



ARAB INTERNATIONAL  
WOMEN'S FORUM

المنتدى العربي الدولي للمرأة

# Beirut Reception Welcome Remarks

**Delivered by**

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**Founder & Chairman, AIWF**

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**Fattal Group, Beirut Lebanon**

## Opening Remarks & Acknowledgements

Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honour and a pleasure for me personally, as Founder and Chairman of the Arab International Women's Forum (AIWF), to welcome you all this evening to the AIWF Special Reception in Beirut in honour of **Mr Saroj Kumar Jha**, Regional Director of the Mashreq Region, The World Bank.

The Board of AIWF joins me in welcoming on this special occasion all our distinguished guests, representing the Lebanese private sector, public office, prominent civil society organisations, and the diplomatic community. The AIWF Special Reception will bring into focus the key initiatives the World Bank is undertaking in Lebanon to foster growth, development, and job creation for all, and we thank you all for accepting our invitation to be here with us this evening.

Tonight, we take a special interest on how to leverage economic reform measures to create progress and opportunities for the Lebanese private sector, with a focus on women and youth, working together with the public sector, the World Bank and civil society to effect reforms. In our view, women and young people should not only be empowered to participate fully in the development of a new economic future for Lebanon but must be the prime beneficiaries of enhanced economic and social prosperity to result from much-needed reform and investment initiatives.

Mr Jha, whose valued presence as our Guest of Honour Keynote Speaker and whose participation we all deeply appreciate, will share timely and valuable insight into the World Bank's much-needed initiatives and projects to revitalise Lebanon's infrastructure and support economic development, highlighting the World Bank's lead role in implementing critical economic reform and investment programmes as announced at the Cedar (CEDRE) Conference for international donors and investors supporting Lebanon's economy, which was held in Paris on April 6, 2018.

Crucially, this investment is expected to provide tens of thousands of job opportunities for young people in Lebanon, with investments supporting over 250 projects in sectors including transport, water and irrigation, sewage, electricity, communications and tourism.

We all deeply value the participation of Mr Jha this evening and are very much looking forward to hearing his keynote address this evening. We thank you Mr Jha for accepting the invitation of AIWF and honouring us with your presence and insight.

Before I welcome Mr Jha to the podium I take this opportunity to share a few words about AIWF, a non-profit development organization committed to advancing economic opportunities for women and young people in the MENA region and internationally, which I am very proud to have founded in London in 2001.

In 17 years, AIWF has delivered unparalleled, high-level international conferences and initiatives in London, Paris, Dubai, Doha, Damascus, Washington DC, Madrid, Brussels, Sharjah, Cairo, Amman, Beirut, Palestine, Kuwait and Morocco, staying close to the heart of what is

happening in the Arab world and globally by alternating between Arab and international host cities.

AIWF's conferences and activities are designed to support frank, constructive dialogue on gender and youth issues, examining strategies for job creation, inclusive sustainable development, the role of women as engines of economic growth, women's peace and security, economic competitiveness, early stage entrepreneurship in the MENA region, and women-led innovation in STEM.

AIWF's keystone initiative, the *Young Arab Women Leaders Conference Series* launched in 2011 in partnership with PwC, provides a platform for young aspiring Arab women to engage and network with mentors in leadership roles in the Arab world. AIWF is also pleased to partner with the International Bar Association to develop and support women lawyers in the Arab world and to advance gender diversity in law and the professions.

AIWF works closely with a global network of corporate and institutional partners to promote and prioritise the engagement of women and youth and to find innovative, actionable solutions to the multi-faceted and complex environmental, economic security, and developmental challenges the MENA region faces.

As a proud NGO Member of the UN Global Compact, in 2018 the Arab International Women's Forum continues to build on its core mission and momentum to achieve sustainable empowerment for women and youth and advance gender diversity and equality in the Arab world.

Since its inception, AIWF has had the much-valued support and cooperation of the World Bank in its mission to support a greater role for women in the Arab region. We especially remember and cherish the generous welcome that the World Bank extended to AIWF when it hosted our Annual Conference, *Partners for Change: Realizing the Potential of Arab Women in the Private and Public Sector* in Washington DC in 2008.

In 2017, the World Bank supported AIWF's *Young Arab Women Leaders* 10<sup>th</sup> conference on 'Women-Led Innovation in STEM' held at the Royal Academy of Engineering in London. And in September 2018, AIWF will again partner with the World Bank's Center for Mediterranean Integration to deliver a high-level conference in Amman on 'Women, Water & Youth', which takes an intersectional approach to three critical development challenges in the MENA region – water scarcity and food insecurity; the extraordinarily low rate of female participation in the Arab labour force overall; and the high rate of youth unemployment in the MENA region.

This evening could not have been possible without the kind hospitality and partnership of the **Fattal Group**. We express our warmest thanks to AIWF's longstanding friend and member **Caroline Fattal** and her outstanding team at the Fattal Group who were instrumental to the successful planning of this evening's event.

AIWF is also proud to have the valued support on this special occasion of AIWF Global Partner **PwC**, which has worked in longstanding partnership with AIWF to make a positive difference for Arab and international women in business and the professions.

I take this important opportunity to welcome all our distinguished guests and the esteemed members of the AIWF Board present with us this evening. Our very special thanks also to all AIWF Global Partners for their longstanding support of AIWF's impact-driven programmes and our international initiatives to enhance opportunities for women in the private sector and in public service.

We are indeed delighted to welcome you all to this evening's Special Reception, which we trust will be an informative and invaluable experience for you all. I thank you for your kind attention and ask you please to join me in welcoming **Mr Saroj Kumar Jha**, Regional Director of the Mashreq Region, The World Bank.