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National Strategy for Women

in

The Syrian Arab Republic

Prepared by:

**The National Committee for
Post-Beijing Follow-up of Women's Affairs**

"The advancement of women in our country, and the restoration of their rights and exercise of their duties constitute a fundamental element in continuing and accelerating our efforts on the road toward progress and evolution."

- President Hafez al-Asad

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Introduction

Based on:

- The Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, particularly the articles related to women.
- The historic sayings of the General Secretary of the Socialist Arab Ba'th Party and President Hafez al-Asad on women and their role in building and advancing the society.
- The applicable laws in the various areas.
- The principles of the Articles of Incorporation of the Women's Federation.
- The Arab Plan for the Advancement of Women, through the year 2000.
- The Beijing Platform for Action.
- The conclusions of workshops organized by the Post-Beijing National Committee.

The Committee devised a comprehensive draft strategy for the advancement of women in the Syrian Arab Republic through the year 2005, and helped in dealing with the various issues under discussion.

A strategy for each of the key issues is presented in the following:

I. Women and Law

The National Committee Classifies The Relevant Strategies as Follows:

First: laws and regulations dealing with women as citizens on the basis of equality and non-discrimination because of sex.

Second: laws including provisions related to women's civil and personal rights that need to be revised.

Third: The International Convention on Human Rights, particularly women's human rights, which was ratified by the Syrian government and entered into law like other applicable laws.

Fourth: Women and the elimination of all forms of violence.

First:

The strategy for the first group of laws defines the legal status of women on the basis of citizenship and equality. In terms of quantity, this group represents the large majority of laws and regulations governing individual and institutional activities in the Syrian Arab Republic. But, because there is a gap between the laws on record and their real implementation, the National Committee emphasizes the need for action to carry out the following strategies:

1. Enacting regulations and creating mechanisms to monitor the implementation of these laws, and ensure that individuals and institutions understand them well and apply them properly. This process will include all significant provisions in this group, beginning with the Constitution and incorporating the relevant provisions of laws and regulations governing the legislature and trade union candidacy and elections; labor laws and

- regulations; laws of education and public health; the civil law; laws governing information and the right to free speech, the economic law regulating ownership rights, investment, incorporation of companies, and access to capital and financing, etc.
2. Strengthening the mechanism which coordinates the efforts of the Women's Federation, Workers' Federation and the Bar Association, to monitor and detect violations and improper implementation of such laws and;
 3. Designing a basis for utilizing these laws as a means to boost women's opportunities for leadership and senior positions in all areas.

Second:

The laws and regulations which still include provisions limiting women's human rights. Despite the insignificant percentage of the total laws in the first group, they touch central and sensitive issues pertaining to women's citizenship status and human and personal rights. At the top of this group are the Penal Code, the Personal Status Law, the Agricultural Relations Law, the Insurance and Pensions Law and the Social Insurance Law.

Third:

The international conventions on human rights in general, and women's human rights in particular:

1. Taking action to publicize and explain the purport of the conventions ratified by the Syrian government.
2. Enacting a law that allows the Syrian government to sign the 1979 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Fourth:

The elimination of all forms of violence against women:

Reinforcing all rigorous provisions included in the Penal Code governing violence against women, helping women who are exposed to exceptional conditions by providing rehabilitation and training and facilitating access to income-producing activities, and guiding their normal re-integration into society.

II. Women and Social Status

1. Eliminating the sources of poverty and alleviating its effects on women, by allowing them to participate in the implementation and follow-up of comprehensive development plans.
2. Incorporating data on the national income distribution, according to the population categories in the National Accounts system, and showing the percentage of groups living below the poverty level.
3. Increasing the focus on rural development projects, and boosting the rural woman's status in terms of educational, legal, social, health and economic issues.

4. Encouraging local community projects, generating job opportunities for women living in rural areas, encouraging their participation in food production and improving their efficiency in handling issues pertaining to food security.
5. Empowering poor women who have special needs (such as the disabled, the elderly and family income providers, etc.), fostering their capabilities and independence, increasing their participation in economic activity and providing them with the required care and assistance.

III. Women and the Environment

1. Monitoring, devising and following up the implementation of the laws and regulations concerning environmental protection, control of pollution resulting from the various industrial, agricultural and tourist activities, the different uses of energy and all natural resources, and from irrigation methods.
2. Establishing a mechanism to allow the participation of women in formulating, monitoring and implementing development projects designed to overcome desertification and to build a green belt, and strengthening the implementation of laws and regulations protecting forests and preventing nomadic farming.
3. Joining the entities concerned in devising and implementing the plans and programs to create environmental awareness and establish environmental concepts about the conservation of natural resources and vital facilities.
4. Fostering research into the relationship between population and development in terms of production, consumption, environment and natural resources; and highlighting women's role in these areas, through cooperation with national, Arab and international organizations.
5. Reinforcing the full participation of community organizations, trade unions, and the scientific and research community to follow up the provision of environmental health and occupational safety maintenance measures.
6. Rehabilitating and training women to acquire the advanced skills needed to handle modern technology and to be able to manage resources and sustain environmental diversity.
7. Strengthening the concepts of family planning; and striking a balance between population growth and natural resources.

IV. Women and Information

1. Raising the level and scope of women's participation, through the media, in shaping public opinion on various issues on general interest.
2. Strengthening a joint mechanism within the authorities concerned to monitor any activity that does not conform with the principle of equality or which perpetuates the negative stereotype of working men and women.

3. Boosting the working woman's position by maintaining equality in the media.
4. Reinforcing the information office of the Women's Federation by all technical and financial means.

V. Women and Decision-Making Positions

1. Monitoring and implementing the principles of the National Constitution with regard to all provisions underscoring full equality and equal opportunities between men and women; and taking measures to boost the level and scope of women's participation by enabling them to hold important positions in the legislature and the executive and judicial branches of government.
2. Fostering women's participation at the decision-making level to reach 30% of all positions.
3. Creating the kind of conditions that enable qualified and efficient women to be promoted to high-ranking positions.
4. Supporting the inclusion of women's needs in national development plans and strategies; and establishing the required mechanisms.
5. Encouraging the role of non-governmental organizations in raising the level and scope of women's participation in public life.
6. Bolstering the mechanisms and measures required to deal with any practices that prevent women from reaching decision-making positions or which violate the laws and regulations protecting this women's right.
7. Monitoring the obsolete concepts, values and traditions which perpetuate the stereotype of men and women's roles in the society and family.
8. Creating a women's research center within the Women's Federation to define the research and study plans which deal with the various facets of women's status on the economic, social political and cultural fronts; to monitor, through such studies, specific problems pertaining to women's human rights and to design the practical programs to solve pressing problems in the society and family.
9. Making efforts to incorporate human rights concepts and principles in the national curricula and in cultural and educational media programs.

VI. Women and The Economy

1. Strengthening the resources and conditions that allow women to exercise their rights, by participating in all economic activities, and emphasizing their equal rights to job opportunities and to own land, and to have access to financing.
2. Taking action to improve the level of occupational and technical performance of the working woman.
3. Supporting and encouraging small and medium productive businesses in rural or urban areas, and adjusting marketing conditions in the interest of the productive woman.

4. Making efforts to assess the actual level of women's participation in national production; and developing statistical systems to cover all non-governmental fields in which women work, and incorporate their figures in the national statistics.
5. Supporting and encouraging women to be self-employed, and facilitating their access to credit, capital and low-cost services and facilities.
6. Boosting women's role in starting development projects.
7. Providing the appropriate conditions to bring modern agricultural services to women in rural areas, on an equal footing with men.
8. Dealing with the negative effects of the "so-called" New World Order, particularly with regard to privatization and structural adjustments which affect the poor, especially women and children.

VII. Women and Education

1. Introducing the concepts of equality between the sexes in the curricula at the various stages of education.
2. Opening new Kindergartens in the various regions.
3. Making efforts to absorb all children at the mandatory education age in primary schools, and eliminating illiteracy, especially among women.
4. Increasing the percentage of children completing primary education to at least 90%, and reducing the drop-out rate, while focusing on female education.
5. Strengthening the link between schools in the rural areas and their local environment and making efforts to expand this approach while raising the level of interaction with the existing rural development centers at the same location and with the surrounding social environment.
6. Taking action to achieve more conformity between occupations in the various branches of technical and vocational education and the desires of female participants in terms of responding to their interest in learning such occupations.
7. Expanding the activities designed to eliminate illiteracy so that illiterates will be brought to a level enabling them to continue their education, improve the quality of their lives and help the development of their society.
8. Devising a national plan for adult education within an Arab strategy.
9. Designing an integrated plan for scientific research at universities and meeting its resource requirements, with adequate attention to studies on women.
10. Adding more specializations at universities and intermediate and higher institutes, and expanding graduate studies in various fields, especially in areas covering women's issues and their role in economic and social development.
11. Reinforcing the climate needed to accelerate efforts to raise the level of awareness about the importance of women's training in non-traditional skills such as computers

and modern technology, and taking measures to enable women to play their unique role in social development and progress.

VIII. Women and Human Rights

1. Devising integrated plans, including media and educational programs, designed to publicize and explain women's human rights as stipulated in the National Constitution and the relevant international conventions ratified by the Syrian Arab Republic.
2. Making efforts to create mechanisms to coordinate between community organizations, professional associations and workers trade unions to define policies and implementation arrangements, as a part of their professional and educational role to monitor and follow-up the implementation of women's human rights, depending on their specific areas of activity.
3. Taking action to design a joint plan between the Women's Federation and the community, professional and political organizations and trade unions to monitor any problems related to human rights and, in general, to the gender-sensitive institutions, in order to put in place a network of national mechanisms to follow-up the implementation of human rights in general and women's human rights in particular, and provide the necessary measures to prevent violations.

IX. Women and Health

1. Widening the scope and improving the quality of health services, while taking measures to remove any disparity between the rural and urban areas.
2. Focusing on the groups which are most vulnerable to disease such as mothers, children and workers.
3. Training the required staff to provide health services.
4. Paying more attention to women's health education and awareness, fighting common, endemic and venereal diseases, maintaining mothers' and children's health, providing vaccination and maintaining occupational health and safety.
5. Expanding and developing the institutions needed for basic health care services, and taking measures to establish the Health Region System.
6. Participating in programs designed to reduce mortality among children between one and 5 years old by one sixth by the year 2000, as set out in the national plan.
7. Reducing maternal mortality by 25%.
8. Reducing the fertility rate to below 5 children per woman.
9. Increasing social awareness campaigns on reproductive health and family planning, and improving the level of services provided in these areas, in cooperation with the governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned.