



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report

Arab Parliamentarians Dialogue on the Regional Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after Thirty Years Amman, 29–30 May 2024

Summary

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the League of Arab States and the Regional Office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), organized the Arab Parliamentarians Dialogue on the Regional Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after Thirty Years, which was held in Amman on 29 and 30 May 2024.

The meeting was attended by representatives of parliaments from 14 Arab countries, namely Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Somalia, Tunisia and Yemen. They reviewed the achievements of their parliaments in terms of legislation promoting gender equality, particularly with regard to women's participation in public life and decision-making positions, the right to work, a decent work environment and leadership opportunities, protection from violence, the rights of the most vulnerable women and girls and ways to protect them, and issues related to family and personal status. Participants exchanged experiences and best practices on the role of Arab parliaments and their contributions to advancing women's issues, and on monitoring progress towards implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 30 years after their adoption. Participants also discussed the challenges facing their work in this area. This dialogue resulted in recommendations and key messages.

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Introduction

1. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the League of Arab States and the Regional Office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), organized the Arab Parliamentarians Dialogue on the Regional Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after Thirty Years, which was held in Amman on 29 and 30 May 2024.
2. This regional dialogue falls within the framework of a work programme that includes implementing a set of activities in preparation for the drafting and adoption of an Arab regional report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 30 years (Beijing+30). The dialogue aims to provide representatives of Arab parliaments with an overview of the regional review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and to exchange experiences and best practices on the role of Arab parliaments and their contribution to advancing women's issues, and on monitoring progress towards implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.
3. The dialogue highlighted the contributions of Arab parliaments in adopting legislation that falls within the framework of advancing the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and achieving related accomplishments, discussing the most prominent challenges and obstacles in the Arab region that legislators face and their repercussions on achieving the desired progress, and ways to enhance the role of legislators in enacting national legislation that addresses women's issues and their role in the development process. The dialogue also focused on identifying priorities, and future visions and recommendations that would accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Arab region. The representatives of Arab parliaments agreed on a number of key messages aimed at accelerating the achievement of goals in the region.

I. Key messages and recommendations

4. Emphasizing the unity of the Arab position on the centrality of the Palestinian issue, and its full support for ending the Israeli ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories since 1967, for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and for the necessity of stopping the aggression and the genocidal war in the Gaza Strip; demanding that Israel be obligated to stop its settlement and colonial policy in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and end all policies and measures against Palestinian prisoners; and demanding that the international community and international institutions oblige the Israeli colonial occupation to implement international resolutions and the rulings of the International Court of Justice.
5. Stressing the necessity of considering the repercussions of the global, regional and national challenges that Arab countries have faced in recent years, including armed conflict, the Israeli occupation, the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economic crisis and climate change, and their resulting effects on the most vulnerable women and girls, and on the ability of Arab countries affected by armed conflict and terrorism to achieve progress in the critical areas of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and in the indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
6. Operationalizing the pivotal role of parliaments in the national review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by clarifying it in the guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, issued by UN-Women and the regional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, and urging national women's machineries to involve parliaments and parties in relevant national consultations.
7. Intensifying efforts to build the capacity of Arab parliaments to formulate legislation that enhances gender equality and to prepare budgets that respond to women's needs, by establishing a specialized Arab parliamentary platform, organizing regional workshops to exchange experiences and lessons learned, and highlighting good practices in Arab parliaments.

8. Emphasizing the importance of establishing mechanisms to implement legislation, and strengthening the oversight role of parliaments in this context by adopting regulations, and preparing and implementing relevant strategies and plans.
9. Identifying gaps in national data related to women and development, improving data collection and analysis within quantitative and qualitative studies, and making them available to parliamentarians to support their role in enacting evidence-based laws and policies.
10. Developing clear indicators and various measurement standards for countries affected by conflict, taking into account the different contexts of countries, especially those experiencing armed conflict.
11. Cooperating with clerics to confront the false religious concepts that perpetuate the patriarchal system, customs, perceptions and stereotypical roles of women, and prevent the achievement of the desired legislative reform to enhance the role of women in public life.
12. Emphasizing that positive discrimination is a temporary necessity to overcome historical discrimination against women so as to achieve parity, and that the percentage of women's representation and the seats allocated to them in elected councils represent the minimum level of participation and should not be an obstacle to women obtaining seats in a competitive manner.
13. Stressing the need for representative institutional structures and workplaces to be sensitive to women and families, thus allowing them to perform their duties in the public sphere.
14. Building on legislative and procedural achievements in the field of women's participation in public life in a manner consistent with the national political context, so as to gradually achieve parity in elected and appointed councils and decision-making positions.
15. Continuing efforts to harmonize labour laws and civil service regulations with international standards on maternity and paternity leave, providing nurseries, and ensuring protection from violence and harassment, by adopting laws that balance the responsibilities of the State and the obligations of the private sector towards its male and female workers.
16. Adopting a new approach to the concept of caring for children, older persons and persons with disabilities, based on the principle of the care economy; and taking into account the need to reduce the burden of unpaid care and redistribute it within the family and institutions.
17. Continuing to review legislation to enhance women's financial inclusion and encourage their entrepreneurship; and to adopt tax and financial policies that encourage investment in small and medium enterprises and access to finance, especially in rural and remote areas.
18. Adopting innovative mechanisms to ensure that parliamentarians communicate with stakeholders and are aware of the special needs of women, either through hearing committees or oversight sessions, or by preparing detailed studies on legislative texts to understand the extent of success in implementing a law and identify gaps that require legislative amendments with regard to protection from violence, including political violence.
19. Reviewing laws on protection from domestic violence to consider punitive measures, such as adopting alternative penalties and psychosocial treatment for perpetrators, with the aim of tackling women's reluctance to report cases of violence for fear of the impact of the breadwinner's imprisonment on the family.
20. Building on the legislative achievements made by countries, whether in acceding to relevant agreements or in enacting laws, including legislation that sets the minimum age for marriage, provides protection for

persons with disabilities, or criminalizes harmful practices; and activating the role of parliaments in considering the economic and social conditions that lead to those practices.

21. Making parliaments more responsive to women's issues by achieving parity in integrating parliamentarians, both men and women, into parliamentary committees, thematic committees and fact-finding committees, so as to enshrine the principle of citizenship.

22. Conducting community dialogue in the process of reviewing laws related to family and personal status, so as to ensure understanding of the impact of their application in the context of the family in accordance with the requirements of religious laws.

23. Emphasizing the importance of awareness of the rights granted by legislation, which contribute to strengthening the stability of family relations through agreement on the terms of marriage contracts in a manner consistent with the requirements of religious laws.

II. Topics of discussion

A. Session 1: Universal national review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

24. Ms. Salma al-Nims, ESCWA Senior Social Affairs and Gender Equality Officer, summarized the process of reviewing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 30 years, and the main objective of the dialogue with Arab parliaments. She reviewed the history of its adoption and its goals and critical areas. She said that several issues had been raised for the first time within its framework, including women and armed conflict, and women and the role of the media in supporting equality issues. She noted that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was comprehensive and focused on the idea of intersectionality and partnership. She mentioned the periodic reviews conducted by the United Nations every five years, which aimed to monitor achievements and identify gaps. She addressed the intersection of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with the 17 SDGs, which aimed to link the development approach to human rights, creating an overlap between the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action process and the development process. She reviewed the steps followed for the regional review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the sections of the guidance note, and the six pillars that would be developed to present messages to policymakers. She indicated the main points that would guide the discussion on the role of Arab parliaments, the challenges that had affected progress, and the counter-discourse on women's rights.

25. Ms. Shaza Abdel-latif, Regional and International Cooperation Officer at the Women's Department (Social Affairs Sector) at the League of Arab States, presented the results of the political track of the first regional review of the 2030 Agenda for Women's Development in the Arab Region after five years, which was prepared by the general secretariat of the League of Arab States to monitor progress made during the period 2017–2022. She said that the review, given the intersections between the SDGs and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, was one of the most important regional reviews, especially since it monitored the reality of Arab women through pillars and indicators that had been developed and updated to keep pace with developments and emerging issues at the international and regional level in the past years, including the COVID-19 crisis, climate change and environmental adaptation, and the transition to a green economy and digitization. She presented the indicators used in the six pillars of the regional report, focusing on the indicators of the political track, and the key results monitored in terms of constitutional amendments in a number of member States. She provided examples of the main legislative reforms and laws aimed at achieving gender equality in Arab countries over the past five years. Referring to the draft general recommendation No 40. on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was being discussed at the international level, she stressed the Arab League secretariat's rejection of the use of some words and terms that were inconsistent with Arab cultural and religious principles and identity, such as "the LGBT community."

26. Ms. Nada Darwazeh, Director of the ESCWA Centre for Women, made a presentation on legislative reforms in the Arab region under the Gender Justice and the Law platform. She noted progress made in the legislative field in the Arab region since 2020 in the areas of inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work, poverty eradication, social protection and social services. She said that the focus was on health care and social insurance, participation and accountability, gender-sensitive institutions, and international and national frameworks in peaceful societies where no one is marginalized. She reviewed key developments and legislative gaps in a number of countries in these areas.

27. Mr. Majed Osman, lead consultant on preparing the comprehensive Arab report on progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 30 years, gave a presentation on progress made in the status of women, sustainable development indicators and gender equality. He discussed the current situation in the Arab region compared with other regions worldwide using sustainable development indicators, and identified the information gaps that prevented its measurement. He noted progress in several areas, including women's economic empowerment, social protection, women's participation in decision-making and women's political empowerment. He gave an overview of the status of Arab women, who had faced many development and geopolitical challenges since the last review (Beijing+25), stressing the need to address them.

28. The presentations were followed by questions to clarify the sources of data and information used. It was emphasized that sources included national data provided by national statistical offices to ESCWA, the indicators adopted by relevant United Nations bodies and calculated according to a unified mechanism, and national data provided by member States to the general secretariat of the League of Arab States during the regional review of the Arab Women's Development Agenda.

29. Participants from Iraq, Lebanon, the State of Palestine, Somalia and Yemen pointed to the impact of conflict, occupation and crises, including economic and climate crises, on development efforts and women in particular, and on the ability to produce and update data. They stressed the need to take into account the various contexts of Arab countries, especially those affected by armed conflict, during the regional review, and the need to develop clear indicators and different measurement standards. They also stressed the need to take into account the specificities of countries, and to classify the presentation of data for Arab countries in a manner consistent with their political and economic context. They highlighted the criticality of that stage, in view of the ongoing war in Gaza and its impact on the status of women and families in the occupied Palestinian territory, the weakness of the global justice system, the need to protect Palestinian women and defend their basic right to live in an independent State, and to apply international laws to the practices of the Israeli occupation.

30. Representatives made interventions on legislative progress with regard to gender equality in constitutions over the past five years, including amending the 2020 Constitution of Algeria to stipulate non-discrimination on the basis of gender; amending the 2020 Constitution of Tunisia to stipulate equality between men and women; issuing the Basic Law of the Sultanate of Oman, which recognized equality between men and women; adding the word "Jordanian women" to the title of chapter two of the Jordanian Constitution to become "Rights and duties of Jordanian men and women", and adding a paragraph related to protecting women from violence and discrimination.

31. At the close of the session, representatives of parliaments stressed the need for national mechanisms to involve parliaments in the national review of progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to inform them of it, guided by the participatory approach set out in the guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews.

B. Session 2: Legislative developments in the field of women's participation in public life and decision-making

32. Ms. Simone Ellisoluoch-Olunya, Regional Advisor for Women's Political Participation, Leadership and Governance at the UN-Women Regional Office for the Arab States, opened the session with a statement in which she discussed the importance of women's participation in public life and decision-making, and the slow

progress in fulfilling global commitments to achieve parity. She noted the draft general recommendation No 40. on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which the Committee was expected to present to the General Assembly in September 2024. The recommendation included guidance for States parties to achieve parity and women's representation in decision-making positions in the public and private spheres, including adopting a governance approach based on parity and women's inclusion as a fundamental transformative principle capable of contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Under the recommendation, Committee members would be granted interpretative authority to guide States parties to adopt and achieve the principle of 50:50 gender parity in decision-making systems at all levels. She said that to implement the principle, it was necessary to adopt a comprehensive and intersectional approach, and to work on making structural changes to achieve equality and full participation in decision-making, provided that civil society organizations participated in the decision-making system as a whole.

33. In the ensuing discussion, parliamentary representatives made interventions on legislative amendments related to access to decision-making positions, progress made in that regard, and the challenges that women continued to face. The 2020 constitutional amendment in Algeria stipulated the principle of parity within the framework of fundamental rights and public freedoms. In Jordan, the amended electoral law stipulated increasing the seats allocated to women from 15 to 18 in electoral districts, and requiring the presence of at least one woman among the first three candidates on party lists, as well as among the next three candidates. The Palestinian electoral law stipulated that women's representation should not be less than one woman among the first three names, then one woman among every four names. The Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission stipulated that women's representation should not be less than 25 per cent of the seats in the Council of Representatives, and that women's hierarchy should be taken into account at a rate of one woman for every three men on electoral lists. Although the Somali law allocates 30 per cent of seats to women, women's participation in the Senate amounts to 24 per cent. Participants also noted positive facts related to women's participation in politics and decision-making positions. In Bahrain, women's participation had reached 20 per cent without seats being allocated to them, and a woman held the position of Second Deputy Speaker of the Shura Council. In Lebanon, women's representation in parliament reached 6.25 per cent, and that percentage ranged between 16 and 25 per cent in parliamentary committees, noting that the Lebanese legislative framework did not specify any quota for women in parliament, seats or candidate lists. In Somalia, women headed two of the eight parliamentary committees, and held the position of Deputy Speaker of Parliament. In Libya, women's representation in parliament was 16 per cent, and efforts were being made to increase the percentage of seats allocated to them to 30 per cent.

34. Some participants stressed the need to expand women's participation in party and national lists, and their ranking within the first names. They underscored the importance of the support provided to women and young people in enhancing their political participation, in addition to the role of legislation in developing skills such as by the Bahrain Institute For Political Development, providing financial support to non-partisan young people and women's lists in Tunisia, and launching awareness campaigns aimed at changing discriminatory societal trends against women's political participation and motivating women to participate. The Moroccan representatives stressed the importance of achieving parity in local constituencies, especially in areas affected by traditional customs and trends, and the importance of convincing women to participate in the electoral process.

35. The session concluded with participants emphasizing the importance of institutional structures being friendly to women, and for executive and legislative councils to adopt policies that respond to their various needs, such as adopting budgets that respond to women, addressing issues that affect their reality, and reducing burdens of care so that they can be active in political life and decision-making positions.

C. Session 3: Legislative developments in the field of the right to work and the decent work environment, and opportunities for entrepreneurship

36. Parliamentarians were invited to provide input on achievements and major challenges in adopting legislative amendments related to labour laws aimed at combating gender discrimination, unpaid care,

maternity and paternity leave, flexible work, fiscal policies and investment opportunities to enhance employment opportunities, entrepreneurship and property ownership. The representative of Lebanon discussed the importance of organizing hearings to promote legislation that responded to women's needs, such as those held in Lebanon, in collaboration with ESCWA, with women small business owners, farmers and representatives of local organizations on economic security and women. Those hearings resulted in the submission of draft amendments that included a proposal for flexible work mechanisms, an extension of maternity leave, a proposal for a breastfeeding hour, paternity leave, and the establishment of nurseries and related standards. In addition, six amendments had been adopted that prohibited discrimination in the Social Security Law, granted full pay for 10 weeks during maternity leave, and stipulated that insured women should benefit from maternity compensation if they had been social security members for 10 months or more.

37. The representatives of Morocco stressed the importance of dialogue between stakeholders when enacting laws to protect workers' rights and affirm the right to decent work, and indicated that dialogue was ongoing on the Labour Law to respond to challenges, frameworks and international obligations without harming employers. The representatives of Tunisia stressed the importance of hearings with the Ministry of Labour and employers, which had resulted in extending breastfeeding hours to two hours, adopting paid maternity leave for four months and an additional two months during which half the salary was paid, and granting public sector employees a month of paternity leave and studying a proposal to adopt it in the private sector. In Oman, a new labour law had been recently adopted that set maternity leave at 98 days, obliged establishments employing 25 or more women to provide nurseries for their children, and stipulated an hour of breastfeeding. In Iraq, a system had been adopted that allocated additional points to women when evaluating job applicants to promote their economic participation, and mothers were granted 14 weeks of paid maternity leave. The representative of Bahrain said that women were granted two months of paid maternity leave and six months of unpaid leave. In Libya, maternity leave lasted for three months with pay, while in Morocco it lasted 14 weeks.

38. Ms. Salma al-Nims highlighted the Jordanian experience, which did not link maternity insurance and the right to provide nurseries to women only. The law obliged employers to pay maternity insurance allowances for the wages of both male and female employees, even if the percentage was small. The law also obliged employers who employed a number of workers who had no less than 15 children under the age of four and eight months to provide nurseries for them, which reduced the reluctance of the private sector to employ women. The maternity fund distributed an amount to the social protection system allocated to cover the costs of providing nurseries and their alternatives. In response to the intervention of the representative of Jordan, Ms. Nada Darwazeh indicated that the policy of reducing the burden of care emphasized that having children was a social responsibility for the entire family and did not fall solely on women. The representative of Lebanon stressed the need to adopt a new comprehensive approach to caring for children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

39. On another note, Ms. Nada Darwazeh said that there was a disparity in the financial inclusion of women in the Arab region. The representative of Iraq mentioned the existence of programmes for women's economic empowerment, and the provision of loans and grants for small projects. The representative of Bahrain highlighted efforts to support women's entrepreneurship. In Algeria, the Ministry of Knowledge Economy, Startups and Microenterprises provided interest-free loans to enhance entrepreneurship opportunities. The representative of Lebanon said that equality in law did not necessarily result in fair economic policies, and that financial policies must be developed to access financing and reduce interest, especially in rural and remote areas. The representative of Algeria stressed the importance of technological progress and the opportunities it provided for women to work remotely and manage their own projects. The representative of Libya said that the financial system did not discriminate between women and men, but that specialized programmes had been implemented to support women economically.

40. The representative of Morocco said that her country was the first Arab country to implement, in 2002, and continues to implement, budgets that responded to the needs of women and girls by granting them fair and equal access to rights and services. It was noted that Jordan and Bahrain had also begun to adopt such budgets.

41. At the end of the first day, a set of messages proposed at the sessions were discussed and agreed upon, and set out in chapter I of the present report on key messages and recommendations.

D. Session 4: Legislative developments in the field of protection against violence

42. The second day began with a session on legislative developments in the field of protection from violence. Representatives of parliaments were invited to make interventions on the main achievements and challenges in adopting relevant legislative amendments, particularly in the field of protection from domestic violence, harassment in public places, technology-facilitated violence, political violence against women in decision-making positions and public office, and violence against women human rights defenders. In Lebanon, amendments had been made to the law on protection from domestic violence, which had expanded the definition of violence to include economic and moral violence, and provided for protection orders. In Iraq, legal support was being provided to victims of violence and penalties were included for forced prostitution, but the law on protection from violence had not yet been adopted. In Bahrain, article 353 of the 2023 Penal Code, which exempted rapists from prosecution and punishment if they agreed to marry the victim, had been repealed. An amendment to the law on protection from domestic violence was currently under consideration, so that anyone who failed to report cases of domestic violence while knowing about them would be punished. Draft laws on protection from violence were still under consideration and discussion in Iraq, Libya and Mauritania. The representatives of Algeria said that there was no law protecting against domestic violence, but the Constitution and the Penal Code address related issues and included provisions protecting children from sexual exploitation and human trafficking. They noted that the State provided shelters for women and children, which contributed to their protection from violence. The representative of Mauritania said that the Personal Status Code provided for protection from domestic violence. The representatives of Morocco said that the law on protection from violence was under review based on lessons learned since its adoption.

43. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Lebanon said that a law criminalizing sexual harassment and rehabilitating its victims had been passed in 2020, and that Parliament was working on adopting mechanisms to implement it. The representative of Jordan said that the Labour Code had been amended to include a definition of sexual harassment in the workplace and specify its penalty. The representatives of Algeria, Bahrain and Oman indicated that sexual harassment was covered by the penal codes using terms related to indecent acts.

44. With regard to implementation measures and procedures, the representative of Lebanon said that in 2023, Parliament had held oversight sessions on the implementation of the relevant law, attended by representatives of Parliament, relevant ministries and civil society organizations, which had resulted in an assessment of the gaps in the law and implementation mechanisms. The representative of Bahrain stressed the continuation of work on implementing a strategy to protect women from domestic violence by expanding the provision of protection services, appointing more protection officers, and establishing violence protection offices in schools. In Iraq, family courts had been established to follow up on various related issues, including cases of violence within the family. In Palestine, plans had been adopted and budgets allocated to implement a law on protection from domestic violence. The representative of Tunisia said that the Ministry of Family, Women, Children and Seniors was implementing comprehensive strategies aimed at enforcing the law, and providing protection and support to women victims of violence. The representatives of Morocco highlighted efforts related to implementation mechanisms and encouraging complaints through the establishment of helplines and reporting platforms, and the provision of shelters for survivors of violence.

45. In the ensuing discussions, participants stressed the importance of harmonizing legislation with laws on protection from violence, so as to avoid hindering the implementation of the provisions of the law in Arab countries. They also stressed the importance of collecting national data, monitoring cases of violence, and paying attention to the issue of harassment through electronic platforms and the grooming of adolescent girls through them, which exposed them to sexual exploitation, rape and human trafficking. They highlighted the importance of the role of the media in changing stereotypes, societal trends, and violent and discriminatory practices against women and girls.

E. Session 5: Legislative developments relating to the rights and protection of vulnerable groups

46. The fifth session focused on the main achievements and challenges in adopting legislative amendments relating to the rights and protection of vulnerable groups. Representatives of Arab parliaments discussed the rights of women and girls with disabilities, children's rights and child marriage, and combating female genital mutilation. The representatives of Morocco addressed the legal protection system for women, children and persons with disabilities based on the country's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and said that Morocco was in the process of drafting instructions to ensure that women with disabilities had access to reproductive health services. The representative of Bahrain indicated the implementation of inclusive education, the adoption of executive procedures that facilitated access for persons with disabilities and provided them with transport, and the entitlement of workers with disabilities or their caregivers to two hours of rest. In Iraq, the law stipulated a quota for persons with disabilities in government and public sector jobs. In Libya, a draft law on protection from violence stipulated special provisions to protect persons with disabilities. The representatives of Jordan and Lebanon noted the severity of penalties for crimes committed against persons with disabilities.

47. With regard to the political participation of women with disabilities, the representative of Bahrain referred to the appointment of a woman with a disability to the Shura Council and noted the difficulties faced by women with disabilities in accessing parliamentary councils. In response, the representative of Mauritania said that her country's law stipulated the inclusion of persons with disabilities on municipal and parliamentary candidate lists and their ranking at the top, and mentioned the existence of a parliamentary committee for the affairs of persons with disabilities headed by a woman. In the ensuing discussion, participants emphasized the importance of enhancing the participation of persons with disabilities in political life as voters, and facilitating their access to polling stations.

48. The representative of the Palestinian National Council highlighted the impact of war on children and persons with disabilities, the difficulty of protecting them during war and conflict, and the challenges faced by their families when they were forced to flee, especially given the destruction caused by the war to roads, infrastructure and assistance devices in Gaza. He also stressed the urgent need to monitor the increasing numbers of persons with disabilities in Gaza as a result of the war and the death of their family members, who were often their only protection and support network. He also reviewed the effects of the war on women's health in general, women's inability to access reproductive health services in the occupied Palestinian territory and their complete absence in Gaza, and the resulting increase in the number of newborns with disabilities.

49. Participants discussed the issue of children's rights, with a focus on efforts to combat child marriage in the absence of full criminalization of the phenomenon without exception. They said that laws varied in terms of exceptions, mechanisms and related procedures. In Morocco, a law was currently being considered to criminalize the marriage of minors, and mechanisms were being implemented to address it, including ensuring education. The representative of Algeria said that the State's social system had contributed significantly to combating child marriage, thanks to the provision of health services, housing and education. For example, the State provided university education, which had contributed to preventing girls from being forced into marriage due to poverty. The representative of Lebanon said that more than one proposal had been submitted in the past to amend the law on the legal age of marriage, which had been approved by the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, but the draft amended law had not yet been submitted to Parliament. She stressed the need to find economic solutions, especially in view of the crisis in Lebanon and the high poverty rate, in addition to the number of displaced Syrians in the country. She also stressed the need to take into account, when legislating to criminalize child marriage, unregistered marriages to avoid increasing their number and the birth of unregistered children.

50. With regard to female genital mutilation, the representative of Mauritania said that the practice had been criminalized, and that necessary measures had been taken to ensure the implementation of the law. She stressed the need to undertake community awareness-raising activities to completely eliminate the harmful practice.

F. Session 6: Legislative developments in family and personal status matters

51. At the sixth session, representatives of Arab parliaments presented legislative developments in family and personal status matters, and made interventions on the main achievements and challenges related to the adoption of relevant legislative amendments. The representatives of Morocco discussed the international agreements ratified by their country, and gave an overview of the efforts made to review the Family Code after 20 years of its implementation. Around 1,900 hearings had been held, which had included representatives of civil society organizations, organizations promoting protection from violence, relevant official institutions, and religious figures, during which shortcomings in implementation were discussed, as well as the requirements for adapting the Code to the 2011 Constitution and to the needs of Moroccan society and the transformations it was witnessing. Among the key amendments proposed within the framework of a comprehensive reform of the relevant legal provisions were the elimination of discrimination between divorce and repudiation, the establishment of a judicial divorce system and simplification of divorce procedures, the elimination of religious differences as an obstacle to inheritance, the expansion of women's right to inheritance and the abolition of patrilineality, and the criminalization of underage marriage. In response, the representative of Lebanon said that her country was currently considering legislative amendments that would include the participation of both parents in approving children's travel, and opening and managing bank accounts for them. She addressed the challenges facing the issue of child custody, as it was subject to the jurisdiction of religious courts under the Constitution, and the issue of granting civil rights to children of a foreign father and a Lebanese mother. The representative of Bahrain said that a widow working in the public sector was granted a salary during her mourning period, and the representative of Libya noted that the State covered the legal costs that women might incur in all cases, including family matters. In Jordan, legislative amendments were currently being considered to ensure equality between women and men in inheritance within Christian families.

G. Closing

52. Participants agreed on several messages proposed at the sessions, which are set out in chapter I of the present report on key messages and recommendations.

III. Organization of work

A. Date and venue of the meeting

53. ESCWA, in partnership with the UN-Women Regional Office for Arab States and the League of Arab States, organized the Arab Parliamentarians Dialogue on the Regional Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after Thirty Years, which was held in Amman on 29 and 30 May 2024.

B. Opening

54. Ms. Salma al-Nims opened the meeting by welcoming representatives of Arab parliaments. She said that 2025 was supposed to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, during which the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had been adopted, as well as the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. However, the current meeting was being held at a difficult time, with several countries experiencing conflicts that cast a shadow over the entire region. The conflict in the Sudan had been ongoing for more than a year, with sexual violence against women being used as a weapon of war. The repercussions of the Israeli occupation in the occupied Palestinian territory had worsened, constituting a major obstacle to development efforts and gender equality, especially with the ongoing war in Gaza. The ESCWA report described that war as the bloodiest in the twenty-first century, with at least 35,000 deaths to date, 70 per cent of whom were women and children.

55. She stressed the need to continue working on gender equality issues, and to benefit from international frameworks as an opportunity to assess reality, identify achievements and challenges, and build on lessons

learned. She highlighted the many achievements made over the past 30 years in a wide range of legislation in the Arab region, including constitutional amendments that promoted gender equality; and amendments to laws on personal status, labour rights, social security, parliamentary and local elections, and protection from domestic violence, in addition to other laws that had enhanced women's contribution to the development process and public life. All of those amendments had paved the way for Governments to adopt strategies and programmes that enhanced women's access to their basic rights to education, health and work, built national institutions and machineries for women, and provided infrastructure that contributed to protecting them from violence and discrimination. However, many obstacles still prevented the implementation of legislation and its impact on women's reality, not to mention that the gender gap in the Arab region remained the highest worldwide, taking into account the disparity between Arab countries in economic, social and political contexts. She added that challenges were increasing in a region suffering from conflict, occupation, the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and the war in Ukraine. The percentage of women's participation in Arab parliaments did not exceed 16.5 per cent, which was modest compared with the global average of 26.5 per cent and far from what States had committed to achieving in the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, there was a large disparity between Arab countries themselves, reflected in a representation rate of 50 per cent in the United Arab Emirates and a complete absence of women's representation in the Yemeni House of Representatives.

56. She addressed the mechanisms for the periodic review of progress made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its goals, stressing that it was a necessary and important process for all countries, regardless of their political and economic status. It required a participatory approach between Governments, national women's machineries, bodies working on the 2030 Agenda, human rights organizations, and all stakeholders such as trade unions, syndicates, parties, parliaments and the private sector. She explained the link between the regional review, which was based on the results of national reviews, and the global review. She said that the preparation of the comprehensive Arab report on progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 30 years in the Arab region would be based on those national reviews. She noted that the regional review would conclude with a high-level conference, at which the outcomes of the regional consultations, the main results of the regional report, and the Arab declaration outlining the unified Arab position would be presented. The report and declaration would be submitted to the sixty-ninth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, to be held in New York in March 2025. She expressed her sincere thanks to the partners of UN-Women and the League of Arab States for their continued collaboration, and to the attendees for their valuable participation.

57. Ms. Shaza Abdel-latif expressed her happiness at the opening of the current meeting. She commended the joint efforts and fruitful collaboration between the League of Arab States, ESCWA and UN-Women. She lauded the selection of Mr. Majed Osman as the lead expert to prepare the regional report, expressing her confidence in issuing a report that was characterized by professionalism and credibility, and which monitored the areas that hindered the progress of Arab women and shed light on recent achievements. She pointed to the important role of women in confronting armed conflict and their suffering from sexual violence. She stressed the importance of involving Arab parliaments to support the implementation of the principles of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, especially in the legislative context, and the importance of ongoing consultations to support the preparation of a comprehensive and unified Arab report. She concluded her speech by thanking the League of Arab States' partners, namely ESCWA and UN-Women; expressed her eagerness to benefit from the interventions of participating experts.

58. On behalf of Ms. Janneke van der Graaf-Kukler, Deputy Regional Director of UN-Women in the Arab States, Ms. Simone Ellisoluoch-Olunya made a statement in which she expressed her appreciation to partners. She stressed the importance of consultations with all parties on progress made towards the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Thirty years after its adoption, it was still considered one of the most progressive global documents, as it included important issues related to gender equality, climate, the role of technology and addressing violence against women. She pointed to the progress made in women's access to leadership and decision-making positions, increasing commitment to implementing the women, peace and security agenda, the adoption of national targets related to opportunities for access to decent work,

and the social protection system in the Arab region. Nonetheless, the gender gap in the Arab region remained the highest worldwide. However, Arab countries were committed to initiatives aimed at accelerating the closing of that gap and advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, including by promoting legislative reforms aimed at addressing various forms of discrimination against women and girls and eliminating violence against them; ensuring women's access to leadership positions in the public and private sectors, including the judiciary; enhancing and supporting women's economic participation, including in the information technology sector; expanding the umbrella of social protection; and directing budgets to achieve those commitments.

59. Ms. Janneke van der Graaf-Kukler commended the legislative progress made in the Arab region over the past five years, with 39 legislative amendments adopted by the end of 2023. She stressed the need to be vigilant against a counterattack on the gender equality agenda, which required diligent follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, if progress was to be maintained and furthered. She denounced the unacceptable reality in areas of ongoing conflict, including human losses and deprivation of basic needs such as food, health and education services, and the impact that it had on the path towards sustainable development. She also drew attention to the negative impacts of climate change and water scarcity, recalling the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to use a gender lens to recognize the needs and rights of both women and men in the areas of health, education and the economy. She stressed the importance of conducting the current regional review every five years to identify achievements, assess obstacles and challenges, and identify actions to ensure the adoption of the necessary legislative amendments to accelerate implementation over the next five years. She highlighted the essential role played by legislative reforms in promoting economic participation, enhancing protection and security, and addressing new and emerging issues such as artificial intelligence, technology-facilitated violence and climate change. She also focused on the important role of parliaments, in which both women and men participated, in advancing those reforms and directing funding towards their implementation, stressing UN-Women's readiness to provide support at the national and regional levels to achieve that.

C. Participants

60. Representatives from Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Somalia, Tunisia and Yemen participated in the dialogue, in addition to representatives from partner organizations and concerned international and regional organizations. The list of participants is set out in annex I to the present report.

D. Provisional agenda

61. The provisional agenda is set out in annex II to the present report.

Annex I*

List of participants

A. ESCWA member States

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Annex II

Provisional agenda

	Day One: Wednesday, 29 May 2024
Time	Session
9.30–10 a.m.	<p>Opening session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Salma Nims, Senior Social Affairs and Gender Equality Officer, Gender, Population and Inclusive Development Cluster, ESCWA. Ms. Shatha Abdel Latif, Women’s Directorate, League of Arab States. Ms. Janneke van der Graaff-Kukler, Deputy Regional Director of the UN-Women Regional Office for the Arab States. <p>Presentation of the objectives of the regional dialogue and the themes of the sessions.</p>
10–11.30 a.m.	<p>Session 1: Universal national review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Regional Review after thirty years. <i>Ms. Salma Nims, Senior Social Affairs and Gender Equality Officer, ESCWA</i> Presentation of the results of the political track from the Regional Review of the Arab Women’s Development Agenda +5. <i>Ms. Shatha Abdel Latif, Women’s Directorate, League of Arab States</i> Progress on the status of women in the Arab region since 2020: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presenting legislative reforms in the Arab region through the Gender Justice and Law Platform. <i>Ms. Nada Darwazeh, Chief, ESCWA Centre for Women</i> Presentation of progress in critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action. <i>Mr. Majed Othman, Lead Advisor for the Consolidated Arab Report on Progress Beijing+30</i> Interventions of representatives of parliaments on legislative amendments regarding gender equality in the constitution.
11.30 a.m.–12 p.m.	Coffee break
12–1.30 p.m.	<p>Session 2: Legislative developments in the field of women’s participation in public life and decision-making</p> <p>Interventions of representatives of parliaments on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legislative measures to enhance women’s participation in legislative authority. Measures to increase the representation of women in various representative entities.

Day One: Wednesday, 29 May 2024	
Time	Session
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience of women in leadership positions in legislative councils and competent parliamentary committees. <p><i>Moderator: Ms. Simone Briony Louise, OLUOCH-OLUNYA, Senior Policy Adviser, UN-Women</i></p>
1.30–2.30 p.m.	Lunch break
2.30–4 p.m.	<p>Session 3: Legislative developments in the field of the right to work and the decent work environment, and opportunities for entrepreneurship</p> <p>Interventions of representatives of parliaments on the achievements and most prominent challenges in adopting legislative amendments on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amendments to labour laws to eliminate gender discrimination in employment. Legislative amendments on unpaid care, maternity and paternity leave, and flexible working. Legal amendments to financial policies and investment opportunities to promote employment, entrepreneurship and access to property. <p><i>Moderator: Ms. Nada Darwazeh, Chief, ESCWA Centre for Women</i></p>
4–4.30 p.m.	Summarizing the key messages of the first day
Day Two: Thursday, 30 May 2024	
Time	Session
9–10.30 a.m.	<p>Session 4: Legislative developments in the field of protection against violence</p> <p>Interventions of representatives of parliaments on the achievements and most prominent challenges in adopting legislative amendments on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protection from domestic violence. Protection from harassment in the public sphere and workplace and from technology-facilitated violence. Protection from political violence against women in leadership positions and human rights defenders. <p><i>Moderator: Ms. Salma Nims, Senior Social Affairs and Gender Equality Officer, ESCWA</i></p>
10.30 a.m.–12 p.m.	<p>Session 5: Legislative developments relating to the rights and protection of vulnerable groups</p> <p>Interventions of representatives of parliaments on the achievements and most prominent challenges in adopting legislative amendments on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rights of women and girls with disabilities. Children’s rights and confronting child marriage. Combating female genital mutilation. <p><i>Moderator: Ms. Maha Muna, UNICEF Regional Office</i></p>

Day Two: Thursday, 30 May 2024	
Time	Session
12–12.30 p.m.	Coffee break
12.30–2 p.m.	<p>Session 6: Legislative developments in family and personal status matters</p> <p>Interventions of representatives of parliaments on major achievements and challenges in adopting legislative amendments related to the provisions of marriage and divorce, the right to own property, and the right to nationality.</p> <p><i>Moderator: Ms. Nada Darwazeh, Chief, ESCWA Centre for Women</i></p>
2–3 p.m.	Lunch break
3–4.30 p.m.	<p>Session 7: Closing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on the role of parliaments and legislatures in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. • Endorsement of key messages. <p><i>Moderator: Ms. Salma Nims, Senior Social Affairs and Gender Equality Officer, ESCWA</i></p>