Regional Conference on Legislations on Violence against Women in the MENA Region

*“We Stand Tall When We Stand Together”*

**Date**: **December 5 and 6, 2017  
Venue**: Room 903, Adnan Kassar School of Business Lebanese American University, Beirut.

**Global Objective**: Reflecting on the successes that have been achieved in terms of women’s rights and thinking about moving forward.

**Specific objectives**:

1. Sharing best practices and lessons learned across generations of activists in the MENA region
2. Reflecting on keeping the political momentum and implementing the laws
3. Understanding feminist foreign policy and its impact on MENA region

Background Under collective and sustained pressure across generations of MENA women’s groups from diverse backgrounds, Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan have witnessed some progressive change regarding women’s rights and gender equality.

On July 26, **Tunisia’s parliament approved a comprehensive** [**new legislation**](http://majles.marsad.tn/2014/lois/57a1d468cf44126c17c5e19d/texte) **targeting violence against women**. Following Tunisia’s footsteps, the **Jordanian parliament voted to abolish the controversial 308 article**, **a provision in the penal code that allows rapists to escape punishment if they marry their victims**. A few days after, the **Lebanese parliament abolished the contentious 1940s law, known as law 522, which allows rapists to marry their victims in order to avoid jail sentence**. If Morocco was a pioneer, annulling the rape marriage in 2014, Bahrain is now working on removing its rape clause from the penal code.

It is definitely a step forward for women’s human rights in the MENA region. However, these laws have yet to be translated into concrete and enforceable policies, programs and budgets to really protect women and girls from violence.

Many obstacles are facing the achievement of gender equality in MENA. Societal norms that relegate women to subordinate status continue to hinder progress and the deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes make gender inequality an acceptable phenomenon. “*The region as a whole is the least gender equal in the world. Overall, the region’s gender gap stands at 59%, where 100% represents perfect equality between men and women”* assert the World Economic Forum.

The rise of extremism, the increasing authoritarianism and the shrinking space for civil society in addition to the governments’ resistance to address inequalities through progressive and fair polices and legislations, make it harder for women’s activists in the MENA to achieve full equality between men and women. For that reason, the international community has the ethical and political responsibility to support women’s activists in their fight towards fair, equal and just societies. Besides the evident need for more structural, yet flexible, financial support, it is very important to emphasize that more moral support and advocacy are key to maintaining and strengthening both the efforts and spirits of women’s rights activists in the MENA region.

Within this framework, **Diakonia, NPA** and **IM Swedish Development Partner** will offer a safe inter-generational space for women activists in the MENA region to celebrate the success of the advocacy campaigns, sharing lessons learned and best practices as well as reflecting on the future of gender equality in the MENA region. This conference is hosted by **Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World**.

**Agenda**

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| Day One |  | Moderator |
| 09:30 to 10:00 | Registration |  |
| Morning session  10:00 to 10:45 | **Welcome and opening remarks**   1. **Sara Fallström** Head of International Department IM Swedish Development Partner 2. **Elvira Giraldez Casal Del Rey** Regional Programme Manager Norwegian People’s Aid 3. **Rodolph Gebrae** Director of Diakonia Lebanon Office 4. **Dr. Lina Abirafeh** Director of Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) Lebanese American University | **Jenny Oskarsson**  Regional Director  IM Swedish Development Partner |
| 10:45 to 11:00 | Coffee break |  |
| 11:00 to 13:00 | Panel 1  **HERstory: women’s rights organizations in the fight to end violence against women**  The panel will discuss inspiring initiatives by women’s rights activists and tactics forworking together across differences.   1. **Amna Al Zou’bi** Jordanian Women’s Union, Jordan President 2. **Ahlem Belhadj** Association Tunisienne Des Femmes Democrates, Tunisia 3. **Danielle Hoyek** ABAAD, Lebanon 4. **Laila Al Ali** Najdeh, Lebanon | **Myriam Sfeir**  Associate Director at the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World- Lebanese American University |
| 13:00 to 14:00 | Lunch break |  |
| Afternoon session  14:00 to 15:30 | Panel 2  **Feminist Foreign Policy: How is the feminist agenda taking effect in the MENA region?  A conversation with:**  **Her Excellency Emmanuelle Lamoureux** Canadian Ambassador to Lebanon  **His Excellency Erik Ullenhag**  Swedish Ambassador to Jordan | **Mikael Färnbo** Reporter OmVärlden Magazine |
| Day Two |  |  |
| 10:30 to 11:00 | Registration |  |
| Morning session  11:00 to 13:00 | Panel 3  **Keep the political momentum and get things done**  The panel will discuss how to make gender equality issues a priority for governments in the MENA   1. **Asma Khader** former Spokesperson of the Jordanian Government, former Minister of Culture, President of SIGI sisterhood Tadamon, Jordan 2. **Bochra Bel Haj Hamida** Member of the Tunisian Parliament and President of the National Committee of Individual Freedoms 3. **Wafa Dikah Hamzeh** Vice-President of the National Commission for Lebanese Women and Secretary General of the National Coalition Women for Politics | **Raneen Bou Khzam** Lebanese Broadcasting Company (TBC) |
| 13:00 to 14:00 | Lunch break |  |
| Afternoon session  14:00 to 16:00 | Panel 4  **Learning from each other towards a Brighter Future:** Best practices, lessons learned and addressing the problem with comprehensive and strategic approaches.   1. **Layla Nafaa’** Arab Women Organization, Jordan 2. **Nay el Rahi** Kafa Organization, Lebanon 3. **Hayat Mirshad** The Lebanese Democratic Women’s Gathering RDFL, Lebanon 4. **Amel Amraoui** Chouf Organization, Tunisia | **Sara Abou Ghazal**  Co-director of Knowledge Workshop & Coordinator of WHRD MENA Coalition |
| 16:00 to 17:00 | **Networking event and closing ceremony** |  |