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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**

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Item 7 (a-ii) of the provisional agenda

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**

**FOLLOW-UP TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED  
BY THE COMMISSION AT ITS TWENTY-SECOND SESSION**

*The establishment within ESCWA of a committee on women: resolution 240 (XXII)*

**Summary**

At its twenty-second session, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted resolution 240 (XXII) dated 17 April 2003 concerning the establishment of a committee on women comprising representatives of member countries who are specialists in women's issues and with responsibility for identifying women-related priorities, coordinating plans and formulating the relevant ESCWA programmes of work.

Pursuant to that resolution, the ESCWA secretariat has undertaken a variety of activities.

This report comprises a brief review of the activities that have been carried out with a view to implementing resolution 240 (XXII).

## **I. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND ITS WORK**

1. In the aforementioned resolution 240 (XXII), ESCWA requested the Executive Secretary to establish a women's centre within the secretariat with the responsibility of acting as the secretariat of the Committee on Women. It was decided that the Committee should hold its sessions biennially, with effect from 2004, and that an inaugural session should be held before the end of 2003.

2. Pursuant to the resolution, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA issued an administrative directive establishing the ESCWA Centre for Women, with a direct link to the Executive Secretary. A director of the Centre was appointed with effect from 1 October 2003. The Centre currently acts as the secretariat of the Committee on Women. The Committee on Women has responsibility for monitoring developments in the situation of women and the development of indicators for measuring progress made in that respect; following up implementation of recommendations made by women-related international and regional conferences; coordinating endeavours and harmonizing the positions of member countries at international gatherings; following up the implementation of women-related international conventions, foremost among which is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; preparing and implementing field projects for the advancement and empowerment of women; providing technical assistance to member countries with a view to achieving that aim and finding the necessary funding for that purpose; and according the appropriate attention to Palestinian women and women in areas where conflict and war are rife.

3. The Committee on Women held its first, inaugural session in Beirut on 4 and 5 December 2003. Its aims included the review and evaluation of the action taken to advance women in the 10 years since the convening of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, by considering all the gains made by women and the obstacles and challenges that are faced in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, in preparation for the 10-year review in New York in March 2005; the review of the responsibilities of the Committee on Women within ESCWA and, in that light, the programme of work of the Centre for Women; and the identification of country needs with respect to the empowerment of women, using the contributions and proposals put forward to the secretariat for consideration in the preparation of the programme of work for the Centre for Women for the 2006-2007 biennium. During the session, the indicator for measuring the status of Arab women, which was devised and developed by ESCWA, was reviewed, together with new indicators that are subsidiary to the basic, previously agreed indicators, namely, the legal indicator and the cultural indicator, which measures common practices and customs. That indicator continues to be studied and tested.

4. The first session of the Committee concluded by making a set of recommendations to Governments and ESCWA, in which the emphasis was on the need to formulate a comprehensive programme for Beijing +10; to provide technical assistance to Arab countries in preparing their national reports on the implementation of the recommendations of women-related international conferences and reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; to review, amend and test the indicator for measuring the status of Arab women; and, with regard to all evaluation and follow-up activities related to the Beijing Conference, to establish firm links for cooperation and coordination with the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, the Arab Women's Organization, the United Nations Development Fund for Women Arab States Regional Office and the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. The Committee further recommended that its sessions should be held annually rather than biennially, and that that recommendation should be put forward for consideration at the twenty-third ESCWA session.<sup>1</sup>

5. The second session of the Committee on Women was held as part of the Arab Regional Conference 10 Years after Beijing: Call for Peace, which was held in Beirut from 8 to 10 July 2004. That Conference also comprised the Expert Group Meeting to Follow Up on the Fourth World Conference on Women and the

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, ESCWA, *Report of the Committee on Women on its first session*, Beirut, 4-5 December 2003, E/ESCWA/WOM/2003/IG.1/9, p. 4.

second meeting of the Consultative Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations. The principal aim of the session was to prepare and coordinate positions for the comprehensive review, Beijing +10; to monitor achievements in the 10 years since Beijing; to identify obstacles and suggest the measures that should be taken; and to present the results to the Commission on the Status of Women, which will hold its forty-ninth session in New York from 28 February to 11 March 2005, with a view to their being taken into consideration in the comprehensive document that will be prepared by the Commission and submitted to the United Nations General Assembly, thereby making available information on the situation in and needs of the region. For that purpose, ESCWA prepared the Arab Regional Ten-Year Review and Appraisal of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, in which the focus is on the achievements of the Arab countries and the obstacles that they have faced in implementing the Platform. It was based on the responses of 18 of a total 22 Arab countries to a questionnaire on the issue which was sent to them by the United Nations secretariat.

6. At its second session, the Committee on Women adopted a set of conclusions and recommendations which, together, constitute the Beirut Declaration on Arab Women Ten Years after Beijing: Call for Peace, and urged the Governments of all Arab countries to implement that Declaration. The Committee urged Arab Governments to strengthen national women-related mechanisms by allocating sufficient human and financial resources thereto. It also requested ESCWA to provide advisory services, at the request of member countries, in fields relating to the advancement and empowerment of women, to strengthen national mechanisms and provide support in the preparation of reports on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and to mainstream gender issues in policies and programmes. Particular emphasis was placed in the Beirut Declaration on supporting the role of women in Arab parliaments, the executive and decision-making authorities, civil society, the media, and intellectual and cultural spheres, by formulating a clear picture of the commitments, arrangements, procedures and policies which must be implemented in the forthcoming 10 years in order to empower Arab women, improve their status and increase their participation in political, economic and social life and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

7. Pursuant to a recommendation made by the Committee at its first session, at the conclusion of the second session of the Committee on Women, the Executive Secretary presented certificates of appreciation to Ms. Suzanne Mubarak, in recognition of her "Women for Peace" initiative; Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak Al Nahyan, for her support for the Arab women's issue; and to representatives of the late Ms. Laure Mughayzal, for her defence of women's rights, Palestinian women, for their steadfast support for self-determination, and Morocco, for its family code.<sup>2</sup>

## **II. SUBPROGRAMME 7. THE ADVANCEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

8. At the time of the establishment of the Centre for Women in October 2003, responsibility for women's issues lay with the ESCWA Women and Development Division, which subsequently became the Women Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming Team of the Social Development Division. Subprogramme 7, concerned with the advancement and empowerment of women, is part of the proposed strategic framework for the 2006-2007 biennium, and was allocated an independent budget under the programme of work and priorities for that biennium.

9. The Committee on Women reviewed the aforementioned subprogramme at its second session and expressed its satisfaction that the proposed strategic framework for the 2006-2007 biennium should include a subprogramme concerned with the advancement and empowerment of women. The Committee requested the secretariat to allocate to the Centre for Women in ESCWA, under the programme of work for the 2006-2007 biennium, the human and financial resources necessary for it to undertake the additional duties which had been assigned to it. The Centre is making strenuous efforts to locate extrabudgetary funding to enable it to carry out those duties. Since it was established in October 2003, it has obtained from the Government of the

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations, ESCWA, *Report of the Arab Regional Conference Ten Years after Beijing: Call for Peace*, Beirut, 8-10 July 2004, E/ESCWA/WOM/2004/IG.1/6.

Netherlands funding to employ a women's issues expert for three years and some \$400,000 to fund her activities. It has also obtained additional funding from the regular ESCWA technical cooperation budget for the implementation of field projects and provision of consultancy services to member countries. The representative of the United Arab Emirates announced the establishment within ESCWA of the Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak Fund for the Advancement of Arab Women.

10. In accordance with the draft programme of work for the 2006-2007 biennium, it is planned to hold the third session of the Committee on Women in Beirut in 2006. However, the twenty-third ESCWA session will consider and make a decision on the proposal made at the first session of that Committee to the effect that its sessions should be held annually rather than biennially, taking into consideration the financial implications of adopting that recommendation.

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