

**Statement of H.E Iyad Ameen Madani,
Secretary General of the
Organisation of Islamic Cooperation during the
thematic debate on the
“Impact of Women Empowerment on the
Sustainable Development of Member States”
At the 9th Regular Session of the IPHRC**

04th May 2016

Excellency Ambassador Abdul Wahab, IPHRC Chairperson
Excellency Dr. Abdul Salam Al-Abadi, Secretary of the International
Islamic Fiqh Academy,
Honourable Members of the Commission,
Distinguished Experts,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a matter of pleasure for me to be able to attend the first thematic debate session of 2016 of the OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC). The theme of today's debate is in sync with the OIC's motto on Women for this year - "*Empowering Women is Empowering Society*".

Women empowerment remains a key priority for the OIC. It recognizes that the issue is not only a matter of gender equality and fulfilment of human rights promises, but an enabler and a transformative force for sustainable development, peace and security.

It is also based on our firm belief that Islam as a religion actually heralded an unprecedented era of women emancipation and established substantive equality between man and woman. The OIC Charter enshrines the noble values of our religion including those related to the rights of women. It emphasises women's pivotal role in sustainable development and calls for women's access to all opportunities in particular good education, health care and access to the market place and equality and recognition by the law.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Not to let the principles and objectives of the OIC Charter related to women remain as rhetoric in written form, the OIC initiated and continues to initiate and implement various programs and activities to empower women, in particular within the OIC Member States.

Since the adoption of the first OIC Ten Year Program of Action (TYPOA) in 2005, five Ministerial level OIC Meetings were held on women, the last one in Baku in 2014. We are preparing for the sixth Women Ministerial Meeting this year in Turkey. All these sessions called for practical steps for raising women's

participation in decision-making mechanisms, providing equal opportunities for women and elimination of all forms of discrimination including combating violence against women.

The OIC adopted a Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in the Member States (OPAAW) and its implementation mechanism, which aims to achieve the aforementioned ideals. This instrument is being revised to meet the evolving demographic landscape and to make it relevant and action-oriented. To this end, I urge the Commission to substantively contribute towards revision and updating of the OPAAW. The Commission, in coordination with the General Secretariat, may also actively participate in all OPAAW related conferences with a view to presenting practical recommendations for the consideration of policy makers of the Member States to help them effectively implement it in their countries.

To sensitize and enhance the positive and meaningful role of women in Member States in all walks of life, the OIC has also established an Organization of Women's Development in Cairo. I take this opportunity to reiterate to all Member States to expedite the ratification of its Statute enabling the Organization to become operational at the earliest.

In order to provide a mechanism for the empowerment of women in the areas of science and technology, the Islamic Network of Women Scientists was created in 2008. The network is administered by senior women scientists from OIC Member States. Also, during the present Summit, a Special Session on First Ladies' Leadership on Cancer Control in Member States was held demonstrating strong leadership of First Ladies to showcase their individual involvement in the fight against cancer and saving lives.

The recently concluded 13th OIC Summit in Istanbul expressed concerns and called upon all OIC Member States to take appropriate measures to reduce the maternal mortality rates, improve literacy and labour participation rates among women. The Summit also adopted OIC's second Ten-year Programme of Action "OIC 2025" (2015-25), which recognizes that despite improvement in the status of women in socio-economic, political and cultural fields over the past decade, there are still gaps and challenges that need to be addressed to optimally utilize the real potential of women as leaders and agents of change.

Accordingly, the OIC 2025 has identified means and modalities to develop synergies with the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals to overcome existing shortcomings in a comprehensive manner.

OIC Member States continue to collaborate with regional and international partners to fulfil their respective international commitments provided in the Bill of Rights, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Distinguished participants,

Nonetheless, the statistical picture clearly shows that despite our efforts as enumerated so far, we are yet to reach the desired objectives of ensuring meaningful empowerment of women. If we look at some recent figures, we would see that in 2013, about 130000 women in the OIC Member States died from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth (that is 44% of world total maternal deaths), which is deeply regrettable. The average physical violence rate reported in the OIC group was 14.4% that is higher than that of the world average of 12.9%. The average labour force participation among female population is currently around 45% far below the world average of 60%. Again, on account of literacy, female literacy rate is 64.2% as compared to 79.3% of males, which is significantly regressive.

We, however, cannot be disheartened or slowed down based on such figures. Recognizing these shortcomings, we along with the international community, emphasize the importance of empowering women and girls as well as mainstreaming the role of women in poverty alleviation, social development and promoting peace and security. These are objectives worth pursuing not for the benefit of women alone but for sustainable development of every society.

However, we need to keep in mind that, empowerment is a process. IPHRC should continue to assist the Member States in identifying prevailing gender gaps, undertaking steps to create enabling environment, and ensuring women's full and equal participation in decision making through enabling policies. In this regards, it would be pertinent to integrate women empowerment and importance of family into the Human Rights Education plans.

It may also be of importance to consider the question of perception. How do we perceive these issues and based on what reference points. An article recently published in the New York Times gives a glimpse on the question of perception. Bina Shah, a Pakistani author, wrote about the perception of Afghan women. She said those perceptions “point to a huge gap between how Westerners have understood the experience of Afghan womanhood, and how Afghan women see themselves. In fact, the self-image of a great many Afghan women does not match the victimhood awarded them by Western aid workers. They see themselves instead as brave, capable and strong. Islam is important to them, as is their honour. They want more freedoms, of course, but they want to be active participants in their own liberation and set their own pace for the struggle.”

I also urge the Commission to continue to work closely with the General Secretariat to expedite ongoing review of various institutional frameworks and legislations pertaining to women, family wellbeing and development in OIC Member States. It will improve their enforceability and create synergies with the gender sensitive international development mechanisms.

I hope that the outcome of today’s deliberations would help Member States in developing societies where women are defined by their strengths and progressive contribution.

I thank you all.