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**REPORT
OF
The First Ministerial Conference On Women's
Role In The Development Of Oic Member States**

**Istanbul, Republic of Turkey
29-30 Shawwal, 1427H
20 - 21 November 2006,**

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Within the framework of the OIC's drive to implement the Ten-Year Action Plan issued by the Third Extraordinary Islamic Summit Conference held in 2005, and at the kind invitation Government of the of the Republic of Turkey, the First Ministerial Conference on Women's Role in the Development of OIC Member States was convened in Istanbul on 20 - 21 November 2006, in implementation of the resolution no. 3/32-C(b) on "Muslim Women and their Role in the Development of Islamic Society" adopted by the 32nd Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Sana'a, Republic of Yemen, which called for the organization of a Ministerial conference in order to "generate more opportunities for women in every walk of social life and to draft a plan of action to enhance the role of women in the development of Muslim societies".

The Conference provided a forum for the OIC Member States to discuss ways and means to prepare joint strategies, standards, programmes and goals to advance the status of women.

The Opening Session was addressed by Her Excellency Nimet Cubukcu, State Minister for Women and Family Affairs of the Republic of Turkey who welcomed the delegates participating in the Conference. In her welcoming speech, she stated that development of countries within a democratic framework depends on inclusion of all individuals, men and women, in the social and political life not only within equal rights but with equal opportunities as well, and uniting their potential towards that goal.

She indicated that development models which neglect women and therefore half of the world population have proven to be ineffective in reducing poverty and providing social justice. She highlighted that the most outstanding the ever-widening wage gap worldwide, with many countries currently engaged in a battle against the problem of poverty. The heaviest price of poverty, studies show, is being paid by women and children. The Minister highlighted the efforts

made by the Republic of Turkey to introduce constitutional and legislative amendments in formulating policies for women. She further stressed that the inclusion of women in the developmental strategies is an important parameter that would contribute to the stability of countries. Women who take an active part in work life will perform a significant task in preventing poverty, contribute to their countries' political, economic and social life and they will have the place they deserve in their countries' progress, development and modernisation.

In his address, H.E. Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the OIC, expressed sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Turkey for hosting this important conference which reflected Turkey's keenness to promote the overall objectives of the OIC. He said that the convening of this conference in Istanbul represents a major turning point towards achieving the goal that we all look forward to in order to establish a road map for women agenda in the Muslim World, a task that acquired urgency following the adoption of the Ten-Year Programme of Action adopted by the Third Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Summit Conference.

The Opening Session was addressed by His Excellency Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey. In his Statement, he said that the agenda of the Conference included significant issues that aim to improve women's status and their contribution to the development of the OIC Member States. He added that the Islamic World is facing major challenges and crises, to which common solutions should be sought in the framework of the common denominators of Islamic culture and civilization. He emphasized that Turkey has decided to host the First Women Conference with the purpose of seeking means to guarantee women's participation in development issues and increase their role in the political, economic and social spheres.

His Excellency the Prime Minister stressed that women issues should be discussed within the framework of fundamental rights and freedoms, referring, in this respect, to the efforts exerted by his country to enhance women's role on all levels, in particular in the field of political participation, gender equality, sustainable development, constitutional and legislative amendments, and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and honor killing.

His Excellency the Prime Minister noted that there is a misperception regarding the situation of women in different Muslim societies. He emphasized that Islam does not prevent women's participation and that the problem lies in traditions and customs. As for the difficulties preventing the inclusion of women in social and economic life, His Excellency the Prime Minister highlighted that this problem is not geographically or religiously restricted.

His Excellency the Prime Minister stressed the importance of international cooperation in the search for solutions to the challenges faced by women and pointed out that the OIC has an important role to play in this regard.

The Conference elected its Bureau as follows:

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| Republic of Turkey | : Chairperson |
| Republic of Tunisia | : Vice Chairperson |
| Republic of Mali | : Vice Chairperson |
| Islamic Republic of Pakistan | : Vice Chairperson |
| State of Palestine | : Vice Chairperson |
| Republic of Azerbaijan | : Rapporteur |

The Conference adopted its program of work and agenda as follows:

1. National policies and strategies for increasing women's employment and eradication of the poverty among women
2. Women's participation in decision-making mechanisms from local to national
3. A better future for women through enhanced participation in and access to education
4. Elimination of all forms of violence against women

The participants addressed various aspects within the context of the above-mentioned themes, such as giving women equal opportunities and promoting their equal access to labour markets, sustainable employment and adequate social security, eliminating gender inequalities in primary and secondary education, eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and the girl child, promoting increased participation of women in decision-making bodies, including through ensuring their equal opportunity to participate in the political process.

The participants noted that there have been improvements with regard to the legal framework on women's rights in the OIC Member States, but acknowledged that there was still need for further progress, both in terms of legislation and implementation. In this regard, they expressed the need to set indicators for assessment and follow-up.

The participants stressed that the governments of the OIC Member States must be willing and determined to improve, through concrete initiatives, the status of women in their respective countries in all walks of life and elaborated on practical steps that can advance women's rights.

Sub-theme No. 1 – “National policies and strategies for increasing women’s employment and eradicating poverty among women”:

The participants stressed that gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to the eradication of poverty and the achievement of sustainable development. In that context, they pointed out socio-economic participation of women is an essential component of sustainable development. In this regard, the following recommendations were proposed:

- Placing eradication of poverty among women at the centre of the national policy agenda in formulating poverty eradication policies and strategies.
- Enabling women to have equal opportunities in getting access to labor market, continuous employment, and facilitating social security to enhance their social and economical participation.
- Increasing efforts to improve the access of women and girls to health care and child care facilities, as well as to social security to enhance their socio-economic participation.
- Encouraging vocational training for women to improve their access to labor market.
- Promoting balanced participation of women in all OIC institutions.
- Revision of national legislations which endorse discrimination against women.

Sub-theme No. 2 - Women’s participation in decision-making mechanisms from local to national:

The participants noted that women’s participation in decision-making positions at all levels is desirable for the development of the OIC Member States. In this context, they discussed the use of temporary special measures such as positive discrimination policies for the promotion of women into power and decision-making positions. In this connection, the following recommendations were proposed:

- Promoting increased participation of women in all decision-making bodies, including through ensuring their equal opportunity to participate fully in the political process.
- Introducing more effective measures aimed at eradicating poverty among women and improving their living conditions to promote the realization of their full human potential to enable their advancement and their equal participation in decision-making.
- Ensuring that women have equal access to education in all forms and promoting educational programmes in which women will be equipped with the necessary knowledge and be prepared to participate equally in decision-making processes.

Sub-theme No. 3 – “A better future for women through enhanced participation in and access to education”:

The participants emphasized the critical role of education for women’s empowerment in general and for poverty eradication in particular. In that context, they attributed special attention to the elimination of gender inequality and imbalance in access to education and noted that further efforts are needed to improve girls’ education. The participants also affirmed that the problem of discrimination between men and women in education lies in traditions and customs. They expressed the need to put more emphasis on quality education for women and not quantity in order to meet the demand of labor market. Moreover, they stressed that the issue of education should be addressed within the general framework of poverty eradication. In this connection, the following recommendations were proposed:

- Formulation of policies which link women’s education with the demands of labor market.
- Initiating campaigns for the eradication of female illiteracy.
- Adoption of special measures to ensure equal access to education for girls and women and promotion of incentives for families, especially in rural areas for sending girls to school.
- Revision of school curricula and textbooks to eliminate gender biases in order to overcome societal prejudices and attitudes against women.
- Promotion of public awareness campaigns covering all segments of society, in order to increase the enrolment of girls to school.

- Calling upon the OIC to consider establishing a special fund within the OIC to support the activities of women.

Sub-theme No. 4 – “Elimination of all forms of violence against women”:

The participants reiterated that this global phenomenon constitutes a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of women, as well as an obstacle to the advancement of women. They confirmed their commitment to eradicate violence against women, including domestic violence, and agreed to work towards taking the necessary measures to prevent such violence and to protect its victims. They also emphasized that education is an essential element in the fight against violence against women. In this regard, the following recommendations were proposed:

- Strengthening laws aimed at enhancing the advancement of women in Muslim societies in economic, cultural, social, and political fields and at protecting women against all forms of violence and discrimination, and adhering to the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, in line with the Islamic values and equality.
- Taking all necessary measures including legislative and institutional changes to combat all forms of violence against women and the girl child, including violence caused by armed conflict, domestic violence, honour killings, forced marriages and harmful traditional practices. Measures should address prevention, protection and prosecution.
- Developing an integrated approach to eradicate violence against women by including the civil society, media and religious institutions in awareness-raising activities.
- Considering the preparation of a guiding manual on the protection of women against violence in family and society.

Under this item, the Participants expressed their solidarity with the Palestinian women who face critical situation in the occupied territories, and called upon the international community to ensure the cessation of all forms of violence against them. They also called upon all OIC Member States and institutions to urgently extend support to help them overcome the difficulties they are facing.

The participants expressed their solidarity with Iraqi women who undergo difficult situations.

For future work on the advancement of women within the context of the OIC, the participants also recommended the following:

- Strengthening cooperation between OIC Member States to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally-agreed development goals on the advancement of women.
- Strengthening the capacity of national institutions in charge of women's affairs.
- Allocation of necessary resources to implement gender policies at the local and national levels.
- Strengthening dialogue and cooperation among national institutions in charge of women's affairs, with a view to sharing experiences and best practices and considering the creation of a network of OIC Member States on this issue.
- Promoting dialogue and cooperation between Governments and civil society organizations to the extent possible.
- Promoting awareness-raising initiatives and training on women's rights, especially among the young generation.
- Training of law enforcement personnel on women's rights and the relevant legislation.

Follow-up Mechanism

There is no doubt that the OIC Member States are committed to improving women's status and ensuring equal rights for them. However, it is also true that, in one way or another, there are shortcomings both in legislation and implementation. In this context, the Conference recommends the following:

- To establish within the OIC framework, an open-ended governmental group with a view to developing an Action Plan by Member States to pursue the goals and strategies on the advancement of women, which would lay the grounds for future work within the OIC pertaining to women's affairs.

- To convene a women conference at the ministerial level once every two years in order to review and evaluate the OIC Member States' activities on the role of women in their development.
- Staging subject-specific symposia within the framework of the OIC and its specialized institutions to discuss the major issues pertaining to women.

The participants expressed their sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Turkey for hosting the Conference, the warm welcome and hospitality extended to the participants, and for the excellent preparations for the Conference.

The participants commended the initiative taken by the OIC Secretary General to hold this Conference and for the special attention he continues to accord to social issues, in general, and to women's issues in particular in OIC Member States. They also expressed their thanks to the OIC General Secretariat for its efforts in materializing this Conference.

The participants took note of the proposal by Malaysia to host an expert meeting on the issue of decision-making and eradication of all forms of violence against women, to be convened in advance of the Second Session of the Ministerial Conference on "Women's Role in the Development of OIC Member States".

The participants decided to send a cable of thanks and appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey for his kind patronage of the Conference, and to Her Excellency Nimet Cubukcu, State Minister for Women and Family Affairs in the Republic of Turkey, and the General Directorate for the Status of Women in the Republic of Turkey for their excellent preparations for holding this Conference.