

## PRESS RELEASE

### "Progress of Arab Women 2004" - Arabic version

Official Launching Ceremony  
January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Cairo- Egypt

Under the patronage of H.E. Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, President and Founder of the Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) is launching the Arabic version of the "**Progress of Arab Women 2004**" Report on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005, at the League of Arab States headquarters in Cairo, Egypt.

The aim of this report is to serve as a tool for evaluating the progress and identifying the challenges in protecting women in the contexts of social, economic and political security in the Arab states. The report also revisits existing strategies and programs of action for the protection of women's security, in an effort to increase their potential for concrete change.

"Progress of Arab Women 2004" investigates three different levels of action for women's empowerment in the region: the policy level where international commitments are being made, the operational plans and actions at the national level, and the achievements and challenges in terms of the everyday lives of women.

The report notes that progress has been particularly evident at the policy levels, where Arab countries have been full and active partners in the adoption of gender-based strategies for development. In addition, many of these countries have also achieved some progress in building the capabilities of women and identifying their security requirements. The implementation of policy level strategies at the national level, however, has yielded disproportional results throughout the region. Thus, despite the success of many national gender-sensitive programs, the low participation rate of women in the social, economic and political spheres in many countries continues to negatively impact the development of the region as a whole.

"Progress of Arab Women 2004" highlights the importance of enhancing human security in view of the current Arab development efforts, as well as the traumas and insecurities rampant throughout the region. The report also draws attention to the urgent need to redress gender imbalances and promote the empowerment of women, in order to strengthen the impact of initiatives geared towards achieving development, security and peace throughout the Arab world. Moreover, it calls for the enhancement of the gender-knowledge base and the development of corresponding indicators that respond to different contextual specifications.

In the efforts to strengthen the **social security** of women, the report underlines the need to formulate strategies that emphasize the important relationship between the private and public spheres and the centrality of family as an integral part of the Arab identity. Accordingly, the report recommends revisiting family codes and state practices which make women's citizenship contingent on family relations, reforming welfare regimes to accommodate the needs of women and regulating labor markets with gender sensitive mechanisms. In addition, the report calls for the development of

“social watch instruments” to register unfulfilled commitments and assess progress in the field of social security.

The significance of **economic security** in the lives of Arab women is also captured in this new publication. Achieving economic security, as explained in this report, should not be limited to satisfying the basic needs of individuals. Instead, it should also fulfill non-material needs such as personal autonomy, human dignity and effective participation in community life. Moreover, in order to protect individuals through the provision of job opportunities and a secure income, economic security should entail that both men and women have equal access to changing markets, resources and credit. In this regard, the report delineates the value of education and training, as well as microfinance initiatives and other financial loans and services, in enhancing women’s opportunities for income generation. At the same time, according to this study, social safety nets remain crucial for protecting individuals in periods of economic downturn.

In its final chapter, '**securing politics**', the report examines the progress achieved towards the implementation of international benchmarks such as the Beijing Platform for Action, Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Millennium Development Goals. Throughout the region, there has been a positive increase in Arab women's representation in national parliaments and executive positions. Also, women's NGO's have been attributed a more focal role in the efforts to enhance women's participation in politics. At the same time, the newly established Arab Women's Organization has begun to actively coordinate efforts to develop the status of women and support their role in their communities.

Yet, despite the progress, Arab women continue to be marginalized from the political arena. The report suggests that this negative trend is sustained by the fact that the political domains within many Arab countries do not encourage the participation of women in political dialogues and initiatives. In this respect, the report calls for the creation of a policy environment that protects women's security and bridges the gap between the private and public sectors. In addition, Arab countries are urged to formulate gender-sensitive policies that will enable women to participate more actively in the promotion and realization of political reform strategies.

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