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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT
OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN ON ITS SIXTH SESSION
KUWAIT, 4-5 DECEMBER 2013

Summary

The Committee on Women of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its sixth session in Kuwait, on 4 and 5 December 2013.

At the session, the Committee considered steps taken by Arab States to implement the recommendations made by the Committee at its fifth session; the activities of the ESCWA Centre for Women since the fifth session of the Committee; and the programme of work for the biennium 2014-2015 in the area of women advancement. The Committee also discussed regional issues, such as international frameworks to combat violence against women in Arab countries, highlighting the principle of due diligence, and encouraged Arab countries to mainstream a gender perspective into their public institutions. The presentations also covered international issues, such as the situation of Arab women and gender equality under the post-2015 development agenda and a review of progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 20 years after their adoption (Beijing+20).

The principal outcomes of the sixth session of the Committee were the issuance of the Kuwait Declaration on Combating Violence against Women that underscored the positive developments regarding Arab women and evaluated the main violations they had suffered. ESCWA member States confirmed their commitment to protecting women, safeguarding all their human rights and providing a safe environment for them to seek social justice on the basis of gender equality. They also reaffirmed their commitment to enshrining women's right to a decent life, physical integrity and human dignity without any form of discrimination. The Committee issued a series of recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat and member States for implementation during the biennium 2014-2015.

CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AT ITS SIXTH SESSION	2-4	3
A. Adoption of the 2013 Kuwait Declaration on Combating Violence against Women	2	3
B. Recommendations to ESCWA member States.....	3	4
C. Recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat	4	5
II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION	5-43	6
A. Progress achieved in the field of advancement of women since the fifth session of the Committee on Women	5-11	6
B. Regional issues	12-19	8
C. International issues	20-31	9
D. Programme of work for the biennium 2013-2014 in the field of advancement of women.....	32-40	12
E. Date and venue of the seventh session of the Committee on Women.....	41	13
F. Other matters	42	13
G. Adoption of the recommendations of the Committee on Women at its sixth session	43	14
III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK	44-55	14
A. Date and venue	44	14
B. Opening	45-50	14
C. Attendance.....	51	15
D. Election of officers	52	15
E. Adoption of the agenda and proposed organization of work.....	53-54	15
F. Documents.....	55	16

ANNEXES

I. List of participants	17
II. List of documents	20

Introduction

1. The Committee on Women held its sixth session on 4 and 5 December 2013, pursuant to Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) resolution 240 (XXII) of 17 April 2003, which was endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2003/9 of 18 July 2004 concerning the establishment within ESCWA of a committee on women. In its resolution, the Council decided that the Committee on Women shall hold its sessions biennially, with effect from 2004, and that an inaugural session should be held before the end of 2003. The Committee held its inaugural session in Beirut on 4 and 5 December 2003; its second in Beirut from 8 to 10 July 2004; its third in Abu Dhabi on 14 and 15 March 2007; its fourth in Beirut from 21 to 23 October 2009; and its fifth in Beirut from 19 to 21 December 2011.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AT ITS SIXTH SESSION

A. ADOPTION OF THE 2013 KUWAIT DECLARATION ON COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

2. The Committee adopted the Kuwait Declaration on Combating Violence against Women, set out as follows:

We, the member States participating in the sixth session of the Committee on Women of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), held in Kuwait City on 4 and 5 December 2013;

Recognizing that the Arab region is undergoing historical transitions and movements that are redefining the region, which we hope shall build a better future in terms of respect for human rights and dignity, including the protection of civil liberties and equal citizenship;

Noting the positive developments in the status of Arab women in previous years;

Affirming that Arab women are struggling with determination to protect the rights they have gained which are currently under threat because of discrimination from their societies and families and in the fields of health, education, economics and politics;

Recognizing also the negative effects of armed conflict in some Arab countries and the threats faced by women refugees and displaced women in terms of human rights violations and other forms of violence;

Affirming also the continuous suffering of women in Palestine, the Golan Heights and other occupied Arab territories and the extreme forms of violence and displacement they face;

Recognizing also the negative effects of blockades and economic sanctions on women in particular;

- Monitor with increasing alarm the violence targeted at women that threatens their well-being and livelihoods, and denies them their right to be active members of society, given that such forms of violence have become a means and a tool to hamper women's participation in development and progress;
- Condemn all types of violence against women that threaten their security and right to participate in all walks of life, considering such violence as a flagrant violation to basic ethical principles and religious values;
- Confirm that such violations and manifestations of violence not only negatively affect women but have a detrimental impact on society as a whole, thus eroding the credibility of its institutions and impeding its progress in a world where all individuals must participate in the development process;

- Also confirm the importance of upholding commitments to protect women and their human rights and provide them with the security to pursue justice founded on equality and defend their positions and active roles in society as fully competent persons; and call for specific measures to develop clear rules and procedures that determine liabilities regarding violence against women and limit cases of impunity;
- Declare our commitment to ensuring women's right to a decent life, physical integrity and human dignity without discrimination as foundations of legislation, politics and culture; given that it must be completely unacceptable in any circumstance to deny persons their right to a secure and decent life and to aspirations of a better future characterized by social equity and gender equality;
- Affirm our support for and solidarity with women in Palestine, the Golan Heights and other occupied Arab territories in their continuous struggle against the Israeli occupation and blockade; and commend their resistance and determination to a decent life that is free from all forms of violence;
- Strive to prohibit violations against women in general and against women refugees and displaced women in particular in times of war and armed conflict; and call for the punishment of offenders;
- Welcome the Kuwaiti initiative on strengthening efforts to monitor and evaluate violence against women in the Arab region; and request the ESCWA secretariat to implement the initiative in collaboration with ESCWA member States;
- Greatly value the role of the ESCWA Committee on Women as a platform for combating violence against women from a regional perspective that takes into account Arab specificities; and commend the efforts of the ESCWA secretariat in responding to the urgent challenges faced by member States.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ESCWA MEMBER STATES

3. The Committee thanked the Government of Kuwait for hosting the session; Mr. Jaber al-Mubarak al-Hamad al-Sabah, Prime Minister of Kuwait, for his patronage; and the Women's Affairs Committee, under the Council of Ministers, headed by Ms. Latifa al-Fahd al-Salem, for organizing the session. At the conclusion of its sixth session, the Committee on Women issued the following recommendations to ESCWA member States:

(a) Review cultural traditions that support women and combat those that hamper their advancement and empowerment;

(b) Ensure that national plans and legislation comply with international commitments; ratify international agreements on gender equality; and lift reservations, especially regarding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its optional protocols and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children;

(c) Implement recommendations endorsed by ESCWA member States in their global periodic reviews of women's rights and their participation in political and economic life;

(d) Support national human rights institutions in coordinating with national committees and ministries to enhance gender equality and empower women;

(e) Intensify efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and prepare national reports to review the progress made 20 years after its adoption; and collaborate with the ESCWA secretariat to prepare a regional review;

(f) Enact and implement a framework law to combat violence against women that covers the following: ensuring women's right to a life free of violence; investigating offences against women and punishing perpetrators; providing protection services to victims; compensating victims; and preventing violence against women;

(g) Target women in capacity-building programmes; raise their awareness; and include men in national initiatives to combat violence against women in general and in sessions of the ESCWA Committee on Women in particular;

(h) Strengthen the political will to support national mechanisms on the advancement of women and provide the necessary financial resources to implement, monitor and evaluate the integration of a gender perspective into all ministries, government institutions, public policy, planning and development programmes;

(i) Provide the needed human, technical and financial resources to create and adopt gender-sensitive budgets in all sectors;

(j) Strive to achieve the third Millennium Development Goal on promoting gender equality and empowering women, and implement national mechanisms on the advancement of women, taking into account national and regional specificities;

(k) Support Palestinian and Arab women under Israeli occupation;

(l) Provide support and assistance to Arab women in war zones and conflict areas;

(m) Develop partnerships at the national, regional and international levels to benefit from successful experiences;

(n) Continue to support and communicate with the ESCWA Centre for Women, and submit to it reports on best practices and successful national experiences and initiatives regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ESCWA SECRETARIAT

4. The Committee issued the following recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat:

(a) Strive to implement the Kuwait initiative to combat all forms of violence against women by intensifying efforts to monitor and analyse the phenomenon of gender-based violence in the Arab region and by proposing appropriate public policies and procedures to combat it;

(b) Study the phenomena of child and forced marriages and their effects on the social and economic situation of women and girls in the Arab region;

(c) Build the capacities of workers who provide protection services to victims of violence against women by developing tools and studies founded on relevant international standards;

(d) Strengthen the capacities of national mechanisms to mainstream a gender perspective in national legislation, policies, plans and programmes by providing training, technical assistance, advisory services, studies and lessons learned from successful experiences in this field;

(e) Enhance the capacities of member countries to monitor the implementation of CEDAW and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security by building the capacities of national mechanisms related to the advancement of women and of parliament members and civil society; exchange

experiences and good practices; and continue to raise awareness among decision makers on international instruments;

(f) Prepare for the regional review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+20) in collaboration with member States, the League of Arab States, regional organizations and relevant civil society institutions;

(g) Incorporate issues related to displaced women and girls and the role of women during periods of transition in the proposed work priorities;

(h) Collect data related to the economic role of women in society;

(i) Coordinate constantly with other United Nations entities and regional organizations, especially the League of Arab States, and support partnerships with them;

(j) Provide member States with updated information and research on good practices and successful experiences and initiatives related to empowering women and gender equality by organizing studies and workshops that meet regional priorities;

(k) Continue to measure the impact of current programmes and activities related to empowering women and gender equality and prepare development plans that meet national requirements and priorities.

II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

A. PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN THE FIELD OF ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN SINCE THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN (Agenda item 4)

1. *Implementation of activities related to the advancement of women under the ESCWA programme of work for the biennium 2012-2013, and pursuant to the recommendations of the Committee on Women at its fifth session* (Agenda item 4 (a))

5. The representative of the secretariat, referring to document E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/3, gave a presentation on the following activities undertaken by the ESCWA Centre for Women since the fifth session of the Committee:

(a) Studies and research: most notably “Gender Mainstreaming in Arab Countries: Experiences and Lessons Learned” (E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/5, Arabic only); “Addressing Barriers to Women’s Economic Participation in the Arab Region” (E/ESCWA/ECW/2012/1); and “Addressing Barriers to Women’s Political Participation in the Arab Region” (E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/1, Arabic only);

(b) Meetings and training workshops: most notably expert group meetings were held to discuss the project on women’s economic participation in the Arab region; mechanisms to support women’s political participation; and integrating a gender perspective into public institutions. Training sessions were also held for representatives of member States;

(c) Manuals, newsletters and information kits: the Committee reviewed the main publications, booklets and information material issued by the ESCWA Centre for Women aimed at policymakers in the Arab region to enhance the empowerment of Arab women; and documents that analyse statistics on women (health, education, and economic and political participation);

(d) Advisory services and technical assistance provided to member States in the following areas: gender equality; gender mainstreaming; formulating national strategies on women; preparing reports on CEDAW; monitoring and evaluation; and building leadership skills;

(e) Field projects and extrabudgetary activities: such as those that complement recurrent publications under the Women and Development Series and relevant expert group meetings; in addition to field projects to strengthen the mechanisms aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering women (in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs).

6. In the ensuing discussion, several representatives requested clarification on the member States benefitting from the project on Institutional and Capacity-building for Arab Parliaments and Other Stakeholders for the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security. In response, the Committee said that the project was being implemented, in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Economic Commission for Africa, in seven ESCWA member States affected by conflict or political transition, namely Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen.

7. Representatives also enquired about the nature of the technical support and advisory services offered by ESCWA and the strategies for their provision in areas that meet the requirements of member States, noting that advisory services should focus on capacity-building and providing technical guidance on gender issues and women's rights.

2. Actions taken by member countries in the field of advancement of women pursuant to the recommendations of the Committee on Women at its fifth session
(Agenda item 4 (b))

8. The representatives of Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen gave Power Point and verbal presentations on measures taken by their countries to implement recommendations issued by the Committee on Women at its fifth session and the challenges that arose in that regard.

9. Those representatives reviewed the measures taken to empower rural women, including developing national strategies, observatories and special funds for rural women; implementing integrated development programmes that included programmes aimed at rural women; and establishing centres to offer services and implement activities to build capacities, raise awareness and offer training in remote areas. Several representatives indicated the steps taken to mainstream gender, such as developing plans and strategies to integrate a gender perspective at all levels within public institutions and priority sectors for women, and in national strategies in general and women's strategies in particular; in addition to establishing gender units and networks in public institutions to build staff capacities. Some representatives indicated the existence of gender mainstreaming in national and sectoral surveys, studies and public budgets and noted the establishment of sex-disaggregated statistical databases.

10. A few representatives focused on measures taken to combat violence against women in their presentations, especially developing relevant national strategies; preparing draft bills to combat domestic violence; approving a referral system for victims; establishing monitoring and follow-up centres, complaint centres, shelters and service centres for victims of violence; and enacting legislation that prohibited trafficking in women and amending penal codes in that regard.

11. With regard to women's participation in decision-making processes in member countries, representatives said that a quota system had been adopted in representative councils, especially local and provincial councils and parliaments. Positive discrimination measures had also been taken for working women and in terms of motherhood issues.

B. REGIONAL ISSUES
(Agenda item 5)

1. *Frameworks for combating violence against women in Arab countries:
National laws and international standards*
(Agenda item 5 (a))

12. The representative of the secretariat, referring to document E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/4, gave a presentation on frameworks for combating violence against women in the Arab region and compared national and international standards in that regard. International standards related to combating violence against women were founded on the principle of due diligence, explained in the model framework for legislation on violence against women. The principles, tools and obligations of countries in combating violence against women were outlined in the following five priorities: ensuring women's right to a life free of violence; prohibiting violence and protecting women from it; investigating cases of violence; punishing offenders; and compensating victims.

13. The speaker underlined the findings of ESCWA studies, which showed that official mechanisms had been established to combat violence against women in Arab countries in the form of specialized police units, in addition to training policewomen and developing national strategies to combat violence against women. Nevertheless, the real challenge lay in the absence of comprehensive laws protecting women from offences committed against them. Current laws did not cover all forms of violence against women at all levels; and member countries concentrated more on criminalizing violence than on preventing it, protecting and compensating victims and upholding their rights.

14. The presentation also highlighted the fact that, although criminal law in the majority of member countries prohibited some forms of violence against women, their legal systems did not completely comply with the five above-mentioned priorities, the principle of due diligence and the model framework for legislation on violence against women. With regard to protecting victims of violence, despite the various services available to victims, such as hotline, shelter, medical, legal and advisory services, the absence of a comprehensive referral system in the majority of member countries resulted in victims not being properly protected.

15. In the ensuing discussion, several representatives stressed the need to resolve the issue of violence against women and girls in times of war and peace. They indicated the importance of assisting refugees and displaced women from the violence of war and armed conflict in some Arab countries and of involving men and boys in efforts aimed at combating violence against women. Representatives also highlighted the need to implement laws and establish courts specializing in cases of violence against women and underscored the need to empower women and educate them legally to limit cases where offenders go unpunished because women forfeit their rights, confirming that it should be the right of society, and not only women, to punish offenders. Representatives also agreed on the importance of building partnerships and collaborating with international organizations to empower women.

2. *Gender mainstreaming in public institutions in the Arab countries*
(Agenda item 5 (b))

16. Under this item, the representative of the secretariat gave a presentation on national initiatives and experiences in mainstreaming a gender perspective into public institutions in Arab countries. She stressed that gender mainstreaming, 20 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, was no longer an option but rather a necessary strategic tool to empower women and achieve gender equality. The presentation focused on the main challenges and obstacles facing national mechanisms in gender mainstreaming in public institutions and presented guidelines and recommendations from various successful experiences, including building the capacities of gender units in ministries and public institutions and urging countries to adopt gender-sensitive budgets.

17. The presentation also tackled the study on gender mainstreaming in Arab countries: experiences and lessons learned, noting that, for the first time, the study had been conducted in collaboration with member countries through a consultative expert group meeting aimed at discussing the questionnaire on which the study was fundamentally based; and at reviewing national experiences, disseminating good practices and exchanging experiences in gender mainstreaming.

18. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Oman explained the measures taken in the country to mainstream gender indicating several initiatives to support rural women, prepare gender-sensitive data and establish a committee to monitor the implementation of CEDAW in Oman.

19. The representative of Morocco presented her country's experience in gender mainstreaming, especially through the development of gender-sensitive budgets. The Sudanese representative noted the importance of the study and said that gender mainstreaming should be propagated throughout the private sector and not only in public institutions, especially considering that most women work in private institutions. Representatives also stressed the need to reevaluate the concepts of gender and gender mainstreaming to meet the needs of both men and women.

C. INTERNATIONAL ISSUES (Agenda item 6)

1. *Arab women and gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda* (Agenda item 6 (a))

20. The representative of the secretariat, referring to document E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/5, gave a presentation on women and gender issues in the post-2015 development agenda and on the outcomes of national, regional and international consultations on the topic. The presentation evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the Millennium Development Goals, stressing their importance, and their time-limited measurable targets that represented a common vision that guided national and international development principles. Weaknesses lay in the adopted approach to determining principles, challenges and strategies that did not take into account the principles and values contained in the Millennium Declaration, focusing on results rather than implementation methods, and not linking the goals to international legal commitments.

21. The presentation covered the agreements reached at meetings and consultations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on the fundamental priorities and principles contained in the post-2015 development agenda, whose main priorities were achieving economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. The three principles on which the agenda should be founded were human rights, equality and good governance. Given that gender equality was vital to the realization of those three principles, it was proposed that it should be adopted as an approach in its own right by including it as a separate goal in the agenda and introducing it as a comprehensive policy throughout all sectors, or by adopting a dual approach that integrates gender equality as one of its components.

22. The representative of the secretariat outlined the progress made and the challenges faced in implementing the Millennium Development Goals at the regional level. On the basis of studies conducted in that field, the following recommendations were made:

(a) Hasten the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (using the third goal as a nexus) to meet the 2015 deadline by determining various realistic interventions aimed at achieving those goals, highlighting the main challenges that impede their achievement and finding solutions to priority issues;

(b) Ensure that national and local goals and targets meet legal commitments in accordance with international treaties and national development strategies;

(c) Implement a framework for monitoring, reviewing and accountability that includes inclusive national mechanisms and clearly identifies the roles of all stakeholders, including civil society and national mechanisms for the advancement of women;

(d) Activate national mechanisms for the advancement of women by including them in international discussions on the post-2015 development agenda and the positions taken by States and relevant actors, so as to ensure that Arab women's priorities become development commitments;

(e) Include relevant national mechanisms for the advancement of women in the post-2015 development process at the national and regional levels, especially to ensure that goals, targets and indicators comply with internationally agreed principles and regional and national specificities.

23. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Saudi Arabia indicated the progress achieved in improving health care and reducing illiteracy among women, in addition to the increase in women university graduates in Saudi Arabia. She said that 30 women were members of the Shura Council, making up 20 per cent of its total membership, and that Saudi women would stand in the 2014 municipal elections. The representative of the Sudan noted that her country had carried out national consultations on the post-2015 development agenda, confirming the importance of national priorities and national ownership of the Millennium Development Goals. The representative of the United Arab Emirates asked whether there was a database on the post-2015 development goals and on the measures taken to establish such a database if it did not exist.

24. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic said that quantitative data were generally not a good indicator given that they reflected changes in women's roles without reflecting the empowerment process. Member countries should therefore develop other indicators for the post-2015 era. The representative of Palestine focused on the need to implement gender quotas to correct legislative imbalances and on the importance of establishing a ministry for women.

25. The representative of Kuwait said that existing institutional mechanisms were not sufficient given that most Arab countries had ministries of women's affairs but results were not promising, highlighting the importance of compliance with international treaties. In Kuwait, for example, courts did not abide by CEDAW or the Convention on the Rights of the Child. She added that there were disparities among countries in the way they were implementing the Millennium Development Goals. Countries should be named in United Nations regional reports, thus avoiding generalizations on achievements and challenges.

26. The representative of Lebanon said that democracy and good governance led to more effective participation of women in the political process and more representation at the national level. The representative of Morocco stressed the need to include marginalized and vulnerable groups in the post-2015 development agenda and to establish national funds to meet their needs, such as the Moroccan family takaful fund for divorced women.

27. In response, the representative of the secretariat said that discussions were currently underway to develop a database on new indicators that would be adopted following agreement on the post-2015 development goals. She added that the aim of the report entitled "Arab Women and Gender Equality in the Post-2015 Development Agenda" was not to evaluate progress made in implementing the Millennium Development Goals in Arab countries, but rather to highlight current international discussions on gender equality in the agenda and the importance of including national mechanisms concerned with the advancement of women in the process of determining development goals and incorporating women's priorities in those discussions.

*2. Preparations for the 20-year review of progress in the implementation of the
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+20)
(Agenda item 6 (b))*

28. The representative of the secretariat, referring to document E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/CRP.1, gave a presentation on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 12 critical areas of concern, explaining key strategies related to each area, and regional review procedures for the implementation of the Platform for Action in Arab countries that had been undertaken every five years since the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. She also outlined the following preparatory steps to the evaluation of progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 20 years after their adoption (Beijing+20):

(a) Design a questionnaire for member countries that includes a guidance note on preparing national reports and guidelines on the content of national presentations;

(b) Hold a regional workshop that includes representatives from national mechanisms concerned with the advancement of women to discuss the questionnaire prepared by United Nations entities and regional commissions, which includes clear indicators to accurately identify national achievements; and provide guidance on the preparation of national reports;

(c) Prepare national reports that highlight progress made regarding the 12 critical areas of concern; issues linked to data and statistics; and opportunities and challenges in the implementation of the Platform for Action;

(d) Organize consultative meetings with specialists, experts and civil society representatives to take into account civil society perspectives in evaluating progress;

(e) Hold a high-level meeting to discuss the preliminary results of the regional report on the basis of national reports so as to determine the progress made in the Arab region in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 20 years after their adoption;

(f) Review the consolidated Arab report by the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-ninth session.

29. The representative of Jordan confirmed her country's commitment to preparing reports on CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. She posed several questions on the possibility of developing real partnerships between the public and private sectors; on successful networking and participation; on the success of member countries in developing women's networks to meet their interests; on establishing standardized databases that facilitated access to information; and on the ability to measure the quality of services provided to victims of violence against women, persons with special needs, women heads of households and older women.

30. The representative of the Sudan said that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action should be fully linked to the development agenda, indicating the need to evaluate the Platform to determine the extent to which it met national requirements. She also stressed the need for partnerships and consultations between countries; to take into account emerging issues and their impact on women; and to develop international partnerships to implement the Platform. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic suggested that the membership of delegations and national mechanisms concerned with the advancement of women should comprise an equal number of men and women; and recommended that ESCWA champion this.

31. The representative of Kuwait focused on the nature of standards used to measure countries' progress in the advancement of women and their empowerment so as to include them in the development process, given that progress should not only be measured through questionnaires, as standards and indicators that affirm countries' compliance with recommendations were also necessary. The representative of Egypt

requested clarification on areas that required special focus in national reports. She also confirmed the importance of changing prevalent stereotypes among decision makers. The representative of Tunisia stressed the importance of including men in tackling women's problems by mainstreaming gender in all activities. The representative of Oman indicated the absence of some data on Oman in the statistics tables distributed by ESCWA.

D. PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 2013-2014 IN THE FIELD OF
ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN
(Agenda item 7)

32. The representative of the secretariat, referring to document E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/6, gave a presentation on the programme of work for the biennium 2013-2014 in the field of advancement of women, including expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement and the strategy and vision of the ESCWA Centre for Women with regard to the implementation of the programme of work amidst the challenges facing the Arab region and their repercussions on the status and rights of women. The presentation introduced the Centre for Women, established on 1 October 2003, pursuant to ESCWA resolution 240 (XXII) of 17 April 2003, and upgraded to the level of a division, pursuant to ESCWA resolution 293 (XXVI) of 19 May 2010. The Centre's team comprised gender equality experts from various disciplines and its vision was to achieve gender equality, contribute to respect for women's rights in accordance with international treaties and encourage the exchange of lessons learned between ESCWA member States.

33. The representative of the secretariat said that the Centre's main achievements were publishing studies and research in accordance with regional and international priorities; strengthening partnerships and coordinating with national mechanisms concerned with the advancement of women; developing capacity-building programmes, such as training 120 staff members to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and training 400 staff members on gender mainstreaming and the CEDAW provisions; and allocating 500,000 United States dollars (\$) from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs to support a project to build the capacities and institutions of Arab parliaments and other stakeholders for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

34. The speaker indicated the challenges faced by the Centre, including a lack of human and financial resources, and the difficulty of mainstreaming gender in programmes despite approval and support from senior management. There were also regional challenges that made gender equality hard to achieve given that current conflicts and the lack of security and political will negatively affected the situation of women; in addition to the lack of sex-disaggregated indicators and data.

35. She said that regional priorities and urgent issues could be addressed by implementing policies and legislation that complied with women's social, economic and political rights and that tackled the situation of women in conflict zones and during periods of political transition, in the light of Beijing+20 and the post-2015 development agenda.

36. The speaker also reviewed the implementation strategies for increasing technical support to strengthen the capacities of national mechanisms and other stakeholders concerned with the advancement of women. She mentioned the research approaches and training tools developed, and the need to raise awareness and exchange information and experiences on gender mainstreaming. She finally highlighted the importance of implementing international treaties on women; strengthening cooperation and developing partnerships between all stakeholders; and working in close collaboration with other United Nations entities, especially the Commission on the Status of Women, the United Nations Population Fund, the other United Nations regional commissions, with regional government organizations, particularly the League of Arab States and the Arab Women Organization, and with research centres, especially the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR), the Carnegie Middle East Centre and the New York Abu Dhabi University, in addition to civil society institutions and the media.

37. The representative of the secretariat reviewed the Centre's work programme for the biennium 2014-2015 that focused on limiting gender disparity; encouraging the exchange of experiences and lessons learned between member countries; and contributing to respect for women's rights in accordance with international conference and conventions. Expected accomplishments are as follows:

(a) Enhance the capacities of member countries to adopt gender-sensitive policies, legislation and budgets to achieve gender equality;

(b) Enhance the capacities of member countries to combat gender-based violence by enacting legislation and implementing national work plans;

(c) Enhance the capacities of member countries to implement governance and national development policies founded on equal participation from men and women, which focused on improving the status of women in democratic decision-making processes.

38. The following were the main expected outcomes of the work programme for the biennium 2014-2015: holding the seventh session of the Committee on Women; publishing a report on progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+20) and on key development issues related to the advancement of women in the Arab region; issuing recurrent publications such as "Status of Arab Women: National Laws and International Conventions" and "Gender and Development Series: Early Marriage in the Arab Region"; and non-recurrent publications on Women and the Knowledge Society in the Arab Region, Addressing Gender-based Violence in the Arab Region: Status and Institutional Frameworks, The Social and Economic Situation of Women in Conflict-Stricken Areas in the Arab Region; and technical material such as the report on the Economic and Social Situation of Palestinian Women; as well as other printed material.

39. Another expected outcome of the programme of work was holding expert group meetings tackling the following issues: early marriage in the Arab region; national legislation and international agreements in the Arab region; progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Arab region; and the economic and social situations of women in conflict areas in Arab countries. The Centre would also organize the launch of the publication entitled "Status of Arab Women: National Laws and International Conventions" on International Women's Day.

40. The Centre would provide advisory services to member countries regarding gender mainstreaming and would monitor the implementation of international agreements on gender equality and empowering women; hold training sessions, seminars and workshops on using the media to empower women in the Arab region and on women and knowledge-based societies in the Arab region; implement field projects such as building the institutional capacities of Arab parliaments and other stakeholders for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security; and establish a women's observatory for the Arab region.

E. DATE AND VENUE OF THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN (Agenda item 8)

41. Participants agreed to hold the seventh session of the Committee on Women in Beirut in 2015, provided that no member country submits a request to host it. The representative of Palestine expressed her wish to hold the seventh session in Palestine.

F. OTHER MATTERS (Agenda item 9)

42. There were no matters to be discussed under this item.

G. ADOPTION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN
AT ITS SIXTH SESSION
(Agenda item 10)

43. The recommendations of the sixth session of the Committee were reviewed and adopted as amended.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

44. The Committee on Women held its sixth session in Kuwait, on 4 and 5 December 2013. The session's proceedings were conducted over four meetings.

B. OPENING

45. Ms. Rima Khalaf, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA, made the opening statement highlighting the significant transformations taking place in Arab countries that had been instigated by the will of the people who aspired to establish democratic systems that upheld human rights and dignity, and ensured social justice. She said that women's rights were a part of that movement, founded on the principle of equal citizenship for all, but many feared that the rights that women had struggled to secure for decades would be eroded. Women faced a continuous battle with many difficult challenges, but women's rights remained a central issue for any society determined to guarantee a decent life for all citizens. She also outlined the priority regional and international issues that would be discussed at the sixth session of the Committee, such as Beijing+20, key areas for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality, as well as the great national, regional and international challenges in those areas, which should be determined as a first step towards taking appropriate measures to implement countries' commitments on women's issues.

46. The Executive Secretary noted the progress made in Arab countries in terms of maternal health and achieving gender parity in education. Nevertheless, women's participation in economic life remained limited compared to other regions, resulting in gender disparities in income and opportunities. Women's participation in political life was also low in most Arab countries. Undoubtedly, Arab women were gravely suffering because of the security threats and the increase in violence in the Arab region, especially in conflict-stricken countries, given that women were the primary victims in such situations. She said that Palestine remained a unique example, in the Arab world and globally, of a place where the arbitrary procedures of the Israeli occupation were increasing the already heavy burden of Palestinian women and destroying every hope they have for progress and development by denying them their basic human rights.

47. The speaker affirmed that violence against women was a global problem that took on various forms and caused great suffering to women, their families and their communities. It was therefore necessary to eliminate it through social awareness, political will and the necessary resources. She said that ESCWA gave special attention to the issue and was collaborating with regional and international organizations to support Arab countries in developing their legal infrastructure and adopting policies to combat that scourge. She stressed the need to benefit from the opportunities of the post-2015 development agenda to present the case of Arab women and their needs within development requirements for the coming period, noting that the development project would not end in 2015 as it was a comprehensive approach that would continue within a new framework so as to achieve inclusive human development for all social groups.

48. She said that the current meeting aimed to enhance the role of women in political, social and economic life, thus enshrining their rights and the principle of gender equality. Effective women's participation in the political process would not be achieved without their strong economic participation, which in turn would not be complete before all forms of violence and discrimination against women were eliminated. Empowering women was one of the main prerequisites that determined the success of efforts made by Governments and civil society organizations to resolve conflicts, secure economic advancement and guarantee social justice for the benefit of all social groups.

49. Ms. Latifa al-Fahd al-Salem al-Sabah, Chairperson of the Kuwaiti Women's Affairs Committee, stressed the importance of holding the sixth session of the Committee in the light of the urgent circumstances and challenges facing the Arab region, and their effects on Arab women. She presented an initiative for the establishment of a committee to analyse the needs of women in Arab countries suffering from urgent security and political crises, so as to assist women in their plight and understand their problems and worries. That would enable the committee to prepare a detailed and comprehensive study that offered a close up analysis of women's requirements; to galvanize efforts to support and adopt them at regional and international events. She expressed her hope that the initiative would be supported and implemented. She added that efforts in Kuwait focused on protecting the rights of women and children, eliminating all forms of violence, combating poverty and illiteracy and offering all types of support to empower women, increase their participation in the decision-making process and offer them equal opportunities in all areas.

50. Ms. Thikra al-Rashidi, Kuwaiti Minister of Social Affairs and Labour, commended the Committee for its role in improving the situation of Arab women by providing technical and research support in all relevant cases, striving to empower rural women, encouraging their participation in economic and political life, training them to use information technology services and working hard to secure social equity and gender equality. She underscored the importance of monitoring the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and evaluating achievements, challenges and priorities 20 years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. She stressed the importance of regional cooperation between ESCWA member countries and with regional and international organizations concerned with the advancement of Arab women. She noted the achievements of ESCWA in terms of studies and reports, technical support and training, which positively affected efforts to improve the situation of Arab women.

C. ATTENDANCE

51. The session was attended by representatives of national machineries for women, ministries, councils and committees on women from Arab countries in the capacity of government experts. Observers included representatives of United Nations specialized agencies and programmes, governmental and non-governmental regional and international organizations accredited by the Economic and Social Council; other governmental organizations; national and regional networks, several research centres; and bilateral and multilateral national and regional donors. A number of experts, advisors and academics were also in attendance. Annex I to the present report sets out the list of participants.

D. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

52. Pursuant to article 18 of the Rules of Procedure of ESCWA, which provides that member countries shall assume the presidency of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission on a rotating basis, in Arabic alphabetical order as established by the United Nations, Iraq assumed the presidency of the sixth session, succeeding the Sudan, which had assumed the presidency of the fifth session of the Committee on Women, from 19 December 2011 to 4 December 2013. The Committee elected the representative of the Sudan by consensus as First Vice-Chair and the representative of Oman as Second Vice-Chair. The representative of Palestine was elected as Rapporteur.

E. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND PROPOSED ORGANIZATION OF WORK

53. At its first meeting, the sixth session of the Committee on Women adopted the following proposed agenda as contained in document E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/L.1.

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.

3. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
 4. Progress achieved in the field of advancement of women since the fifth session of the Committee on Women:
 - (a) Implementation of activities related to the advancement of women under the ESCWA programme of work for the biennium 2012-2013, and pursuant to the recommendations of the Committee on Women at its fifth session;
 - (b) Actions taken by member countries in the field of advancement of women pursuant to the recommendations of the Committee on Women at its fifth session.
 5. Regional issues:
 - (a) Frameworks for combating violence against women in Arab countries: national laws and international standards;
 - (b) Gender mainstreaming in public institutions in the Arab countries.
 6. International issues:
 - (a) Arab women and gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda;
 - (b) Preparations for the 20-year review of progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+20).
 7. Programme of work for the biennium 2014-2015 in the field of advancement of women.
 8. Date and venue of the seventh session of the Committee on Women.
 9. Other matters.
 10. Adoption of the recommendations of the Committee on Women at its sixth session.
54. At the same meeting, the Committee approved the proposed organization of work set out in document E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/L.2.

F. DOCUMENTS

55. Annex II to the present report lists the documents presented to the Committee on Women at its sixth session.

Annex I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

Bahrain

Ms. Bahija Mohammad al-Daylami
Training and Development Consultant
Supreme Council for Women

Ms. Rana Ahmed Khalifa Ahmed
Director of the Women's Support Centre
Supreme Council for Women

Ms. Hanadi Ahmed al-Nayef
Statistician
Supreme Council for Women

Ms. Noura Abdulaziz al-Rifai
Bilateral Relations Expert
Supreme Council for Women

Egypt

Ms. Mirvat Talawi
Chair
National Council for Women

Ms. Isis Mahmud Hafez Ahmed
National Council for Women

Ms. Amal Tawfiq
National Council for Women

Mr. Issam Rajab Sultan
Public Relations and Protocol
National Council for Women

Iraq

Ms. Bushra al-Zawini
Adviser to the Office of the Prime Minister

Ms. Samira Hussein
Adviser
Ministry of State for Women's Affairs

Ms. Sara Hamid Rashid
Engineer
Ministry of State for Women's Affairs

Jordan

Ms. Mona Mo'tamin
Strategic Planning Advisor
Jordanian National Commission for Women

Kuwait

Ms. Hoda Abdulmohsen al-Shayji
Coordinator of the Fatwa and Legislation
Department
Women's Affairs Committee

Ms. Salma Nasser al-Ajami
Adviser
Women's Affairs Committee

Ms. Hessa Majed al-Shaheen
Adviser
Women's Affairs Committee

Ms. Badria Nawar Jaber
Ministry of Education Coordinator
Women's Affairs Committee

Lebanon

Ms. Jumana abu al-Rus Mufrej
Administrative Director
National Commission for Lebanese Women

Ms. Susi Buladian
Fund Secretary
National Commission for Lebanese Women

Morocco

Ms. Basima al-Haqawi
Minister
Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social
Development

Ms. Fatima al-Zahra` Babaowmal
Adviser to the Minister
Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social
Development

Morocco (continued)

Ms. Aziza Bilmalam
Director of the Department for Women's
Initiatives
Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social
Development

Mr. Yusuf al-Sathi
Head of the Department for the Advancement of
Women's Rights
Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social
Development

Oman

Ms. Jamila bint Salem bin Mabkhut Jadad
Director of the Department of Women's Affairs
Ministry of Social Development

Ms. Nour bint Said Aslam al-Shahri
Director of the Department of Women and
Children
Ministry of Social Development

Ms. Shadia bint Abdullah bin Said al-Shabibia
Omani Women's Association
Member of the CEDAW Committee

Palestine

Ms. Rabiha Diab
Minister of Women's Affairs

Ms. Rami Asaad Zaqut
Director of the Media Department
Ministry of Women's Affairs

Qatar

Ms. Jawharah al-Mutawa
Director of the Planning Department
Supreme Council for Family Affairs

Ms. Fatima Yusuf al-Abidli
Acting Director of the Department of Family
Policy
Supreme Council for Family Affairs

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Ali Abdullah Bahithim
Adviser
Foreign Ministry

Ms. Rana Jamil Taybe
Head of the Department of Consultations and
Development
Ministry of Social Affairs

Ms. Ghada bint Mansur Abdulghafar
Ministry of Social Affairs

The Sudan

Ms. Masha'ir al-Amin Abdullah
Minister
Ministry of Welfare and Social Security

Ms. Mawahib Mohammad Ahmed al-Haj
Director-General
General Department of Women and Children
Ministry of Welfare and Social Security

Ms. Lamyia Abdulghafar Khalfallah
Secretary-General
National Population Council

Syrian Arab Republic

Ms. Insaf Hamd
Chair
Syrian Commission for Family Affairs

Ms. Rana Khalifawi
Director of Research and Studies
Syrian Commission for Family Affairs

Tunisia

Ms. Siham Badi
Minister
Ministry of Women and Family Affairs

Ms. Iman al-Qal'i al-Iyari
Director of Women's Affairs
Ministry of Women and Family Affairs

Ms. Iman Zawawi
Adviser
Centre for Research, Studies, Documentation and
Information on Women

Ms. Wafa' al-Raslati
Social and Legal Expert
Ministry of Women and Family Affairs

United Arab Emirates

Ms. Naji'a Seif al-Mansouri
Head of International Relations
General Women's Union

Ms. Mona Awd Omar
Researcher

Yemen

Ms. Ishraq Muhammad Abdurrahman al-Jadiri
Director of the Department for Civil Society
Institutions and Human Rights
Council of Ministers

Ms. Iman Abdullah Ali al-Hamami
Secretary-General
Ministry of Planning and International
Cooperation

Ms. Hanan Nasser Hajeb
Director of the Education Department

Ms. Wafa Mohammad Naef Yahya
Director of Legal Affairs

B. INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

League of Arab States

Ms. Faiqa Said al-Saleh
Assistant Secretary-General and Director of Social
Affairs
Egypt

Ms. Inas Sayed Makawi
Minister, Director of the Department of Women,
Family and Children
Egypt

Arab Women Organization

Ms. Sheikha Seif al-Shamisi
Director-General
Egypt

C. UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMMES AND BODIES

United Nations Development Programme

Mr. Salah al-Haj
Kuwait

Ms. Dima al-Khatib
Deputy Resident Representative

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights

Ms. Fatima Ayed al-Rashidi
Legal Protection
Kuwait

Office of the High Commissioner for Human
Rights

Ms. Nada Daruza
Responsible for Human Rights
Middle East Region
Lebanon

United Nations Population Fund

Ms. Inshirah Ahmed
Adviser on Gender, Human Rights and Culture
Egypt

D. UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATIONS AND SPECIALIZED AGENCIES

International Labour Organization

Ms. Dunia Mahmud al-Baihari
Programme and Administration Expert
Kuwait

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the
Empowerment of Women

Ms. Nouhad Jawhar
Programme Director
Egypt

Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Title	Item	Symbol
Information note		E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/INF.1
Provisional agenda and annotations	3	E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/L.1
Organization of work	3	E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/L.2
Progress achieved in the field of advancement of women since the fifth session of the Committee on Women	4	
Implementation of activities related to the advancement of women under ESCWA programme of work for the biennium 2012-2013, and pursuant to the recommendations of the Committee on Women at its fifth session	4 (a)	E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/3
Regional issues	5	
Frameworks for combating violence against women in the Arab countries: national laws and international standards	5 (a)	E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/4
Gender mainstreaming in public institutions in Arab countries	5 (b)	E/ESCWA/ECW/2011/2
International issues	6	
Arab women and gender equality in the Post-2015 Development Agenda	6 (a)	E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/5
Preparations for the 20-year review of progress in the implementation of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+20)	6 (b)	E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/CRP.1
Programme of work for the biennium 2014-2015 in the field of advancement of women	7	E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/6