

**Statement by Ms. Rola Dashti**

**Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and**

**Executive Secretary of ESCWA**

**High-Level Conference on Progress Made in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after Twenty-Five Years**

28 November 2019

Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women;

Ms. Fadia Kiwan, Director-General of the Arab Women Organization;

Ms. Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Social Affairs Sector at the League of Arab States,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to participate in this Conference with our partners from the League of Arab States, the United Nations family, regional organizations, and Arab Governments and civil society.

We come together today to review our performance in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action twenty-five years after their adoption.

We ask: where are we today in terms of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment?

The periodic review of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action calls for some optimism.

Our region has registered an increase in women's participation in political life, and in the labour market.

Most Arab countries have made progress in providing education and health care.

To realize women's rights and empowerment, Arab States have acceded to international instruments and implemented legislative reforms.

These achievements, although important, unfortunately remain weak when compared with global achievements. Tunisia is a glaring example.

It boasts the highest level of gender equality in our region.

Nonetheless, it ranks 117th globally .... So what can be said of the rankings of other Arab countries!

Chronic challenges impede such progress, in addition to conflict, war, displacement and occupation.

The most painful of these challenges is the trafficking of women and forced prostitution. In the shadow of laws that protect rapists...and justify the killing of women under the pretext of maintaining honour and cleansing shame.

What is shameful, ladies and gentlemen, is that around a third of our women have been subjected to physical or sexual violence, at least once in their lives.

It is shameful to consider the elimination of such violence as a luxury.

It is shameful to marginalize women in political life.

To deprive society and the economy of their participation.

Women's full participation in the economy on an equal footing with men could increase global GDP by \$28 trillion, and Arab GDP by \$1.5 trillion by 2025.

Gender equity in wages could increase global wealth by an estimated \$160 trillion in absolute terms, and Arab wealth by \$8.5 trillion.

As for violence against women, the world economy suffers direct and indirect losses estimated at \$14 trillion annually, and Arab economies lose approximately \$245 billion.

These are missed opportunities that our region could benefit from, and losses that could be avoided if we were to stand together in the face of economic, social and political challenges.

I therefore invite you, ladies and gentlemen, to work together to develop a practical Arab roadmap for the next five years.

And to support the League of Arab States, the Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries to Combat Violence against Women, and ESCWA in adopting an Arab convention on the elimination of violence against women.

I appeal to you to develop effective national legislation for implementing this convention.

In conclusion,

I apologize to every girl and woman in our region for failing to achieve the principles and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for twenty-five years.

I pay homage to all the girls in our region who are afraid to suddenly find that they are children raising children.

To a girl who dreams of a morsel to satisfy her hunger, and a house to shelter in.

To a woman who dreams of equality ... and another who fears that violence will remain her fate.

I want to reassure each of them that tomorrow will undoubtedly be brighter.

And that the preservation of their childhood is our duty .... and that the realization of their dreams is an obligation that we will spare no effort to fulfil.

Thank you.