

## **THE ARAB INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM "YOUNG ARAB WOMEN LEADERS - THE VOICE OF THE FUTURE" INITIATIVE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PwC AND BIRZEIT UNIVERSITY IN BIRZEIT, WEST BANK, PALESTINE.**

**BIRZEIT, WEST BANK, PALESTINE 22 May 2013** The Arab International Women's Forum (AIWF) held a conference, on 22 May 2013, as part of its regional initiative in partnership with PwC entitled "Young Arab Women Leaders - The Voice of the Future" in Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine in cooperation with and hosted by Birzeit University.

This landmark event, the first of the young women leaders series in 2013 and the first to be held in Palestine followed on from a successful programme of similar events in 2012, in Amman Jordan, Beirut, Lebanon and Dubai, United Arab Emirates featuring eminent guest speakers participants, and appropriately held at the Birzeit University, the location of the first Gender Studies Centre in the Arab world set up over twenty years ago

In bringing this initiative to Palestine, AIWF has endorsed its commitment to assist the empowerment of women in the region. The principle aim of the conference was to identify and build a network for young business and professional women in Palestine, who are marked for future leadership roles helping them share their knowledge and experience. The conference objectives also provided the opportunity for the wide spectrum of young women leaders to further optimise and strengthen their personal business skills and overall contribution to the business world and community at large.

Gaining key insights into best practice methods that transform challenges and barriers into success stories and various opportunities for development and enhancement, the event also served as a platform for the young aspiring Palestinian women to support, engage and network with other women in pioneering political, economic and social leadership roles within Palestine while learning more about the qualities of leadership for women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The outcomes strengthened the long held belief in the importance of education, coaching and mentoring, the influence of successful role models and inspiring the young participants to reach out for that success.

Mrs Haifa Al Kaylani, Founder Chairman of AIWF, welcomed guests of honour and keynote speakers, HE Rabiha Diab, Minister of Women's Affairs, Palestine and Dr Shantayanan Devarajan , Chief Economist Middle East and North Africa Region, The World Bank, USA and special guests, Dr Safa Nasser Eldin, Minister, Ministry of Telecom and IT, Palestine and Dr Hanan Ashrawi, PLO

Executive Committee Member, Palestinian Legislative Council Member, Palestine, AIWF global partners and members, a wide spectrum of young women leaders in Palestine and thanked conference partners, Birzeit University, the World Bank, Arab British Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Aramex International for their support.

In opening the forum, Mrs Al Kaylani said *“The Arab International Women's Forum has consistently called for the region to fully utilise its most precious resource, its people .For this reason we are dedicating our resources and investing in the success of The Young Arab Women Leaders: The Voice Of The Future initiative. Our priority is to promote empowerment for women and youth in Palestine and the region to act as future agents for lasting, sustainable development and prosperity in the whole Arab world.”*

Commenting on the Forum, Michael Orfaly, PwC's Partner, Leader – Middle East International Development said *"We at PwC view women as a critical talent group to enable the firm to continue its growth in the marketplace and to deliver the best client solutions. As a firm we provide a strong collaborative group for women at pivotal points in their careers, giving them the resources, role models, mentors and contacts which contribute to their career success and the ongoing success of PwC. At a regional level the role and powerful impact women have created must be appreciated, especially through increasing gender equality in the political and economic arenas in the region. We are delighted to partner with AIWF and have a strong belief in the mission AIWF stands for "*

In his address, Professor Khalil Hindi, President, Birzeit University said: *“In our Arab societies, we do need to show by widespread deed, not just by token example, that women are capable of engaging in all types of economic activity and of reaching top leadership positions. We at Birzeit believe and educate that a woman ought to be able to be whatever she desires to be: a head of state, an engineer, a scientist, a business woman, an entrepreneur, or whatever. And not only should women have a place at every table, they by right ought to be at the head of the table as frequently as men.”*

There was a wealth of other eminent speakers, most of whom were Palestinians who brought the conference objectives to life through their own personal experience and success stories and by creating an informative, invaluable and interactive experience. They included:

Ms Lana Abu Hijleh, Country Director, Cooperative Housing Foundation International

Ms Rawan Abusrour, Broadcaster & Journalist

Ms Hilda Awwad, President, BPW Ramallah Club

Ms Juliana Hodali, Head, Businesswoman Centre, Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Dr Grace Khoury, Director, MBA Program, Birzeit University

Prof. Jean Pierre Lehmann, Emeritus Professor, IMD, Founder, Evian Group (Switzerland)

Ms Ruba Masrouji, CEO, United Securities Company

Ms Amal Daraghmeh Masri, General Manager, Ougarit Marketing Communications Media Co

Ms Amal Masri Moghrabi, Chairwoman, Business Women's Forum

Ms Abeer Raji Musleh, Senior Program Manager, Welfare Association for Youth

Ms Najah Osaily, Manager, Osaily Trading Contracting

Eng Asma Hassan Sbeih, President, Association of Engineers

Ms Darin Zeidan, Program Manager, Palestinian Education for Employment Foundation

Ms Manal Zraiq, Manager, Massar International Company

Mrs Nadereh Chamlou, Senior Advisor, Office of the Chief Economist, The World Bank (USA) and

Ms Naela Husni Ali Khalil, Journalist & Author were the moderators for the interactive conference sessions in which the opportunities and challenges for young women leaders and how they can break the glass ceiling, the mentoring and coaching needed, the power of social media and learning from success stories and how change starts with them for the way forward were the themes discussed.

Mrs. Al Kaylani summed up the aim of the day when she said *"The conference has highlighted the wealth of talent and expertise that is present in Palestine. It has also demonstrated the need to promote investment in youth through education, training and the development of leadership skills to help women reach new levels of competency and confidence equipping them to take roles as leaders and job creators working towards the social and economic recovery in their communities and the region."*

-ENDS-

## EDITORS' NOTES

### **About the Arab International Women's Forum (AIWF):**

The **Arab International Women's Forum (AIWF)** is a non-profit organisation that has members and contacts in more than 45 countries and links Arab business leaders with each other and their counterparts in the international community to exchange knowledge, experience and develop their business potential. AIWF has been an agent for change for women in the Arab region encouraging their potential and has received international recognition in the Arab world and internationally as a powerful advocate for women in business and their empowerment. International conferences have been held in London, Dubai, Paris, Damascus, Washington DC, Madrid, Brussels, Sharjah, Cairo, Amman and Beirut examining strategies for job creation,

inclusive sustainable growth, economic competitiveness, development of human capital, increased innovation and collaboration through public-private partnership. Please visit [www.aiwfonline.com](http://www.aiwfonline.com) for media resources and past papers.

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**About Birzeit University**

**Birzeit University** was the first institution of higher education to be established in Palestine. It provides students with the opportunity to realize their academic aspirations and encourages them to be productive citizens and active members of their community. It's committed to excellence and encourages creativity, experimentation, innovation, accomplishment, team work and democratic practices anchored in pluralism, freedom of expression and respect for others.

The university offers undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate degrees through its nine faculties: Arts, Business and Economics, Education, Engineering, Science, Law and Public Administration, Information Technology, Nursing, Pharmacy and Health Professions, and Graduate Studies. In addition to its academic programs, the university has institutes and centers that are designed to develop and support community-oriented programs that contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in Palestine. for further information.

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