



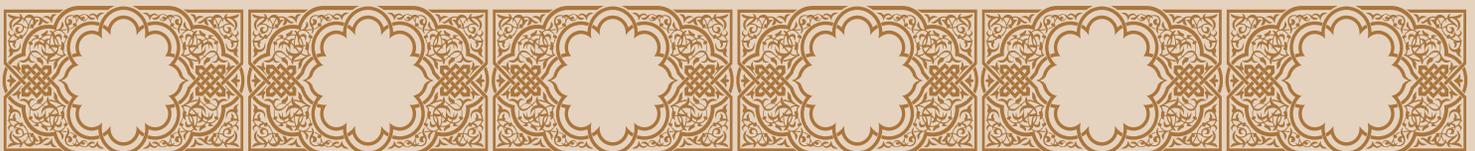
Women in the Concept and Issues of Human Security
Arab and International Perspectives

Proceedings of the Second Conference of the Arab Women Organisation
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 11-13 November 2008

Under the Kind Patronage and Chairmanship of Her Highness
Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak

Editors
Bahgat Korany
Hania Sholkamy
Maya Morsy

Volume I



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Opening Speeches

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	VII
Speech by Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak President of the Conference United Arab Emirates	IX
Speech by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	XIII
Speech by Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa Kingdom of Bahrain	XVII
Speech by Her Excellency Mrs. Leila Ben Ali Republic of Tunisia	XXI
Speech by Her Excellency Mrs. Wedad Ba Baker The Republic of Sudan	XXVII
Speech by Her Excellency Mrs. Asma al-Assad Syrian Arab Republic	XXXIII
Speech by Her Excellency Mrs. Amina Abbas State of Palestine	XXXVII
Speech by Her Excellency Mrs. Wafaa Sleiman Republic of Lebanon	XLI
Speech by Her Excellency Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak Arab Republic of Egypt	XLV
Speech by Her Excellency Mrs. Tekaiber bint Ahmed Islamic Republic of Mauritania	LI
Speech by His Excellency Mr. Amre M. Moussa Secretary General of the League of Arab States	LV
Speech by Dr. Wadouda Badran Director General of the Arab Women Organisation	LXI

INTRODUCTION

Based on firm principles engraved in Arab consciousness, the Arab quest to promote the status of women has intensified, especially in the last decade. Arab First Ladies have recognized the importance of laying down an institutional framework to manage and propel forward this aspiration. Accordingly, Her Excellency Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak took the initiative in November 2000 to call for convening the first Arab Women Summit with the participation of Arab First Ladies and the objective of identifying the means by which to ensure a better future for Arab women.

During that summit, a set of objectives crystallised, such as the elimination of all obstacles hindering the role of women, the assurance of equal opportunities, and the empowerment of women across all walks of life. The summit agreed to adopt a regional mechanism to meet these objectives and push forward joint Arab efforts aimed at promoting Arab women. In response, the Arab Women Organisation (AWO) was established as an intergovernmental entity under the umbrella of the League of Arab states. The AWO has been entrusted with the task of planning and implementing joint Arab efforts aimed at the empowerment of Arab women and promoting their capacities in various fields.

Conferees at the first Arab Women Summit praised the establishment of an Arab women organisation as the peak of positive institutional development for the empowerment of women. The second Arab Women Summit, held in Amman in November 2002 at the gracious invitation of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah, focused on underlining the main objectives of Arab efforts concerning women. The summit approved a “strategy” for the promotion of Arab women that identified seven fields of special interest: education, health and environment, media, economy, politics, law and social activities. Based on this strategy, the AWO set areas of priority relative to the promotion of women, working on multiple fronts to reach its goals since 2003.

The strategy for the advancement of women set out by the Arab Women’s Summit is in conformity with the concept of human security adopted by the UN before the mid 1990s and in many literatures published later on. The AWO decided to adopt this concept as a theoretical and practical approach — and overarching framework — for its activities, programmes and projects. Hence, it was decided to make the concept of human security linked to women the focus of the second general conference of the AWO. This conference gave attendees the opportunity to explore and refine the concept with the aim of reducing its ambiguity, making it more applicable for presentation to policymakers. As such, the AWO was keen that the conference transcend the theoretical and foreground the practical, in terms of developing applications on the ground.

To this end, the AWO encouraged participants to introduce policy recommendations while also using the occasion to review and frame its agenda and future work according to the concept and its different aspects. The AWO wanted the conference to give room for

interaction and dialogue among the Arabs and non-Arabs interested in the situation of women within the concept and reality of human security. The objective is to translate this common interest into policies and working programmes. These policies ought to identify the commitments of relevant parties so they can be implemented on the ground.

In view of the abovementioned points, it was taken into consideration while discussing the form of the sessions of the conference that they should bring together academicians and active experts in decision-making institutions in a bid to ensure rich discussions and allow the presentation of different views. The integration between theoretical and practical aspects was also taken into account. It is hoped that the contributions gathered by the conference — both Arab and international — can form the basis for an Arab approach on this subject upon which Arab thinkers and practitioners can continue the vital work of drafting policy and responding to the issues raised in this respect.

Speech by Her Highness
Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak
President of the Conference
United Arab Emirates

Your Excellencies,

Heads of Delegations,

Distinguished Guests,

It is my pleasure to welcome you here and to thank you for accepting the invitation to attend the second conference of the Arab Women Organisation, held on the theme: “Women and human security: Arab and International Perspectives”.

We sincerely hope that the meeting will add great value to the current efforts aimed at supporting Arab women and contributing to their betterment in the future.

I would like to begin by offering thanks to Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah and to Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa for their valuable contributions during their respective terms as President of the Organisation.

I am also pleased to extend my thanks to Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, who launched the initiative of the Arab Women Summit and who recommended that an organisation for Arab women be established.

My thanks also go to the Arab First Ladies for their continuous support for the Organisation.

The UAE takes great interest in this conference and looks forward to the ideas and discussions that lie ahead on the relationship between human security and women.

Human security is one of the newest concepts used with regards to the principles of freedom, security and development. It is an evolving concept that focuses on transforming those principles into commitments and applicable mechanisms.

In this respect, human security encompasses topics like human rights, good governance, the potential for getting access to education and healthcare and a clean environment, the eradication of poverty and the guaranteeing of equal opportunities to individuals so that they may realise their potential. All these are necessary ingredients for a decent and equitable human life.

Brothers and sisters,

The issues related to human security are basically universal and are generally shared by all people wherever they are. It is important, therefore, to tackle them in a highly co-ordinated manner and through openness and a positive dialogue that takes into consideration cultural peculiarities and seeks to bridge differences.

I welcome you again. We in the UAE are extremely happy to host this important event so that we may renew our commitment to supporting women’s causes as one of the most vital issues in our struggle to achieve comprehensive Arab progress.

We believe that positive dialogue and interaction among different cultures are key instruments for reform, progress and peace.

Thank you again and I wish this conference success, by the grace of God the Almighty.

Speech by Her Majesty
Queen Rania Al Abdullah
Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Your Highness Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak, President of the Arab Women Organisation,

Your Highnesses, Excellencies and Distinguished Guests...

Peace be upon you,

First, I would like to extend my thanks and gratitude for your continuous efforts, especially to Her Highness Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak. I wish Her every success in Her role as president of this organisation.

The features of the Arab world have changed a lot over the past eight years, especially since the establishment of the Arab Women's Organisation in March 2003.

Eight years full of change for the globe and our countries. As one Arab world, we have become more educated and achieved more; we have more knowledge, and are more determined to advance and make strides towards having an active and interactive Arab community, for both its men and women.

In 2000, the Secretary-General of the United Nations described human security as "the freedom from fear and freedom from want". Fear from attacks, killing, crimes, diseases, and natural disasters.

Unfortunately, some of our countries are living under occupation or are victims of its consequences.

There they have no freedom from fear and their needs are great.

This need is experienced by one third of the population of developing countries, who languish below the poverty line; high prices are affecting the whole world, particularly in the hungriest and neediest of places. And as it is said, "if bellies are hungry, minds drift away".

Yes, this is a meeting for the Arab Women's Organisation, but an Arab woman is an inseparable part of her community, a community that was accustomed in the past to women eating last, learning last, choosing last, especially if resources are short.

Since 2002, we have been working hard to give our women their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights - most importantly, in education.

We want the next generation of men and women to be more aware of their rights and duties, and there is no more effective tool than education to raise awareness... to improve the situation for women, so they know their rights before we ask them to fulfill their duties towards their families and communities.

In Jordan, we realized early the importance of education in meeting all our goals and years ago we started to make education the foundation from which all aspects of development grows.

Recently, we started rejuvenating our public schools in cooperation with the private sector to upgrade the quality of education and offer a safe and healthy learning environment.

The initiative is called Madrasati (My School) and it has made education a community responsibility.

The number of people working to develop their local school is increasing daily; we want

partnership and participation to form part of the education of future generations... their children, neighbors, and grandchildren.

Therefore, we put our trust in communities as they trusted us. We draw the paths and build them together... so we can build a generation that is able to achieve coexistence, work in the information and knowledge economy age... in the age of high prices, opportunities, rights, and duties.

In Jordan, we have achieved a great deal in social development: illiteracy has dropped to almost 8 per cent and we hope to eradicate it completely by 2020. Also, women's representation has increased in the legislative and executive branches of government; our women are in the private and public sectors, in courts and the army, and they have the legal right to choose their own professions and their own legacy.

Our Arab future is getting brighter in spite of how slow the clouds are dispelling.

Yes, the number of women in Arab parliaments has doubled over the past eight months, but at this rate, we need another 20 years to reach 30 per cent! 20 years to achieve what was stipulated by the Beijing Conference.

Yes, the path is long but we are moving towards clear goals, which do not seem as far as they were in 2000.

Big changes usually start with a small step: educating and enlightening the mind will change the way we think, alter concepts, and clarify our rights and duties, enhancing solidarity and equality.

I, like you, will not stop working, supporting and taking the initiative to achieve that goal, not only in Jordan but in the Arab world. Because, we do not live in isolation from each other, as traditions, borders and identities make our challenges common, our fears similar, our needs interrelated, and our human security a responsibility that we all should shoulder.

The security of half of Arab society depends on this audience, so all Arab women can choose when to eat, what to learn, what to have as a profession, who to marry, and what to choose, even if the resources are short... because the fact is that the lack of resources does not mean there is no solution or that our hands are tied.

Because we cannot be held back; a narrow vision only narrows our horizon. Whoever is on top can combine vision and the will for change. We are on top and it is our responsibility to extend our hands to every single woman to show her limitless horizons.

Thank you for your vision, determination, and for extending your hands

Speech by Her Royal Highness
Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa
Kingdom of Bahrain

In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful,

Your Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, the President of the Arab Women Organisation and President of the Conference,

Your Highnesses and Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Peace and God's mercy and blessings be upon you,

It is with utmost pleasure and pride that we witness together the holding of the second conference of the Arab Women's Organisation in the United Arab Emirates under the gracious patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak. Her Highness has been able; thanks to her profound interest in all matters related to Arab women, to manage the organisation with utmost efficiency and distinguished follow up of all genuine and meaningful activities carried out by the Organisation personnel under the distinct leadership of Her Excellency Dr. Wadouda Badran.

Thanks to all these efforts, a new chapter of bright achievements has been added to the vibrant progress of the Organisation, earning all the people who contributed to this success the merit of being praised and commended, particularly the contributions of the members of the executive board in adding to the Organisation's institutionalized work.

The selection by the Arab Women Organisation of the theme "Security of Women as a human being" with its renewable and wide concept is the best reflection of the new stage the Organisation has reached in dealing with the community with the purpose of conveying the Arab view on such critical issues. Yet, reaching out further towards positive impacts to create a long-term integrated system that links between the necessity of peace to support development and the significance of sustained development to ensure stability and security. Both elements are indispensable and represent the two sides of the coin.

We hope that this conference will be the first step towards a future Arab effort that will place women at the center of this concept and its numerous overlapping aspects. These efforts shall allow women to be free of the causes of fear and need as human beings, to have the options to live in dignity and most importantly to enjoy the right to benefit from every possible option.

Distinguished Guests,

This conference coincides in being held while the global economic crisis is still awaiting solutions that will overcome its damages. This situation increases our responsibilities to highlight its impact on Arab citizens, in addition to the nature of the measures and precautions that need to be taken to protect them from the market turmoil and its enormous effects on the security of people, and particularly that of women, in view of the direct link between the economy and the provision of the basic elements of decent living and the maintenance of the stability sought by the people of the world.

In light of this new and difficult challenge that has imposed itself, the only option is to focus on long-term forceful planning that places human needs at the core of all action work and ensure that they are well protected and properly empowered.

As we talk about the safeguards of security and stability planning, please allow me to briefly review with you the Bahraini experience in this field.

Last month, Bahrain launched "Bahrain Vision 2030", a blueprint of long term plans for

the national economy based on the concepts of “sustainability for the sake of prosperity”, “competitiveness for the sake of development” and “justice for the sake of stability.”

This vision, patronized and supported by HM the King, is founded on national aspirations to change the current economic model from an economy based largely on oil to a diversified economy capable of competing globally. The vision will serve as an indicative guide for both the government and the private sector, in order to reach its ideal and essential role, where the citizens shall gain the most through the commitments made to provide them with all factors to live safely and in dignity.

We thus hope that this national project will add a new and strong drive to our Arab economy, which, I am confident, is of high interest to Arab governments based on their economic conditions and their development needs.

Distinguished Guests,

You may agree with me that the major concern for those in charge of drawing up development policies and those entrusted with implementing them is the lack of human security and the subsequent risk implications.

Over the years, global efforts have been exerted to reach a precise definition of the concept of human security. This has been an attempt to mark out its intertwined components and eventually lead to stressing the need to ensure “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear”, the protection of freedoms and the empowerment of individuals and societies into effective partnership in reconstruction and development.

The setting up of a permanent specialised commission and a fund within the United Nations to follow up this important issue is considered a distinguished effort. This leads me to suggest before this conference that the Arab Women’s Organisation should take the initiative to launch a dialogue with the World Commission on Human Security based on the recommendations and conclusions of the conference. This move will highlight the Arab view about this concept and the challenges it faces in the region, and will help benefit from the Commission’s plans and programs in addressing the problems impacting development in the Arab world.

Before I conclude, I wish, once more, to praise the outstanding efforts exerted at all times by the honorable President of the conference, which she crowns today by holding and organizing this conference, marked by meaningful themes, significant objectives and a participation of a high-level of experts whose views and expertise we are always keen to listen to and learn from.

I would also like to congratulate the President on the launch of the Arab Women’s Media Strategy and the Arab Migrant Women’s Network in line with the “Manama recommendations” and as a mean to help elevate the status of women through the vision, mission and content of the two ambitious projects.

Our thanks to the United Arab Emirates for the gracious and remarkable efforts. Wishing the conference all the success.

Thank you for listening.

Speech by Her Excellency

Mrs. Leila Ben Ali

Republic of Tunisia

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate,

Mrs. Chairwoman of the Conference,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct pleasure to meet with you today in sisterly United Arab Emirates, to pursue the joint effort we launched about eight years ago, when we held the first Arab Women Summit in 2000, the Summit that ushered in a new stage of joint Arab action for the promotion of Arab women, and constituted an efficient tool to consolidate the position of women in our peoples' action for achieving progress and invulnerability.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks and deep consideration to Her Highness Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak, Chairwoman of the Arab Women Organisation Supreme Council, for her warm hospitality, generous patronage of our Conference, and keen determination to provide all conditions of success to its proceedings. I also wish to convey my sincere greetings to all members of the Conference preparatory committee and to the Secretariat-General of the Arab Women Organisation, commending their diligent efforts to ensure an excellent preparation for this meeting of ours.

Mrs. Chairwoman of the Conference,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The creation of the Arab Women Organisation more than five years ago was a major milestone in the process of promoting modern Arab women, furthering solidarity among Arab women, and increasing the fields of joint action in order to meet the huge challenges and stakes facing our societies.

The Second Conference of the Arab Women Organisation, which addresses the theme of "Women in the Concept and Issues of Human Security ... Arab and International Perspectives", reaffirms the strong determination driving Arab women to move ahead in materializing their aspirations for further solidarity, development and progress, and provides a valuable opportunity to deepen reflection on a major issue posed in our world today, an issue in connection with human security and survival.

This Conference is being held within a fluctuating international situation, and within a critical civilizational stage marked by major changes and huge challenges at the social, economic and technological levels; a stage in which Humanity is confronted with various forms of tensions and conflicts. Discussing women's place in the concept of human security is, therefore, legitimate and necessary.

Women hold a central and fundamental place in the comprehensive notion of human rights, with its political, economic, social and cultural dimensions, including the solidarity rights, which consist essentially in the right to development, the right to a safe environment, and the right to peace.

I am convinced that the interesting lectures, in-depth analyses and rich discussions that will characterize our Conference, along with the constructive and comprehensive recommendations and suggestions that will emanate from this meeting, will further crystallize the notions related to these issues, and will enhance serious action to promote Arab women's conditions, in accordance with a coherent strategic perspective and a comprehensive approach that considers

women's needs as one of the priorities to achieve development, democracy, stability, security and peace in the world.

Promoting women in our societies, offering them the means to exercise their rights and accomplish their duties, and preserving their dignity, are a strategic civilizational stake, and a key component of the notion of Arab national security and of the concept of human security in its comprehensive meaning.

In our view, we need to act together, with strong resolve and unwavering determination, in order to make further strides in the process of anchoring our genuine solidarity and materializing our full commitment to the spirit of positive action; our aim being to consolidate the achievements accomplished during the past period, to meet challenges, to reach higher levels of equality and balanced partnership between men and women, and, therefore, to build a balanced, tolerant and solidarity-based society.

Everybody is aware of the importance of international and civilizational changes in achieving a universal awakening vis-à-vis the principles of human rights. Many international charters, in fact, provide a clear explanation of the meaning of protecting human rights from threats and violations. This has given rise to a set of concepts and approaches, such as "human security" and "women's empowerment", which are now recurrent expressions in the approaches aimed at promoting the basic principles of human rights in various fields of concern to women.

On the other hand, everybody is aware that international charters and national legislations, however important they are, cannot alone achieve human security, including that of women. It is necessary, therefore, in addition to enacting appropriate legislation, to continuously adopt programs of action designed to anchor equality and disseminate human rights culture.

Women in general, including Arab women, are still exposed, with varying degrees, to a set of social and cultural constraints that limit not only their participation in public life, but also the promotion of their capacity and awareness, the achievement of self-assertion, and the guarantee of their social and economic security.

Besides, women's suffering from violence is growing more intense, particularly as a result of wars and conflicts. The UNDP report indicates that women are the category that suffers most from the effects of foreign occupation, as is the case in Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, and other countries torn by armed conflicts.

It would be useful to think today of establishing an Arab Women Committee for International Humanitarian Law, within the framework of the Arab Women Organisation, to serve as a support to international, regional and national efforts aimed at defending, respecting and disseminating the culture of international humanitarian law in the service of women.

Mrs. Chairwoman of the Conference,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Arab perspective of women's security, as part of the notion of human security, does not differ, in its basic references and noble ideals, from the international perspective. For in a world where distances have been shortened and its components intertwined, women's issues are the same. This, however, should not overshadow the specificities of Arab women's realities and aspirations.

Despite the considerable progress Arab women have achieved in various fields, the fact remains that Arab societies are still confronted with development challenges. In many Arab countries, illiteracy rates are high, reaching over 40% for women.

On the other hand, Arab societies are still suffering a huge gap between men and women in the economic field. To this we add the high maternal mortality rate in some Arab countries, which has an impact on children and on the balanced growth of generations.

As such, eradicating illiteracy and poverty, and achieving gender equality in all fields, are essential foundations of women's human security, materializing the concept of comprehensive and sustainable development, and anchoring its dimensions in the Arab region.

Whatever the difficulties, I am convinced that achieving our objectives in terms of Arab women's promotion at all levels is still possible, given the successful Arab experiences in terms of women's empowerment and protection from discrimination and threats that might affect their social and economic security.

The Tunisian experience, especially in light of the gains of Tunisian women during the Era of the Change of November 7, 1987, is one of the most significant experiences in this field. It is based on humanist development approaches in which the economic dimension is indissociable from the social dimension. It asserts women's place in the action of development, through an approach in which the promotion of legislations goes hand in hand with the adoption of the gender-based approach in planning, the materialization of the solidarity dimension, and the adaptation of the mechanisms of social promotion and protection to the needs of women and the family. This in addition to developing mindsets toward establishing a family and societal culture that is in tune with the avant-garde legislations adopted in Tunisia to anchor the values of equality and partnership.

Mrs. Chairwoman of the Conference,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Comprehensive Arab security should be based on a civilizational project that has deep roots and open prospects. There is no other path but to continue granting all due attention to women's conditions in our Arab society, as it is a necessary prerequisite for a coherent civilizational construction.

I am convinced that this Conference, with the distinguished participants characterizing it and with the conclusions and recommendations it will produce, will constitute the best stimulant for us to move ahead in materializing the concept of human security, free from any form of gender-based discrimination, and which would guarantee for our Arab societies further progress, invulnerability and well-being.

Thank you for your attention.

Speech by Her Excellency

Mrs. Wedad Ba Baker

The Republic of Sudan

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate,

All praise be to Allah alone, and His peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad, his family and his companions,

Dear sister, Your Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, Chairperson of Arab Women Organisation and President of the Conference,

Dear sisters, Your Excellencies and Highnesses members of the Supreme Council,

Dear sisters, members of the Executive Council,

Honourable attendees,

Peace be upon all of you,

At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to the sisterly country of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for hosting this conference. I would like also to congratulate Her Highness sister Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak for sponsoring and chairing this conference wishing it all success. We would like to stress our support and assistance to you while being fully confident that the proceedings of this conference would result in further promotion of the conditions of the Arab women owing to the effective and essential role you are playing since the establishment of this Organisation,

Madam Chairperson,

Honroable sisters,

Allow me to stress that the main issue of the conference is truly a very important one as it is in line with the priorities of the present stage. Through discussing the concept of human security from Arab and international perspectives, we actually seek to come up with a set of objectives in order to be able to draft this concept from an Arab perspective and engage in dialogue and discussions on this issue with the international community. We should do this in order to draw up policies and plans of action through which we can achieve the concept of human security in general and women's security in particular. This objective is our main preoccupation and concern in light of the uncertainty of the impacts of the international financial crisis on families, women and children. This is in addition to study the impacts of other issues and challenges, such as the armed conflicts, disputes, violence, occupation and economic blockade in connection with the violations of women's security and rights. In fact, women's development and empowerment can not be achieved in the absence of security and stability.

Madam Chairperson,

Dear sisters,

The main topic of this conference is rightly selected and it is the outcome of intellectual and research efforts made by the Arab Women Organisation in its attempt to activate the female joint work at the Arab level. In this context, I would like to express my appreciation of the efforts exerted by the women experts and leaders in this regard.

Madam Chairperson,

Dear sisters,

The Sudanese women have achieved several gains throughout their march. They got the right to election and candidature during the early 1990s. Sudanese women's representation in the Parliament is 18% and it was agreed that women's representation in the forthcoming legislative elections should not be less than 25%. Sudanese women are also holding leading positions in the executive, legislative and political bodies. Several Sudanese businesswomen have emerged in the local market and women's contribution to the economic domain has doubled to register more than 30%. This has been possible thanks to the supportive policies adopted by the state, which seeks the promotion of the status and potentials of women in light of being key partners in achieving sustainable comprehensive development.

The national women's empowerment policy adopted by the Sudanese Cabinet represents the main basis for empowering women and maximizing their contributions in all walks of life.

We do pursue our official and popular efforts in cooperation with civil society organisations and the private sector with the objective to control maternity deaths, set up programmes and policies for promoting the status of rural women under the executive program for agricultural development, which is a key means for achieving food security and self-reliance in terms of food grains for the entire Arab world in view of Sudan's latent and unexploited natural resources.

Madam Chairperson,

A malicious conspiracy is being plotted against a dear part of our country, namely, Darfur. Whenever we try to settle the problem and bridge the gap, the enemies, who seek to destabilize our nation, work on widening it again and again. However, we are strongly committed to spread peace, development and feeling of brotherhood in Darfur. You have followed up the meeting of Sudanese delegation (more than 60% of the delegation are from Darfur people), which sought to come up with visions and solutions for maintaining the unity of our national fabric. In this context, I would like to highly and sincerely praise the serious efforts and good offices being exerted, especially by the League of Arab States (LAS) and the African Union (AU), for preserving the stability of Sudan. We do also need your support for the resolutions and recommendations, which are in the interest of the people of Sudan.

We are totally convinced that partnership for development can not be achieved overnight, but it requires the creation of an appropriate international environment. Moreover, human rights can be disintegrated. In other words, we can not call for ensuring human rights for men and women without the rights of peoples to development and control on its resources.

Madam Chairperson,

Dear sisters,

In this regard, we could like to reiterate that the siege imposed on the Palestinian women and children is tightened. Accordingly, the matter should go beyond the oral condemnation and calling on the parties concerned to taking serious actions towards the protection of the Palestinian women and children.

We are happy that the Arab Women Organisation has adopted what we previously initiatives we proposed in last conferences regarding the issues of women and media.

We highly praise our objective-based march and the achievement of our agenda require enhancing joint Arab action and having full coordination of the efforts being exerted by the official bodies and the civil society organisations towards achieving the society's security and safety and promoting the conditions of Arab women.

May Allah Guide all of us to the right path for realizing the progress and prosperity of the Arab and Islamic nation.

Speech by Her Excellency

Mrs. Asma al-Assad

Syrian Arab Republic

Your Highness Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak, President of the Arab Women Organisation, Conference Chair,

Fellow Arab First Ladies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start by extending my gratitude to Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak for the warm and hospitable welcome afforded to us in the United Arab Emirates. I highly commend her astute choice of our conference's topic. I extend my deepest respects for her steadfast commitment to our Arab identity and all that she has done to empower and protect women in the Emirates and the wider Arab World.

Distinguished Guests,

Our present and our future are defined by the actions people take for themselves. Women must be equally involved in shaping our lives, today and tomorrow.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, women in the Arab World have been steadily defining their role and contribution in our societies. Their efforts have intensified during recent times, but the objective has always remained the same – a progressive society, where citizens, have access to equal opportunities and live without discrimination. The objective is not to carve out a new or different role for women, rather to ensure that their contribution is recognized and optimised. For our societies in the Arab World, this must result in a commitment to our nation's security, stability and prosperity.

We live in a region that has been plagued by conflict and instability for decades. This not only continues to have a detrimental effect on our development efforts, but also, and more significantly, it affects the overall level of human security afforded to our citizens. One cannot discuss human security in the Middle East without addressing Israel's continued illegal occupation of Arab lands and its total disregard of Palestinian rights. Human security and human rights are mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive.

The illegal occupation becomes even more significant when we factor water security and water rights into the discussion. Palestinian, Jordanian, Syrian and Lebanese water supplies continue to be threatened by Israel's hegemonic violation of our water boundaries. Without water security, the other dimensions of human security become irrelevant. There can be no human life without water, it is a basic human right and it will affect how secure Arabs feel.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Globalisation today has left no doubt that the security of individuals and nations are interlinked and interdependent. This presents us with new challenges, both economic and cultural; two cornerstones of human security. Our cultural security is primarily an outcome of our sense of identity and belonging. We must work to ensure that our cultural identity is not compromised and we must not allow our history, our traditions or our lifestyle to be distorted by external forces.

Despite the challenges we face amidst the current global financial crisis, I believe that we also have an opportunity. Any crisis, especially one of this magnitude, requires the total mobilisation of a nation's resources and capabilities, particularly the fuller participation of women in our societies. This can no longer be considered optional; it is a national, regional and global necessity.

I urge you not to forget an additional crisis facing our world today, one that does not benefit from widespread attention, the devastating global food crisis. It is a crisis that reminds us of the necessity for the careful re-examination of the matter of food security and that we must approach human security comprehensively. It is no longer an issue for developing countries to struggle with alone; this is a truly global crisis which has left no country unaffected.

Distinguished Guests,

We can be proud of the significant achievements Arab women have accomplished in recent years, but we can only build on them if we base our evaluation of them on practical realities. Have these achievements translated into tangible changes in the social conditions of women in the Arab world? And what has been the impact of these changes on the extent of human security afforded to Arab women today? The answers to these questions constitute our shortcomings on one hand, but provide us with a benchmark on the other. Given the tensions that exist in our Arab society between the forces of progress and those of stagnation, the state must positively determine the direction of development. With the inclusive participation of men, women and civil society, the government must take action to resolve this tension in favour of growth and prosperity. Today, women must continue to have the courage and the will to demand progress and struggle together with all who believe in our nations' future and who work without discrimination. Together with the forward-thinking elements of our societies they will shape their own human security.

Speech by Her Excellency

Mrs. Amina Abbas

State of Palestine

Her Highness Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubrak – Chair of the Arab Women Conference,

First ladies,

Heads of Arab delegations,

His Excellency Secretary General of the League of Arab States,

Mrs. Wadouda Badran Director General of the Arab Women Organisation,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me in the beginning to convey our deep appreciation, and gratitude to her Highness Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak, for sponsoring this important Arab Women conference, and for her generosity in receiving us here in Abu Dhabi. Her patronage to this conference represents only a fraction of the efforts her Highness exerts to elevate the status of women, and to protect their rights for secure, fair, and dignified life.

We feel this effort through the achievements made by women in the United Arab Emirates in terms of the accomplishments, women in this country, have achieved on all levels.

For us in Palestine, we feel and witness her role through the generous assistance and donations her highness provides to Palestinian families, elevating their suffering, and enabling them to live a relatively normal life. Few days ago, and through her highness' support, a special section to cater for women with special needs, was opened in Palestine.

Elevating the status of women, and enabling them to live a secure and dignified life constitutes an important part of our work to build progressive Arab societies. Without giving women their fair deal in terms of equal job opportunities, education, and the ability to form and build their own status, our societies will not progress, and will not assume their rightful position amongst other world societies.

The cause and concept debated in this conference is paramount. Providing security to people in terms of enabling them to live a secure life, and to work towards sustainable development are essential requirements. Security and sustainable developments are necessary for a secure, stable normal life, void of any violence. This is the bedrock upon which societies develop and relations prosper.

Your Highness Sheikha Fatima,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I, on behalf of Palestinian women, and in the name of all sectors in our Palestinian society would like to stress the need to develop the above concept and to make it more universal, and to pay special attention to the situation of Palestinian women and society under the Israeli occupation, enduring extreme difficulties, insecurity, and all forms of humiliation. The occupiers practice all forms of oppression against the Palestinian people. The occupation and its practices cause hardships, frustrate people, and is a major reason behind the existence of internal violence.

I trust that all of you are aware of the extent of Palestinian women suffering, be it women under occupation in Palestine or in the Diaspora.

We in Palestine, in the holy land, the land of steadfastness, look forward for your support and assistance, to do what you can to help tens of thousands of poor Palestinian families. We are also in need of your efforts to put an end to inter Palestinian violence, and to end the division which has inflicted extreme harm to our national cause.

Your Highness Sheikha Fatima,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Palestinian women are viewing the efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation in Cairo with extreme hope, and are hoping that reconciliation which will end the schism, and bring back Palestinian unity, will prevail.

Palestinian women standing side by side with men for the sake of achieving freedom and independence, and to build the sovereign Palestinian state with Arab East Jerusalem its capital, call on you, the free people, men and women of our world, to stand by the Palestinian people, and to support us in our quest to end the Israeli occupation, and the removal of settlements from the occupied Palestinian land, and to build the independent Palestinian state.

Your Excellency,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our Palestinian homeland is occupied, Jewish settlements are expanding by the day, they are stealing our land and denying our identity, they are Judaizing holy Jerusalem, and are aborting all peace initiatives, be that Arab, Palestinian or International.

We call on this second Arab Women Conference, to urge the international community to exert real efforts to end the Israeli occupation of our land, on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Arab Summit held in Beirut in March 2002.

It is the right of our Palestinian people, as all peoples of our world, to live free and independent on their national soil, in their independent state. Palestinian women standing side by side with Palestinian men in the forefront of the struggle have achieved some of their political and social rights. They have designated places in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), and on municipality boards. There are 17 women member of the PLC, and 650 women member of village and town councils.

It should not be forgotten that there are more than 100 women in Israeli jails in addition to more than 11 thousand Palestinian prisoners. All of those have families suffering their absence. They are poor, and unable to make ends meet. This tragic and inhumane situation engulfing women and Palestinian families should make it imperative on the world community to end the Israeli oppression and their endless torture. The Israeli occupation must end.

I would like to seize this opportunity to convey the sincere regards of our people and leadership to His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed, to his Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed may God preserve and protect them, and to our brothers and sisters, the People of the United Arab Emirates.

Peace and blessings be upon you all,

Thank You

Speech by Her Excellency

Mrs. Wafaa Sleiman

Republic of Lebanon

Your Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, President of the Arab Women Organisation and of its Second Conference,

Your Majesties and Highnesses,

Your Excellencies the First ladies,

Your Excellencies Representatives of the Arab States members of this organisation,

Your Excellency the Director-General of the Arab Women Organisation,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

First, I would like to thank Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak for holding this conference under her patronage and for having shown great wisdom as the President of the Arab Women's Organisation during this period of its history. I would also like to thank H.E. the director general, Dr. Waduda Badran for the enormous efforts she has deployed in order to consolidate the institutional rules for the Arab Women's Organisation work, granting our organisation great credibility and a high standing among other Arab and international organisations.

Furthermore, I would like to seize the opportunity and salute Arab women across all Arab territories especially those who live in conflict and war zones including Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Sudan among others.

I have great hopes that the priority results of this conference will entail reinforcing efforts to empower Arab women especially those who live in areas of armed conflict, for the harmful and destructive aftermath of wars and armed conflicts affect women in particular. At the beginning of our Conference on Arab Women and Human Security, I cannot but underscore the current disparity between the western communities priorities, which aim at achieving advancement and ensuring luxury, and the Arab communities priorities, which aim to ensure safety, a basic need and the simplest form of human security.

Within the framework of ensuring human security, the woman, as a human being, is an end in herself just as she constitutes an active player in that same context.

Therefore, we must work for and with women in this domain.

And since this conference addresses human security from both its Arab and international perspectives, it aspires to place this debate on the international human level and to call upon Arab and international concerned parties to communicate and collaborate in order to achieve human security.

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, our present conference is expected to be another chapter of the cultures dialogue and thus to correct images we have about the "Other" and reveal common factors. And while this conference brings knowledge and understanding of differences in priorities to deeper levels, unity of the cause on the humane level remains intact.

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Let us collaborate across our countries in the field of women empowerment and communicate with all the peace-loving peoples of the world to consolidate human security.

In this context, it is imperative that international efforts be made in order to resolve armed conflicts, end wars, and assist and support communities which have just gotten out of these calamities. As a matter of fact, the Middle East region has lived in the midst of wars since the plight of Palestine in 1948.

Isn't it high time that wars end and witness fair and comprehensive solutions?

Isn't it high time destroyed areas and countries get aid and support?

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We hope this conference sheds the light on the various aspects of human security and on the common grounds between the Arab and International perspectives.

We also hope it highlights mechanisms to consolidate the human security and underscores the roles of formal and civil associations.

I reiterate my gratitude to Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak and hope our conference would fulfill its objectives intended for the service of Arab women's issues.

Long Live Arab Women

Long Live Arab-Arab and International-Arab dialogue and collaboration for the service of the human security causes

Speech by Her Excellency
Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak
Arab Republic of Egypt

**My Dear Sister, HRH Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak,
Your Highnesses, Excellencies and members of the Royal Family,
Distinguished Heads of Delegations,
H.E. Secretary General of the League of Arab States,
Representatives of International and Regional Organisations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It gives me great pleasure to be meeting with you in the United Arab Emirates in this forum, under the patronage of HRH Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, within the framework of one of the leading Arab institutions that epitomizes collective Arab cooperation, namely the Arab Women Organisation. Today we discuss an issue that has increasingly become recognized as one of the top priorities on the international political agenda; the issue of human security.

Allow me at the outset to express my appreciation and gratitude to HRH Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak for sponsoring this important event, and her extensive efforts in the planning and preparation works of the conference, which attests to the heightened importance she places on Arab women's issues, including the means to empower women and enhance their position within society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The concept of human security came to the forefront of the global agenda in the 1990's, in the wake of the tragic events in Rwanda and Bosnia, and the subsequent grave violations of fundamental human rights witnessed in these two countries, including the displacement of innocent civilians and the suffering of refugees.

It is important to note that the concept of human security is still evolving, and subject to widespread debate and discussion both within and outside of the UN framework. It is from this that our conference derives its significance, in order to present the perspective of Arab women vis-à-vis this concept, in order to contribute to its formulation.

We would like to say to our societies and to the World that our Arab World is an indivisible and integral part of this World, brought together by growing independence as well as sharing common human values. The security of our peoples is an integral part of Human security everywhere.

We would also like to affirm that the protection of women and guaranteeing their safety and security should constitute one of the fundamental tenets of the concept of human security. Women are more likely to be subjected to violence, harmful practices and human trafficking. In times of war, they are usually the most affected by its repercussions. In times of peace they are more prone to poverty and marginalization. Women are therefore in greater need for the fruits of development in order to enhance their empowerment and their position within society.

We say to both our local and the wider international communities that Arab women do have a voice and an opinion on the matter, and we should succeed in this conference to achieve a clear and well-defined position in this regard.... a common position that we can later promote at the international level as one representing the collective opinion of Arab Women.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the novelty of the concept of human security, the past few years have witnessed great strides in the development of the concept, its main philosophical framework and its fundamental objectives. The debate continues to this date. Since the inception of the concept, it aroused a wide array of controversy, and was met with great apprehension. It was suggested that the concept of human security would serve as alternative to the national security of states; seen by some as an attempt at segregating the individual from his wider community, and segregating people from their homelands and nations.

The introduction of the concept was also accompanied by attempts in UN literature, and other international academic and research centers, to undermine the importance of the notion of State Sovereignty, especially in the wake of a growing level of Globalisation. There were also simultaneous attempts at introducing the notion of Humanitarian Intervention in order to protect or prevent grave violations of fundamental human rights, including through resorting to coercive force, when necessary.

It was therefore necessary that Egypt, accompanied by many like-minded countries, attempt to rectify false perceptions surrounding the new concept. We affirmed that individual and people's security are indivisible from National Security....that the concept of human security comes in tandem with national security and does not seek to replace it...that implementing human security was a national responsibility first and foremost,...That it was closely linked with social and human development....And that it could be supplemented by a role at the international level. We affirmed the inviolability of the concept of State Sovereignty, and cautioned that the right to humanitarian intervention opens the door to the illegitimate violation of State Sovereignty. We also asserted our unequivocal support for the respect of international human rights standards, and that human security and protection of civilians should be extended to all individuals and peoples. We, in Egypt and the Arab World, owe this to ourselves and our peoples. We advanced along this path through our nationally owned political, economic and social reforms.

While the current dialogue falls short of formulating an agreed definition for the concept of Human Security, I would like to underline our support for any definition that embraces the values of freedom, protection, safety and human rights.

This multidimensional concept should primarily concentrate on the protection of human beings from all material and moral threats. It should seek to protect individuals from economic, social and cultural threats, freeing them from hunger and ensuring the adequate levels of healthcare, education, shelter and a decent livelihood.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our debate today on the issue of human security in general, and its relationship to women issues in particular, constitutes an initiative by the Arab Women organisation that should be praised and promoted.

I am hopeful that tackling this issue, in an all Arab forum, would provide an opportunity and encourage our academic circles, together with their western counterparts, to further deliberate on how to contribute to the formulation of the concept of Human Security.

In addition, our gathering represents a contribution that is specifically Arab, to an issue that has been accorded much importance on the international scene and within the UN as well as other international and regional organisations.

On the other hand, the international character of this conference allows this Arab contribution to fall within the framework of direct dialogue between Arab and international experts. Such dialogue and intellectual exchange is a fundamental prerequisite in itself, which we hope will become a model for similar dialogue between all peoples on issues of common concern.

The subject of this conference is all the more pressing in light of the realities of the contemporary global system. The concept of human security, in all its aspects, has become a matter of extreme urgency, and a means to confront the multifaceted challenges that face human beings wherever they are. These challenges can no longer be confined to certain regions or boundaries due to the unprecedented ICT revolution, the significant development in military technology, and the process of Globalisation which has created new economic and social challenges.

The Arab World expects to include such challenges and the threats they pose in any discussion regarding human security. It is our desire to reach an international consensus with regards to this concept and its definition...A consensus that provides security for all human beings and gives Globalisation a human face, and allows its benefits to be shared by all, while protecting the poor from its adverse consequences....A consensus that enshrines a strong framework to support development efforts in our countries....It should seek to rectify the contemporary international economic and financial systems, so as to relieve us from the consequences of its crises and imbalances and the absence of controls.

In the contemporary Arab Scene, there is a strong link between Arab Women's challenges and the concept of human security, particularly due to the nature of Arab society and culture which makes women the nucleus of the family and the foundation of society. As such, the protection and empowerment of women, and the enhancement of her status in a way that guarantees her freedom and self-actualization, is a basic need for security, stability and development.

Hence, it is important to view women not only as a demander of protection but also as an architect of security, stability, peace and development. It is with this view that I launched the Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement in 2003. Through practice and experience we have come to realize the effectiveness of this perspective. Aside from the status preserved for women in any society as mothers, sisters, daughters and partners, when women are privileged with awareness, education and social recognition of their capabilities, they are able to better perform their role, and to participate in the development of their societies with greater capacity to contribute.

It is imperative that we work to answer a number of questions surrounding the scope of the perceived concept of human security and women's security in our region, and the means to implement these concepts, including the reaffirmation of the role of women as safety and security nets in their societies.

I look forward to the conclusions of this important conference, and I trust that they will offer an intellectual as well as practical value added, serving the cause of Arab women and enhancing it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since its inception, the Arab women Organisation has achieved many successes under the leadership of the Arab First Ladies. It has embraced every Arab woman and earned its place as a forum that presents her issues, interests and priorities. This organisation has asserted, through its activities, research, and studies, that it is capable of tackling issues of concern to women in an organized and effective institutional setting.

I would like to congratulate the Arab Women Organisation, in particular its Supreme Council and its members and staff, and all those who believe in its mission and support its objectives.

My appreciation goes to all those who participated in this conference and all those who support the cause of Arab women...To all those who provide them with protection, security and empowerment and who seek to enhance their status as a necessary prerequisite of the development of the wider Arab region.

I would like to express once more my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to my Dear sister HRH Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak for her continuous effort in this field. I would like to tell her that her leadership of the organisation in its third session witnessed much success

Thank you

Speech by Her Excellency
Mrs. Tekaiber Bint Ahmed
Islamic Republic of Mauritania

Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, Chairperson of the Arab Women Organisation,

Highnesses and Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the beginning I would like to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, for the reception and the kind hospitality that I and the delegation accompanying me were subject to.

Allow me at this happy occasion to praise the efforts of Her Highness and her endeavors to make the Arab women organisation an effective framework for the empowerment of women status and the enhancement of their participation in development.

Highnesses and Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This conference takes place at a time when the Mauritanian people are experiencing the political, social and economic reforms promised by the reform movement of the 11th of August, lead by the State Supreme Council under the leadership of General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz.

This movement saved the country from a dim future which was about to destroy its constitutional institutions and foundations of the state and undermine its economic and social developmental programs.

The State Supreme Council is committed to correcting these deviations and to organizing a board national consultation to overcome the crisis and plan for a promising future for all Mauritians.

At a time when the Mauritanian people are happy with the benefits of the reform, a hand full of supporters of the former presidents' regime are working on imposing an unfair blockade against our people. Women, children and weak stratas of society will be the first to suffer from such a situation.

Highnesses and Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our country devotes maximum importance to women empowerment and their participation in the economy, society and politics. In this context Mauritania has been part of all activities (meeting, forums and research) organized by the Arab Women Organisation and has contributed to setting the organisation's plans and programs.

Holding our second conference under the title "women in the concept and issues of human security: Arab and international perspectives" reflects the keenness of the organisation to address the most important problems and challenges facing the world. It also reflects the AWO keenness on having a unified Arab stand regarding these international concerns. We are sure that the conference recommendations will allow our country to undertake the required procedures to meet the challenges related to all forms of Globalisation, cultural, economic and political, while at the same time respecting our specificities and the requirements for development and progress in our country.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate once more my thanks and appreciation to Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, President of the conference and the organisation for the kind reception, and hospitality.

Thank you and wish this conference all success

Speech by His Excellency

Mr. Amre M. Moussa

Secretary General of the League
of Arab States

Your Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak,

Your Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa,

Your Majesties and Highnesses,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, it gives me pleasure to extend my sincere greetings to Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak on assuming the chairmanship of the Supreme Council of the Arab Women Organisation (AWO). I would also like to express my deep thanks and appreciation for her sponsorship of — and strong faith in — social issues in general and women's rights in particular.

I also have the pleasure to extend my deep thanks and appreciation to Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa for her wise chairmanship of the second session of the Supreme Council of the AWO and for sponsoring the first conference of the organisation.

Thanks and appreciation are also due to their Majesties, Highnesses and Excellencies, the First Ladies, who exert tremendous efforts at various levels in quest of supporting and empowering Arab women.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we attend today's conference on "Women in the Concept and Issues of Human Security: Arab and International Perspectives," we witness yet another important activity sponsored by Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak. The conference is held in the United Arab Emirates, which makes us recall the late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan who contributed a great deal to its renaissance and development through his enlightened political will and vision, thus bringing about peace, security and prosperity for his people.

Human security in general and women's security in particular necessitate enhancing economic and social security, which is represented in reducing poverty, ensuring food security, raising standards of living, and generating job opportunities to ensure a prosperous life for the Arab people and build their capacities. This entails drawing up developmental policies on the basis of justice and equality and forming social safety nets that target the poor and seek to secure their basic needs.

In this context, we should note that the march of Arab women, which has been hindered by social, political and economic realities, has made some remarkable progress. Yet there still is a long way to go. The promotion of the status of Arab women is not an issue of concern to women alone; it is an objective of the entire Arab community. In fact, it is a developmental goal that proved to be a necessity and that cannot be delayed longer. Otherwise we will pay dearly in the course of our march towards development, progress, security and peace. Realising the empowerment and human security of Arab women requires a bold and sincere confrontation with the challenges posed by the status quo, as well as exerting more efforts in the fields of development, modernisation and reform.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The international community has not reached yet a common and agreed upon definition for the concept of human security — one of the new concepts raised in the last decade of the 20th century. The concept aims at revising the terms of security and human discourses with their different intellectual dimensions in view of international developments, the accelerated pace of events, and the escalation of international financial crises. Freeing human beings from poverty and need, and ensuring their active and wide participation in the development and reform process, in all their dimensions, are basic preconditions for bringing about human security.

The concept of security as addressed today by the League of Arab States is neither the type of security that is restricted to national security, with its political and military aspects, nor is it the old concept that is mainly concerned with state security and protection against external threats. What is meant here is the concept, which is closely linked to the security of Arab citizens, of sustainable development, economic prosperity and social security.

The League of Arab States has always been involved in the international dialogue on issues of human security. The League organised in December 2002 the Human Security Forum with the objective of initiating dialogue on integrating humanitarian dimensions into the general concept of security, its standards and regulations. The discussions held identified three phenomena that contributed to the emerging new framework of security that puts “the human” at the centre of its concern.

The first phenomenon is the change of the nature of armed conflicts and the escalation of certain internal disputes and civil wars, thus resulting in a remarkable increase in the number of civilian victims, especially women and children. Such developments have put the social fabric and economic structures in several countries in the region in jeopardy.

The second phenomenon is the massive progress made in the field of information technology and telecommunications, and the fierceness of globalisation that resulted in marginalising several categories of people in developing countries. Globalisation in this sense has not put social dimensions into consideration. Undoubtedly, consecutive international developments and the unprecedented crisis witnessed in the international economy and its institutions will have serious ramifications on the Arab region. Accordingly, the development of common interests among Arab countries, economically and developmentally, has become a pressing need and a duty incumbent on all of us; hence the importance of the socioeconomic and development summit scheduled in Kuwait in January 2009. I am confident that this summit will mark a new juncture in achieving Arab interests.

The third phenomenon is the growing role of civil society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector in the Arab arena. I am sure that these organisations will play significant roles as partners in rights and responsibilities in implementing development plans with their economic and social aspects.

Efforts to consolidate joint Arab action are ongoing. A high-level conference on human security in the Arab region is due to be held in mid-December 2008. The conference, organised by the League of Arab States in collaboration with UNESCO and the UN, will be held at the headquarters of the League of Arab States. It will focus on issues of human security in the

Arab region and will discuss the role of governments and civil society organisations in addressing international challenges emerging from the human security perspective according to national priorities and plans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Societal development is people-based as people are its engine and makers, and they are the ones who reap its returns. Investment in human development is the only means to achieve this objective. Therefore, priority should be given to capacity building and promoting the skills of people so that they can effectively participate in the various levels of development. In fact, education is a key factor for building and promoting the capacities of Arab human resources to address the challenges of development and create a knowledge-based economy. Thus, educational reform is the main gateway for achieving sustainable development and human security.

Arab interest in the necessity to educational reform has been reflected in the agendas of consecutive Arab summits held in Tunisia, Algeria, Khartoum, Riyadh, and recently in Syria, which approved a plan for the development of education in the Arab world. During the summit, mechanisms were developed to follow up on the implementation and funding of the plan. The period from 2008-2018 was declared as the Arab decade for education.

Recent international reports on education indicate that there are 774 million illiterates amongst adults worldwide, 100 million of which are in the Arab region. In view of the fact that illiteracy among Arab women runs to 64 per cent, priority should be given to exerting more efforts to promote the quality of education, increase female enrolment in primary schools, and combating the high dropout rate amongst girls. In view of the above, the Secretariat of the League of Arab States, in cooperation with specialised Arab organisations (at the head of which is the Arab Women Organisation), is preparing a strategy and plan of action to eliminate illiteracy among women in the Arab region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In response to grave recent challenges, actually a turning point on a thorny path full of erroneous concepts about our Arab identity, we are launching today the Arab Network for Arab Expatriates and the Arab Women Media Strategy meant to extend bridges of Arab culture, enhance networking, and serve Arab issues as well as improving the image of Arab women inside and outside the Arab world. We hope that the network gives room for dialogue, interaction and exchange of opinions among Arab women expatriates and with their counterparts at home. I would also like to underline the importance of the Arab Women Media Strategy, as it is a cornerstone for achieving and enhancing women's rights and their contribution to development. It will also help to highlight the historical and civilisational roles played — and the struggles taken up — by Arab women, in order to challenge false stereotypes formed about them. In this context, I would like to hail Arab women in Palestine, Iraq, Sudan and Somalia for their steadfastness in confronting the toughest security, economic and social conditions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Living in societies enjoying peace, security, freedom, dignity, justice and equality has always been the dream of peoples all over the world. We, governments, organisations, unions,

associations, men and women, are called upon to deal consciously and cogently with our Arab reality with all its changes, developments and challenges, armed with a strong and unified will in a bid to enhance security, peace and stability for our peoples.

To conclude, I would like to record my thanks and appreciation for the achievements and efforts made, under the kind patronage of their Majesties, Highnesses and Excellencies in quest of promoting the status of Arab women. It gives me pleasure to express, in my personal capacity and on behalf of the League of Arab States, my thanks and deep appreciation both to Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak as well as to the government and people of the United Arab Emirates. I wish the march of Arab women all success and progress.

May the Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon all of you.

Speech by

Dr. Wadouda Badran

Director General of the Arab Women Organisation

Your Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, President of the Arab Women Organisation,

Your Majesties, Royal Highnesses and Excellencies Arab First Ladies,

Excellencies, Heads of Delegations,

Representatives of International and Regional Organisations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure and honour to meet you on the occasion of the second conference of the Arab Women Organisation (AWO), held under the title “Women in the Concept and Issues of Human Security: Arab and International Perspectives”. The conference is being held under the auspices of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, president of the organisation in its current session.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the status of women is a sensitive issue in the Arab region. In spite of the continuous efforts exerted by different official and civil society organisations to improve their conditions, women are still held far from the level we aspire to. They still suffer from various aspects of insecurity in their daily life. Moreover, they are subjected to different forms of domestic violence and do not have equal access to basic services, such as education and health. There are still many obstacles that hinder their participation in decision-making at different levels. At the same time, women are subject to other serious risks under occupation, wars and armed conflicts, such as forced immigration.

Since its inception, the AWO has sought to build the capacities of Arab women and improve their surrounding environment in a way that contributes to the achievement of their security and safety. The AWO is guided in its various activities by the strategy for the promotion of the status of Arab women. This strategy, which was laid down by previous summits, has identified a number of fields for realising the empowerment of women: education, health, environment and the media, in addition to the social, economic, political and legal fields.

Having reviewed the concept of human security as raised by the UN before the mid-1990s and in several theoretical writings issued subsequently, we have found that the elements of the concept cover the aspects of women empowerment which constitute areas of priority for AWO. In this context, the AWO has adopted a group of working programmes for women that include a number of projects covered under the concept of human security in its broader sense, i.e. to free women from both fear and need, and to safeguard human dignity.

For instance, the AWO has adopted a programme for reviewing the cultural traditions and terms of reference of Arab societies. This programme seeks to review and assess the predominant cultural trends in Arab society, which are considered a key element in determining the status of women and the nature of their roles.

The Arab Legal Group, a permanent working group in the AWO, seeks to review Arab legislation in order to achieve gender equality in the legal field. The group also works to remove impediments that turn legislation into a source of threat for women’s security. The AWO has various databases, which aim at revealing the real conditions of women and the problems affecting their security and safety. The AWO has also adopted a programme on the media and the advocacy of women’s issues that seeks to remove the negative and stereotypical image of women as portrayed by the media, which negatively affects women’s status and roles.

AWO also allocates some awards and scholarships, which are offered for studies on women's issues and armed conflicts as well as women and peace.

Having realized that the components of the concept of human security, as proposed by the UN or other subsequent academic studies, are in line with the objectives of the promotion of the status of Arab women, the AWO decided to adopt this concept both in theory and implementation as a framework for all its programmes and projects. This is why the second conference of the AWO was dedicated to the discussion of the concept of human security and its different elements in connection with women.

Despite the importance of the concept of human security, academic studies have shown that definitions often refer to the broader sense of the concept — covering all material and moral aspects of human life — without adopting a specified order. Academic research has dealt with the concept of human security from a comprehensive point of view. Though this itself is of high conceptual value, some who revised the concept believe that the definition of human security is too complex and ambiguous for policymakers. In other words, policymakers find the definition of the concept of human security loose and not specific, hence the problem of turning it into an action programme. The AWO has, therefore, been keen to design the activities of the conference in a way that goes beyond the theoretical aspect of the concept and addresses practical issues. We concentrated on the crystallisation of each component of the concept in the form of recommendations that can be applied on the ground. The AWO sought to ensure that the activities of the conference should culminate in a certain of a programmed action, which can represent a framework of its future activities for Arab women.

In forming the composition of members of each session in the conference, the AWO has been keen to avail itself of the participation of academicians, activists and experts from policymaking institutions. It has also been keen to invite speakers from all over the world to enrich the discussion with both Arab and international points of view. The AWO made it a point to handle the issues under discussion in a comprehensive way, and to combine theoretical and practical dimensions. Ultimately, this useful scientific accumulation of ideas from foreign and Arab contributions in the conference would represent a nucleus for an Arab school on this issue covering various and wider trends and principles.

I am sure that the conceptual and practical contribution of the participants in the conference offer us a framework under which we can achieve our objectives in the service of Arab women and the promotion of their status in a way that achieves their security in all its aspects.

It gives me great honour to extend words of thanks to all attendees. I would like to express my gratitude to their Majesties, Highnesses, and Excellencies, the first ladies participating in the conference as well as the members of the Supreme Council of the AWO, who spare no effort to advocate the activities of the AWO and Arab women. I would also like to thank the members of the Executive Council of the AWO, who are continuously working on supporting and developing the activities of the organisation and their ideas and proposals were of great importance in preparing for the conference.

Thanks are also due to Dr. Bahgat Korany, the head of the scientific team of the conference, and members of the team, who exerted their utmost efforts to ensure the success of the conference and the fact that it convened at the highest scientific level. I would like to also record my thanks to all researchers and experts from Arab countries and other parts of the world for accepting our invitation to attend the conference and for their scientific

and intellectual contributions to the various activities of the conference. I am sure that their proposals contributed to enriching the outcomes of the conference scientifically and practically.

I would like to extend special words of thanks to the United Arab Emirates for hosting the conference and the teamwork of the General Women's Union (GWU) under the supervision of Mrs Nora Al-Suwaidi, member of the Executive Council of the AWO from the UAE. I would like to thank the valuable teamwork from the Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, the National Council of Media and all ministries and state bodies in the country, which offered all possible assistance for the success of this conference. Allow me also to greet the efficient and dedicated administrative team of the AWO, starting from Dr. Ola Abou Zeid, the director of planning and programmes, to all members of the administration.

To conclude, I would like to express my deep thanks and appreciation to Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, president of the AWO and sponsor of the conference for her kind support and attention to all activities of the conference and the AWO in general. The contributions of Her Highness to the organisation goes beyond financial support of AWO's activities and working programmes to the moral support represented in her enthusiasm, continuous encouragement and keenness to personally follow up all developments in detail. I would like also to record her interest in removing all obstacles the AWO faces and offering all possible facilities to promote the efficiency and quality of its work.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.



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