-TYPOA; (iv) adoption, review and effective implementation of laws that criminalize violence against women and girls, as well as comprehensive, multidisciplinary gender sensitive preventive, protective and prosecutorial services to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls by Member States;

- OIC General Secretariat, IPHRC, Islamic Development Bank and SESRIC² to explore ways and means to fund self-sustaining community based pilot studies and projects to support women entrepreneurs for women empowerment through private public partnership;
- Member States may avail expertise of relevant UN and OIC institutions including IPHRC in capacity building and training of policy makers for formulation of gender sensitive policies and programs for greater involvement of women in the fields of political, social, economic and cultural development;
- Undertake concrete steps including legislative policies to create enabling environment and ensuring women's full and equal participation in decision-making including in conflict resolution, peace-making and peacebuilding processes that will ensure sustainable progress;
- Importance of gender equality and avoiding stereotyped role of women is a process that needs to be addressed at all levels through appropriate training and education. Member States may integrate women empowerment and importance of family into their Human Rights Education plans at all levels;
- Engage religious leaders and scholars in public advocacy and consensus building to challenge social taboos, change mind set and mobilize support for women related issues.
- Engage men and boys as agents and beneficiaries of change in the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls as allies in the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, as well as in the full, effective and accelerated implementation of gender sensitive policies and programs.

The Commission also appreciated the Secretary General of OIC for his active role towards empowering women in the OIC General Secretariat and Member States and commended his efforts to accelerate progress in the implementation of OIC and other internationally agreed instruments on the subject.

The Commission also welcomed the commitment of the Member States given in the 2nd OIC TYPOA that was adopted during the 13th Islamic Summit in Istanbul (14-15 April 2016) to reinvigorate their joint efforts for reduction in the maternal mortality rate, enhancement of literacy rates and labor force participation among female population by 2025. To this end, the Commission recommended that the upcoming '*6th Session of the OIC Ministerial Conference on Women's Role in the Development of the OIC Member States*', should include these commitments as well as above made suggestions as recommendations for sustained follow up and implementation.

² Statistical Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries