



Arab women issue a call to Arab Heads of State

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On the 30th anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the regional Coalition for 'Equality without reservation' launched a call to heads of state of Arab countries to promote the equality and citizenship of Arab women.

On the 30th anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the regional Coalition for “Equality without reservation” launched a call to Heads of State of Arab countries to promote the equality and citizenship of Arab women and in particular to:

- Withdraw all reservations to the Convention and reform all discriminatory laws which constitute obstacles to the fulfilment of the rights of women as citizens.
- Integrate the principles of equality and non-discrimination based on gender into constitutions, laws and action plans and ensure their implementation.
- Support the efforts of non-governmental organisations to raise awareness on the Convention and contribute to its implementation in order to end all forms of discrimination against women and promote substantive equality.

The Coalition for “Equality without reservation”, established at the conclusion of the first regional conference on the withdrawal of reservations to CEDAW and the ratification of its Optional Protocol, held in Rabat, Morocco in June 2006, is composed of women’s rights organisations and generalist human rights organisations from the Arab world. The Coalition’s main objective is to encourage Arab states that have not yet done so to ratify CEDAW (Sudan and Somalia), and to call upon states parties to withdraw reservations which are incompatible with the aims and objectives of the Convention as well as to ratify its Optional Protocol, whilst harmonising national legislation with the provisions of CEDAW.

The Coalition, in its appeal, welcomed the positive measures that have been taken in recent years in this area, in particular:

- The withdrawal by Egypt and Algeria of reservations to Article 9(b) concerning nationality

- The withdrawal by Jordan and Algeria of reservations to Article 15(4) on freedom of movement and choice of residence
- The announcement by the Moroccan government of its intention to withdraw reservations to CEDAW
- The ratification by Tunisia of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, thereby becoming the second country after Libya to have ratified this Protocol
- The ratification by Qatar of the Convention.

However, the Coalition expressed its concern about persisting gaps between constitutional provisions and the requirements of national laws, and political commitments and institutional practices of Arab countries. These discrepancies maintain and strengthen discrimination and violence against Arab women and their exclusion, in both the public and private spheres.

The Coalition drew attention to the significant efforts of human rights and women's rights organisations to overcome obstacles which prevent Arab women from enjoying their human rights, in particular concerning transmission of nationality, personal status, violence and political participation.

The Coalition called on the League of Arab States to organise a regional event to celebrate International Human Rights Day and to effectively include national institutions for the promotion of women's rights and non-governmental organisations.

Finally the call to Arab leaders underlined the efforts undertaken by the Coalition to bring about the withdrawal of reservations to CEDAW and the ratification of its Optional Protocol, and reiterated the recommendations of the second regional conference (Amman, Jordan - May 2009), which emphasised the need for Arab governments to take all measures to ensure that the women of the region can enjoy all their human rights and full citizenship.

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