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OIC/2-WCOD/2008-(OPAAW)

**OIC PLAN OF ACTION FOR
THE ADVANCEMENT
OF WOMEN**

(OPAAW)

(Cairo Plan of Action for Women)

ADOPTED BY THE

SECOND MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

ON

“WOMEN’S ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF OIC
MEMBER STATES”

CAIRO – ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT

24-25 NOVEMBER 2008

Introduction

1. The Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in its 32nd Session in Sanaa in 2005 adopted a resolution on “Muslim Women and their Role in the Development of Islamic Society” calling for the convening of a Ministerial Conference to discuss the issues of women and study ways and means to explore opportunities for them to take part in the development of Muslim societies. The resolution also entrusted the Ministerial Conference on Women to draft an OIC Plan of Action in order to enhance the capacity of women to play an active role in all walks of life in the OIC Member States. The offer made by the Republic of Turkey during the 3rd Extraordinary Summit to host the first aforementioned Ministerial Conference received appreciation and was further welcomed through subsequent ICFM resolutions. The said Ministerial Conference on women was held in Istanbul on 20-21 November 2006.
2. The OIC Member States pledged to improve the condition of women in their countries. They also decided that the Istanbul Conference would contribute to develop a road map for women in the OIC Member States. It reflects OIC’s determination in increasing the status of women in the OIC Member States.
3. Throughout history, women have contributed to social life and participated in civilization building and training of generations. Despite these important contributions, women today suffer exclusion and marginalization and face difficulties that impede their participation in social life and other areas. These ideas emanate from non-Islamic norms and practices as well as misunderstanding of religion. Efforts must therefore be made to change this mindset.
4. It is necessary to empower women with knowledge and combat illiteracy among them. Access to quality education as an essential tool to achieve the goals of equality, development and peace, is a fundamental right of every human being. Similarly obtaining knowledge is the primary duty of every Muslim regardless of gender. Non-discriminatory education benefits both men and women, boys and girls, and thus provides them with equal opportunities to strike a more balanced kind of relationship and partnership between them in various fields of life. It also guarantees a sustained and healthy family system based on gender equality.
5. The OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) is based on the recommendations made in the 1st Ministerial Conference on Women’s Role in the Development of OIC Member States in Istanbul. The OPAAW articulates the OIC Member States’ commitment in addressing a range of difficulties faced by women and the OIC is committed to take steps towards eliminating all acts of discrimination against women in order to reduce inequalities between women and men. It earmarks the visionary and comprehensive strategy to advance the status of women.
6. OPAAW is an approach towards the improvement of the conditions and status of women in the OIC Member States, through partnership with women and men, their NGOs, communities and the private sector. In recognition of the rights

given to women by Islam, it is necessary to take specific actions to increase opportunities for them in order to participate effectively in the economic, social, political and cultural spheres of the society.

7. The Member States of the OIC believe that the adoption and implementation of the OPAAW will go further in improving the conditions of the Muslim women. To achieve this objective, it has to be ensured that women participate effectively and independently in social, political, economic, cultural and other fields through appropriate channels in the OIC Member States, including legislative, judicial and law enforcement institutions.
8. Mindful of the obligations of the OIC Member States towards international conventions and instruments, particularly those related to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (the Fourth World Conference on Women 1995), the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000” Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century” and adhering to the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in line with Islamic values of justice and equality and the First OIC Ministerial Conference on Women in Istanbul, OPAAW will serve as an instrument for finding out the ways and means to protect women against inequality and all forms of discrimination against women in order to improve the conditions and promote the status of women.

I. Vision for Women in the OIC Member States

1. Within the framework of the Ten-Year Programme of Action, the Member States of the OIC are working to draft the Covenant on the Rights of Women in Islam in accordance with the Resolution No. 60/27-P and the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam applying gender justice in all fields of life.
2. As was envisaged in the Istanbul Conference, the OIC vision on the development of women is based on social justice, distinctive consideration of women, female education, health and promoting economic activities of the women guided by the lofty teachings of Islam.
3. Recognizes that women in the OIC member states should be respected, developed, empowered, considered full active participants in social, political, cultural and economic spheres, enjoying their rights and fulfilling their duties, promoting dialogue and positive interaction in order to contribute effectively to nation-building.
4. This will be achieved through, inter alia, taking action on developing special legislations for women in order to enable them to participate effectively in all fields of life.

II. OPAAW's Objectives

1. Eradication of poverty, the achievement of sustainable development and provision of adequate resources and support as essential components towards

achieving gender equality and empowerment of women at all levels and all sectors.

2. Raising women's participation in decision-making mechanisms from local to national levels.
3. Providing equal opportunities for women through access to quality education, health-care, and enhanced participation.
4. Elimination of all forms of discrimination including combating violence against women.

III. Measures and Means for Implementation of the Objectives

The Member States of the OIC will promote the status of women and achieve the objectives of OPAAW through the following measures:

1. Eradication of poverty, achievement of sustainable development and provision of adequate resources and support as essential components towards achieving gender equality and empowerment of women at all levels and all sectors through:
 - a) Increase women's earnings through pay and employment equity initiatives, initially in the state sector of Member States.
 - b) Promote family friendly policies, aiming at reconciliation between professional and family life, in particular affordable care services for children, elderly and other dependants and ensure an enabling environment that is suited to women in terms of transport and safety and non-discrimination at the workplace.
 - c) Reflect the proposed measures directed at the issues and needs of women and girls with disabilities.
 - d) Implement strategies that recognize the increasing importance of women in the OIC Member States' paid and unpaid workforce, particularly young women, elderly women and women with disabilities.
 - e) Provide additional support for low-income families, in particular single women-headed households in accordance with national social policies.
 - f) Provide microcredit for women as this has proven to improve the status of women and their families in the societies and economies of many OIC Member States.
 - g) Increase women's capacities and skills by improving their access to financial planning advice.
 - h) Increase women's uptake of retirement savings schemes.

- i) Facilitate the application of loans for girl and women students and the settlement of their debts.
 - j) Improve greater participation in enterprise by encouraging more women to get access to development funding, and by identifying new opportunities for them.
 - k) Promote and strengthen national machineries to collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data.
 - l) Study and analyze the impact of macro-economic policies on women's and men's employment.
 - m) Develop gender-focused research to enable a more effective gender planning aiming at strengthening the role of women in the economy.
 - n) Pursue the establishment of gender-responsive budget initiatives and ensure more effective poverty-eradication strategies at both national and local levels.
 - o) Promote greater women's representation and participation in economic decision-making positions.
 - p) Promote women's entrepreneurship by improving inter-alia women's opportunities and access to land, finance, markets, information, ICT training and networking and encourage financial institutions to tailor products to women's needs.
 - q) Encourage studies and data collection on women's performance in the public and private sectors in order to highlight their contributions to the economy of their families and societies.
 - r) Improve the co-ordination and provision of government services to women, particularly in rural areas, including access to health, education, economic opportunities and legal assistance.
2. Raising women's participation in decision-making mechanisms from local to national levels:
- a) Promoting increased participation of women in all decision-making bodies, including through ensuring their equal opportunities to participate fully in the political process.
 - b) Introducing more effective measures aimed at eradicating poverty among women and improving their living conditions to promote the realization of their full human potential and enable their advancement and equal participation in decision-making.
 - c) Ensuring equal access for women to education and training to equip them with necessary knowledge and skills to participate in decision-making processes.

3. Providing equal opportunities for women through access to quality education, health care, and enhanced participation:
 - a) The Governments of the OIC Member States should adopt the necessary policies and programs for promoting education of women and girls through providing uncomplicated and free access to literacy programs and also providing free, compulsory and equal access for boys and girls to primary education and removal of possible drawbacks in this field and encourage, through legislation, women's access to advanced technologies including ICT in order to promote their role in the decision-making and development process.
 - b) All efforts should be made to spread education, stop illiteracy, prevent boys and girls dropping out from school and improve conditions to make education a success, including through the provision of incentives for families, especially in rural and poor areas.
 - c) Promoting specific vocational and technical training courses for women in diversified job sectors.
 - d) Increase the number of women trainers through, inter-alia, capacity building.
 - e) Provide greater access to life-long learning to provide women with skills responsive to the rapidly changing labour market.
 - f) Train teachers at all levels on equality values and non-discrimination and involve parents in activities applying gender-sensitive educational methods.
4. Elimination of all forms of discrimination including combating violence against women:
 - a) Encourage member states to reduce the incidents and impacts of violence on women and children through adopting national measures, strategies and legislations to prevent family violence and to reduce crime against women.
 - b) Prevent early and forced marriages through all possible means.
 - c) Support the provision of increased services to abused women and victims of violence.
 - d) Encourage OIC Member States to intensify their efforts in combating female genital mutilation.
 - e) Improve and support health facilities provided for women in terms of quantity and quality and to ensure their availability and easy access from all sections particularly reproductive, sexual and mental health while also focusing on prevention through health awareness raising by all means.

- f) The Member States of the OIC shall provide women with better opportunities through enacting, consolidating and implementing laws that empower women and provide them with greater role in the development of their societies in various fields. Women as a vulnerable group deserve special consideration in formulating policies for them in national development strategies in the OIC Member States.
- g) The OIC Member States shall promote greater gender-balance and increase the participation of women in decision-making at all levels and in all sectors, including in peace-making, keeping and building processes in situations of foreign occupation, armed conflicts and natural disasters.
- h) Promote equality and fight against discrimination between girls and boys in education and culture so as to convey a positive and non-stereotyped image of girls and women and where appropriate, identify new pedagogical materials.
- i) Combat gender-based violence in all its manifestations, specially domestic violence, trafficking in human beings, particularly women and girls, harmful traditional practices and violence against migrant women, including through research, awareness raising campaign involving men and boys, education and media campaigns, toll free and emergency numbers, institutional networks, exchange of experiences, views and good practices in the OIC Member States.
- j) The OIC Member States shall adopt appropriate measures to consolidate the foundations of the family unit and its role in enhancing mutual respect among male and female members, in order to promote the culture of non-discrimination against women.

IV. Developing Indicators and Action-oriented Studies

1. Significant efforts have been made to improve the conditions of women in the OIC Member States over recent years since the issue earned a great level of attention in the OIC Ten Year Program of Action (POA), which emphasizes the following:

"Strengthen laws aimed at enhancing the advancement of women in OIC Member States in economic, cultural, social, and political fields, in accordance with Islamic values of justice and equality; and aimed also at protecting women from all forms of violence and discrimination and adhering to the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, in line with the Islamic values of justice and equality".

2. Nevertheless, a comprehensive study on economic, political and social indicators must be conducted in order to evolve national as well as OIC databases to monitor women's participation and role in the the public and private sectors as well as the formal and informal sectors.

3. Despite the lack of such a study, it can be inferred that:
 - a) Inequalities still exist between men and women, particularly in employment and decision-making levels and between different groups of women.
 - b) Many women continue to earn less than men and remain responsible for much of the unpaid work needed in families and communities. They continue to face difficulties accessing essential resources and services for themselves and their dependents.
 - c) Many women face risks in terms of their independence, security, safety and health.
 - d) Many women still experience significant hindrances to have full access to their rights.
 - e) Rural women, women with disabilities and elderly women continue to face obstacles that impede their full participation to their development and to their economic security.
 - f) Gender-based violence is still predominant and impedes women's enjoyment of their human rights.
4. The OPAAW is an inclusive document that recognizes the importance of the connections and relationships among members of the society as a whole. It recognizes the different priorities, choices and needs of groups of women and men, in the context of families and as individuals. With these considerations in mind, the OPAAW serves to reduce inequalities and improves outcomes for women.
5. The Governments of the OIC Member States are committed to take actions to improve the outcomes for women in the following areas:
 - i. Education: to provide equal opportunities and access to quality education and to promote illiteracy eradication programmes in order to eliminate illiteracy among women;
 - ii. Health: to improve women's health and to ensure their full access to basic health-care.
 - iii. Political participation: to ensure political representation of women for effective participation at all levels of decision-making for the achievement of sustainable development.
 - iv. Economic sustainability: to improve women's economic independence and ability to contribute to the Member States' economy (ensure access to a good level of income, and the skills and knowledge that will help women maximize their financial resources).

- v. Social justice and well-being: to improve and ensure women's social needs, safety and equality to contribute to the development of the society and preservation of a sound and healthy family system. And to ensure that the discriminatory negative stereotypical images of women due to harmful customs and traditions are altered.
- vi. Work-life balance, to support women with appropriate social mechanisms to achieve a greater balance between work and family life.

V. Action Plan Implementation and Evaluation

1. The Member States of the OIC, in close cooperation with the Department of Cultural and Social Affairs in the OIC General Secretariat, shall develop their indicators, use gender analyses and adopt action-oriented plans to implement the OPAAW and achieve the advancement of women.
2. The Member States of the OIC together with the OIC General Secretariat shall periodically evaluate the progress made in the implementation framework for follow up of the OPAAW that will be defined on the basis of indicators identified by Member States.
3. The Department of Cultural and Social Affairs will actively be engaged in the implementation of the OPAAW. It will also continue to work directly with governments of the OIC Member States, upon their request, to develop and support the implementation of policies targeting the accomplishment of the goals of the OPAAW.
4. Calls upon the Department of Cultural and Social Affairs within the OIC General Secretariat and its subsidiary organs, specialized and affiliated institutions, within their respective mandates, as well as the UN relevant institutions, to assist the Member States of the OIC in the implementation of the OPAAW.

VI. Recommendations

1. To implement, without delay, the decision taken at the Third Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, Makkah, December 2005, to establish, a Division responsible for Family Affairs within the framework of General Secretariat's restructuring, towards the advancement of women.
2. A Governmental Group of Experts be established within the OIC framework to discuss and follow-up on the issues of women in the OIC Member States, the composition of which should be based on gender-balance.
3. The OIC Member States should take the initiative to convene regular conferences, seminars and symposia to discuss women's issues and coordinate their positions in different fora. Awareness-raising workshops and campaigns can play a very constructive role in projecting the true image and the cause of

women in the OIC Member States at the national, regional and international levels.

4. The Ministerial Conference on Women should be convened biennially. In this regard, the third Ministerial Conference on Women would be convened in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2010.
5. Significant attention should be given to female-literacy with women trained and empowered in order to get actively involved in developing educational strategies in the OIC Member States. Concrete measures should be taken to improve and expand educational opportunities for girls and young women at all levels of education, including through student-exchange programs between the OIC Member States.
6. Welcome the offer of the Arab Republic of Egypt to host the headquarter of an organ of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to address the role of women in the development of OIC Member States' societies that would be elaborated in coordination between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the OIC General Secretariat and the OIC Member States, in terms of the organ's relation with the organization and its statute and other related matters, in order to submit the issue to the thirty-sixth session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers to be held in Damascus in 2009.
7. From the global perspective, there is a need to synergize the expertise and energies for collective development of business-women. A forum, should be considered for networking among Member States of the OIC to provide technical assistance to women entrepreneurs for upgrading their management, marketing and technical skills in their respective lines of businesses.
8. Women in the OIC Member States should be regarded as equal partners in decision-making and implementation of the OPAAW and that their views should receive genuine consideration and positive responses to their best interests.
9. Women in the OIC Member States should be considered as equal partners and active participants in all spheres of life and society including, inter alia, in the decision making process in all aspects of the development of the communities and countries.
10. Women, from the young to the elderly, should be provided with an environment that enables them to be confident and secure in their living space and in their chosen career whether she is mother/homemaker or in the paid workforce. Henceforth, to enable them to provide positive leadership to their families and communities.
