



ARAB INTERNATIONAL  
WOMEN'S FORUM  
المنتدى العربي الدولي للمرأة

**The Arab International Women's Forum**

**&**

**Foreign & Commonwealth Office**

**Official Launch**

**AIWF 2005 Programme Report & Recommendations:  
*Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World***

**12.30-2.30 pm**

**29 September 2005**

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
London**

**Special Address by**

**Haifa Fahoum Al Kaylani  
Founder & Chairman  
Arab International Women's Forum**

Your Excellencies  
My lords;  
Distinguished Guests;

It is indeed a great honour and pleasure for me, as Chairman of the Arab International Women's Forum, to welcome you today to the official launch of the AIWF 2005 Programme, Report and Recommendations on Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World and to thank you for kindly accepting our invitation.

I wish at the outset to extend on behalf of the AIWF Board and members our warmest appreciation and thanks to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for their valued support of the Programme and for so generously hosting the launch of the Report today. In particular, I acknowledge the special collaboration on the Programme with the Global Opportunities Fund.

Our warmest thanks and appreciation are also extended to our distinguished Panel of guest speakers addressing the Launch representing principally our valuable Partners in the Programme:

The Baroness Symons, Former Minister for The Middle East and currently British Chair of the Saudi British Council and Prime Minister's Representative on the Two Kingdom Dialogue.

Mme Dominique Dellicour, Head of Unit, Human Rights, Civil Society Good Governance at the European Commission for External Relations

Ms Emma Bonino, Member of the European Parliament , Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe at the European Parliament, former EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs (1995-1999)

Dr Suhair Al-Quraishi, Dean, Dar Al-Hekma College, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

We thank His Excellency the Secretary General of the League of Arab States for his special message on this occasion.

The AIWF 2005 Programme had the valued support of: - the League of Arab States, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe at the European Parliament, the European Commission and the World Bank.

We also acknowledge the dedicated contribution of by the Programme Partners, Instituto de Empresa and the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture in Spain, and the practical support of our local partners: No Peace Without Justice in Brussels and the Women's Strategy Group in Cairo. Importantly the Programme had the valued support of our corporate partners, Shell, IBM and CIB Bank in Egypt.

We acknowledge with gratitude the significant contributions of these esteemed organisations.

Distinguished Guests,

"Building bridges, Building business" has been the guiding principle for the Arab International Women's Forum since its launch in 2001, as non-profit organisation based in the UK. Never is this more applicable than with the AIWF 2005 Programme, Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World, with the impact and value of women's contribution being the focus.

The value of women's contributions to the economy remains at the heart of the AIWF programme. It is essential that women be integrated into the mainstream – taking advantage of education and skills training, accessing micro-credit or venture-capital, and developing their full economic potential. When

women prosper, families and communities also prosper. Women's contributions to the economy help nurture a secure, stable and peaceful society.

The Arab world is facing many challenges and needs to explore how to turn these challenges into opportunities. The future growth of the region must be built on making better use of all its human resources. AIWF is committed to enhancing and optimizing the role and potential of Arab women in the region, in all spheres and believes the economic empowerment of women can provide the impetus for greater social change.

The Arab International Women's Forum launched its 2005 programme ***Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World*** to mark the tenth Anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership which is seen as an important instrument for the promotion of women's participation in economic and social affairs.

In that light, AIWF hosted two linked conferences at the European Parliament in Brussels in April and at the League of Arab States in Cairo in June to assess and evaluate the economic challenges still facing women in the Arab world and to explore opportunities for increasing women's participation in the economy.

The AIWF conferences aimed at highlighting the need for synergies between governments, international institutions, the private sector and civil society as the only way to achieve the combination of policies, education and increased women's participation.

Both conferences presented a series of practical and feasible recommendations which are contained in the report being presented today. They are the considered opinion of a diverse gathering of well respected participants – a combined total of over 400 men and women in government, universities, community leadership, business, media, and non-governmental organizations from the Arab world, Europe, Africa and North America.

The Arab International Women's Forum will engage with its partners to advocate the necessary economic and social reforms they have identified as their platform so that women's position in the economies of the Arab world can be improved.

We added our voice to the public discourse and moved the agenda for prosperity and peace forward.

## **Recommendations**

Distinguished Guests,

I would like to share with you the following overview of the recommendations that we are putting forward for action by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and Arab Governments.

In the framework of Public Policy

We are calling for governments and relevant stakeholders to focus their efforts on:

- the improvement of institutional support and legal framework to provide increased opportunities and incentives for the participation of women in business
- the coordination of all collective strategies amongst stakeholders (Government, Private Sector and NGOs in order to integrate women at all levels in local and international economy

- we want to ensure that women are afforded equal rights in legal and political framework
- equally, it is imperative that women's equal status is formalised in the different instruments and agreements at the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's disposal

Key recommendations in the field of Education call for:

- the expansion of all educational opportunities and skills training for females at all levels
- introducing economic and entrepreneurship education in school curricula
- strengthening the links between the business sector and the school, to include women entrepreneurial role models

Other recommendations highlight the role of the corporate sector, the media and civil society in creating the right environment for Arab women's active participation and engagement in the economic and social development of the region.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Distinguished Guests,

In conclusion,

The Arab International Women's Forum is proud of the report and its recommendations.

We believe that the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Barcelona Process provides a momentous opportunity to enhance the economic and social conditions of women and to further strengthen the bridges between civil society on both sides of the Mediterranean.

We call upon all governments participating in the Barcelona Summit in November to lay down a solid foundation for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Agreement Programme for the next five years that will actively engage all the peoples of the Arab Region in its programme and its policy.

We as an organisation remain committed to working with all valued Partners as we believe that the best way to achieve these important objectives is through the active participation of the key institutional stake holders who are well positioned to remove barriers and make the recommendations a reality.

Allow me to conclude with a quote from the President of the World Bank who on a recent visit to India met with a gathering of 300 women from self-help groups in Hyderabad. The groups help women lobby for health and education and gain access to micro-credit loans. He said and I quote:

"The thing that has impressed is not just the money you earn but the way it helps you to make your children's lives better. When I see how well the women are doing here, I think you have to teach the men to walk faster."

We all believe and acknowledge that Arab women can equally prove to be real engines of change and development, and that the key to the future of the Middle East – stability, security, prosperity and peace – is the economic development and diversification of the region for women and men.

Thank you for your kind attention.