



Changing for equality!

Women trade unionists from the Arab countries mobilize for democracy, social justice, decent work and gender equality

On the occasion of the International Women Day 2011, women trade unionists from Arab Countries celebrate the creation of their network “*Changing for equality*”.

Celebrating:

- the historical moment the Arab countries are witnessing with popular revolutions overthrowing despot and corrupt regimes, blowing a wind of freedom and hope throughout the region,
- the victories of the Tunisian and Egyptian peoples, and the key role played by independent trade unions in these struggles,
- the active participation of women, especially young women, in the revolutions and protests shaking the region,
- the courage and activism of all these women in the region who have been taking action in favour of democracy, gender equality and social justice in their countries,

Recognizing:

- that the revolutions and resistance movements broke out of the despair of people, the lack of democracy and decent work opportunity, restricted freedom of speech, and stark gender inequalities,
- that the establishment of democracy requires free and independent trade union organizations and the freedom to bargain in a collective manner,
- that democracy and social justice cannot be achieved without gender equality in the world of work and in society
- that achieving gender equality requires a change in mindset of both men and women that can be achieved through activism and mobilization,
- that Palestinian women face particular constraints due to the colonization and occupation of their territory limiting the realization of their right to decent work,

Deploring:

- the loss of thousands of men and women fighting for their rights, either in Tunisia, in Egypt, in Libya, in Iraq, and many other countries in the region,
- the persistence of violence in post-revolution contexts,
- the segregation and discrimination women face on the labour market including sexual harassment, unequal pay, their overrepresentation in undervalued and precarious jobs
- and rejecting the position taken by many in the region, including governments' officials, who pretend that women should not work outside their homes,
- the increased precariousness of work in these sectors in which women are concentrated
- the exploitation women workers face in the textile, agriculture, chemistry and domestic sectors throughout the region
- the many obstacles women face, especially young women, to enter the labour market
- the high incidence of child labour in the region
- the inadequacy between education systems and labour market's needs which leaves millions of well-educated people unemployed, underemployed or forced to migrate to survive
- the heightening discrimination faced by migrant women especially in the domestic sector
- the unequal share of family responsibilities between women and men, a root cause of gender discrimination
- the lack of adequate public policies enabling jobs creation and equal opportunities between men and women in the world of work,
- the highly unequal level of development within and among the countries of the region and the lack of adequate regional development policies to enhance social cohesion,
- that women in the region face the lowest rate of labour market participation (estimated at 25%), and the highest labour market segregation and discrimination in the world
- that youth unemployment rate is the highest in the world
- that female trade union membership remains at low levels with even lower proportion of women in the leaderships of the unions.

Insisting that

- that the fight for gender justice is not dissociable of the fight for democracy and social justice
- that the current revolutions have highlighted the need for reforms in all countries of the region, which have to be carried out in a democratic way and in close consultation with the trade unions
- that gender equality and the promotion of women's rights must be at the heart of these reforms,
- that women have to be actors of the transition to more democratic regimes and involved on equal footing with men in the decision making process toward democracy
- that trade union structures and organizations in the region need to be modernized so as to continue to respond to the aspiration and needs of workers including young and women workers
- that trade unions in the region must increase their commitment to gender equality and the advancement of women's rights
- that quotas remain a necessity to ensure women's access to decision making bodies

- that donors should ensure that their activities in the region strengthen and do not undermine the objective of gender equality in all aspects of trade union's work

Having the determination to:

- support the process of transition toward more democratic societies
- advocate for the gender equality in the world of work and in society,
- get the support of men to fight gender inequality and to mainstream equality issues in all trade unions' activities, bargaining and structures
- work with civil society organizations sharing our values, to benefit from everyone's experience and expertise,

the Arab women network "*Changing for equality*" will work under the umbrella of the ITUC and with the support of the ILO.

Practicalities

The network aims at gathering expertise and support for democracy, social justice, decent work and gender equality.

The network functions on an informal basis, bringing together trade unions, organizations of civil society, academics and experts, men and women, sharing the values of democracy and gender equality.

The network enables the coordination at the regional level of campaigns run at the national level.

The network will rely on internet and social electronic networks to facilitate communication among its members. A website will be set-up to gather information.

The network will communicate its activities through regular publications and brochures.

As a start, the network will be coordinated by the ITUC.