

GENDER DYNAMICS

Trilingual quarterly newsletter from the regional
Euromed Gender Equality programme, financed by the European Union.



www.euromedgenderquality.org

CONTENTS

Regional workshop	02
Gender-based violence: a common condition	
Publication	04
The Istanbul Conclusions in three languages	
Analysis	05
The condition of women scrutinised in 8 countries	
The team	05
Florence Raes	
The floor is to...	06
Salwa Hadib Ganam, Palestinian Authority	
The voice of the press	08
Women demand their place in politics	

EDITORIAL

The breeze from Istanbul is blowing over Marrakech



An event of major significance to everyone working for gender equality will be held in Marrakech next 11 and 12 November. In the same spirit as the 2006 Istanbul Conference, the second ministerial conference of the Euro-Mediterranean region will be held on 'promoting gender equality'. As was the case in Turkey three years previously, Ministers responsible for women's issues will be invited to the meeting, which is being organised under the auspices of the Union for the Mediterranean, established in 2008. They will discuss a heavy agenda of critical importance, as they know that gender equality is crucial for development.

At the Istanbul Conference the pioneering spirit of the Euro-Mediterranean partners led them to introduce unique instruments for cooperation among the partner countries. The European Commission is financing accompanying measures which aim to achieve gender equality with respect to civil and political rights, social and economic rights and sustainable development, as well as in the fields of access to culture and information. A system has been set up to enhance concerted action among the region's partner countries and to stimulate synergy with civil society. The Euromed Gender Equality Programme (EGEP) is the fruit of this innovative approach and it provides institutional support to nine partners – Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, the occupied Palestinian territories and Tunisia –, in a spirit of exchange beneficial to the region as a whole. EGEP's focus is primarily at national level and seeks to facilitate common regional initiatives on gender equality issues. Exchanges of information and good practice help everyone to progress more effectively in a stimulating atmosphere of mutual cooperation. The contents of this third issue of GENDER DYNAMICS will demonstrate this in practical ways.

Judith Neisse
EGEP Team leader

Continued on page 2

THE FLOOR IS TO ...

Salwa Hadib Ganam, Palestinian Authority: 'In the infernal circle of violence, women are vulnerable to all kinds of aggression'

We met Ms Salwa Hadib Ganam, Secretary of State of the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Women's Affairs at a regional workshop which brought together our programme partners. The interview she gave us sheds light on the practical results achieved by the Palestinian Government in a difficult context.

Interview on page 6



EDITORIAL

Continued from page 1

Thanks to the work of the Mediterranean partner countries, the programme now has an analytical overview of gender equality issues, which will serve as a basis to initiate actions based on real, identified needs. These will be confirmed by workshops to be held in each country and by surveys of the actors concerned. Work so far has already produced some results in that it has been possible to outline a number of possible major themes for action, which are common to all the countries. EGEP will communicate these needs to the European authorities, who are preparing the second ministerial conference in Morocco.

With regard to combating violence against women, good progress was also made in the experts' workshop on research into gender-based violence. The work of a multidisciplinary team from the different partner countries led to the formulation of precise recommendations about surveys, which will be tested when two pilot surveys are carried out. This breeze from the Istanbul Conference, which will soon be blowing over Marrakech, carries with it a practical approach to identifying problems which, thanks to the free flow of information, can be solved when the participating countries talk together, in synergy with civil society and alongside the international organisations. The Euromed Gender Equality Programme is a tool for sharing skills and experience.

However, three years on from the 'Ministerial Conclusions on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society' and the Framework of Action that was appended to it, new needs are now coming to the fore. The Framework of Action outlined the political priorities and identified areas for action, but now governmental institutions and actors in the field need greater precision to give full effect to the Istanbul Process. The Euromed Gender Equality Programme, which includes follow-up of the Istanbul Process in its aims and objectives, is providing support to the European Commission to prepare the Marrakech Conference. This will give new impetus to the Istanbul Process.

So you can understand why the Euro-Mediterranean Ministers will have a heavy agenda. They will be able to make good use of the analytical overview of the situation in the nine countries involved with the EGEP and will most likely seek to render the Istanbul Conference's Framework of Action fully operational. Priorities will be established, action plans drawn up and the most effective mechanisms will be identified, in order to make gender equality a cross-cutting priority for all policy areas.

We decided that we wanted to mark this new step forward in the promotion of gender equality by giving GENDER DYNAMICS a new look. The warm colours of your newsletter symbolise the links that connect the partners of the Euromed Gender Equality Programme who are investing together in a common effort so that human rights are also women's rights.

Judith Neisse
EGEP Team leader

REGIONAL WORKSHOP

Gender – based violence

Gender-based violence is prevalent everywhere in the world. It is often hidden in families and, more insidiously, it can creep into the world of work: from physical violence to sexual harassment, it can vary in intensity and nature, but is very often shrouded in silence. Contemporary societies have a real challenge in identifying it effectively.

The Euromed Gender Equality Programme (EGEP) studied this phenomenon by holding a workshop in Tunis, from 20 to 23 April 2009, at which experts discussed "Research into gender-based violence: Concepts, data, methodology and instruments". In her introductory speech, Sarra Kanoun Jarray, Tunisian Minister of Women, Families, Children and the Elderly, stressed EGEP's universal dimension: "the results of the recommendations on this issue will be a milestone in the consolidation of joint work worldwide undertaken by all those who are combating violence against women".

This kind of violence, and more generally, the discrimination that women suffer, is a hindrance to development. According to Soukeina Bouraoui, Executive Director of the Centre for Arab Women's Training and Research (CAWTAR), all the Arab League's summits have highlighted the link between improving conditions for women and the modernisation process in the Arab countries.

The Euromed Gender Equality Programme gives added value to the struggle carried out by the partner countries. Judith Neisse, EGEP Team leader, takes the view that 'the programme gives practical effect to cooperation among Euro-Mediterranean governments in a wider regional framework. This is making it possible to exchange experience and good practice and for each participating country to take advantage of effective methods which have been tried and tested by others and, also, not to repeat their mistakes. In a wider context it also creates opportunities to go further together using coordinated instruments and to draft and implement a regional strategy.'

In devising such a strategy the first question that needed to be answered was how to arrive at a common position on the various aspects of 'defining gender-based violence?' This was the purpose of the Tunis workshop, which took three

ce: a common condition



A convivial atmosphere conducive to sharing experience.

different approaches to come up with answers. First of all it was necessary to review the tools and good practice used in the studies and research available in other countries. Then agreement had to be reached on a common definition in order to harmonise the conceptual and methodological approaches. The next step was the formulation of recommendations for a draft strategy plan to combat the perpetration of acts of gender-based violence and its root causes. This work was undertaken by 58 participants from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territories, Syria, Tunisia and Denmark, and made it possible to produce a protocol for national surveys which will be tested in volunteer countries.

Part of the success of this venture was the originality of the workshop's concept, insofar as it brought together people from different backgrounds to discuss the issues in both a scientific and cross-cutting manner. Specialists from statistical institutes and research centres met with others who use their findings: officials in ministries and bodies working on gender issues, civil society organisations and associations, journalists and representatives of regional and international institutions. The range of ministries represented included those dealing with women's and family affairs, justice, health, social affairs, information and home affairs.

The participants found that this multidisciplinary approach was particularly

productive. Achraf Hamdane, member of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics remarked: 'I came away from this workshop convinced of the need, not only for work to be carried out to unify concepts, methodology and tools, but also of the importance of this work to create a specific database of gender indicators for the Euro-Mediterranean countries'. In the same vein, spending four days working together improved everyone's understanding of gender-based violence, which had been widened by contributions from other countries and disciplines. Salahdine Khelifi, of the Tunisian Interior Ministry explained this further, 'the workshop has convinced me of the need to work with civil society organisations to tackle this phenomenon'.

In order to enable all participants to make their contribution to the collective work, several different formats were used over the four study days, from plenary sessions to smaller working groups. This type of organisation made it possible to study the problems in depth in order to arrive at a broad consensus which will strengthen the premises of the pilot studies, planned in Jordan and Lebanon, in light of the current experiment taking place in Tunisia.

The meetings were structured around three committees: the first aimed to determine the differences and similarities in the various countries' approaches; the second sought to build consensus for a definition of gender-

based violence; the third devised a methodological and conceptual framework for studies to be carried out in the region.

The presentations of experience by each of the participating countries, as well as the European countries, on how to combat and prevent violence against women, led to a series of practical recommendations for future surveys. These ranged from the tools to be used to identify representative samples, to drafting questionnaires or to setting up teams to process the data. It is particularly worth mentioning the recommendations on the need to avoid the under-representation of certain sections of the population: in some cases violence occurs more frequently among marginalised groups excluded from mainstream society.

The level of quality needed in drafting questions was also emphasized: when questions are formulated in terms of objectives, they should avoid being politically charged and judgemental. Questions should be tested beforehand.

In-depth debates were also held in order to come up with a common definition of gender-based violence. In many cases there is a taboo around this kind of violence which is tolerated in the family circle. In other cases, honour crimes or sexual mutilations, for example, it can even have positive social value. As this is the case, the countries participating in EGEP consider that gender-based violence and violence against women must be viewed in the context of human rights and the respect of the international conventions ratified by the countries, in particular the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Violence that affects women because they are women is characterised by imbalances of power in the relationships between men and women and by the fact that it is tolerated by society.

The United Nations' definition of gender-based violence was adopted by the workshop as a whole. It states that "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public



THE PROGRAMME IN ACTION



- 1 Salahdine Khelifi, Tunisian Interior Ministry : “The workshop has convinced me of the need to work with civil society organisations to tackle this phenomenon”.
- 2 Amira Ahmed, Syrian Committee for Women’s Affairs : “The workshop is enabling us to reach a highest level”.
- 3 Achraf Hamdane, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics: “This work is important to create a specific database of gender indicators for the Euro-Mediterranean countries”.

or in private life”. The participants also stressed the need to highlight the humanist dimension of the Koran in order to combat violence against women.

The participants also agreed on guidelines for a methodology to be used in surveys on gender-based violence, whether this takes place in the public sphere or domestically. Amira Ahmed, of the Syrian Committee for Women’s Affairs, explained that, ‘understanding the methods used in studies and surveys is very important as this enables everyone involved to compare their experience of the problem’. Comparisons are all the more meaningful within the framework of a regional strategy if the same methodology has been used throughout. A deliberate choice was made to favour a quantitative approach to surveys developed at national level on a large scale in order to reach all the categories concerned, but nevertheless combining it, where necessary, with a qualitative approach.

Surveys are primarily based on interviews with women and questionnaires, but other tools can help to draw a picture of the situation, such as population censuses, national health studies, etc. Questionnaires are anonymous and should focus on socio-demographic data, the type of violence committed and the victim’s perception of it, the prevalence of the violence, who commits it and where it takes place, the attitudes of women and

their families, the help sought or obtained and the consequences. Although this is a general framework, variations can obviously be made to take into account the specific situation in a given country.

Great emphasis was also placed on the need to encourage a participative approach, which can bring together all the bodies involved in gender-based violence, such as ministries, non-governmental organisations, and the media. This needs to happen throughout the process of drafting surveys. Samar Haddadin, of the Al Ra’i daily newspaper in Jordan, stresses the need for commitment from the media, ‘The workshop taught me a lot in terms of taking the concepts on board and on how to use statistics and read the figures. This made me understand more than ever before the commitment needed from journalists with respect to issues of gender-based violence and equality between men and women and the need to situate them in a universal legal frame of reference’. The workshop’s participants considered that all the media, active in whatever channel, should be involved in a joint strategy. Seminars, information brochures, meetings, for example, could all help to raise their awareness of equality issues.

The general framework has been built, so now it is time get the pilot surveys underway.

PUBLICATION

The Istanbul Conclusions in three languages



The Programme Euromed Gender Equality Programme has published the Conclusions of the Istanbul Conference de 2006 on ‘Strengthening the Role of Women in Society’ in French, English and Arabic. This was a Euro-Mediterranean Conference held at ministerial level under the patronage of the Finnish Presidency of the European Union.

At the conference the ministers of the 37 participating countries jointly drew up a common Framework of Action aimed at enhancing the role of women in political, civil, social, economic and cultural spheres and to combat discrimination. The Istanbul Conclusions were formulated in 15 articles prefaced by a preamble. Follow-up arrangements were also made for what is now known as the Istanbul Process. In her introduction to the publication, Ms Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner responsible for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, stresses the fact that the Istanbul Conclusions as well as the related Framework of Action constitute ‘the most important political references for promoting women’s rights and gender equality in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership’.

The Euromed Gender Equality Programme is one of the key mechanisms to give effect to the political aims of the Istanbul Conference. It has an operational action plan with fixed objectives and a precise timetable for activities which will contribute positively to influencing progress towards effective legal equality between men and women in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

NEW DYNAMICS

Pilot surveys on gender violence

Lebanon and Jordan have both been sounded out to undertake pilot surveys based on the recommendations of the experts’ regional workshop on “Research into gender-based violence: Concepts, data, methodology and instruments”. These surveys will then enable the other partners to benefit from their experience. Tunisia has been tasked by its partners to draft a document which will provide ideas for the pilot surveys, as Tunisia has already started its own survey.

ANALYSIS

The condition of women scrutinised in eight countries

Before undertaking any action it is always best to know what's happening on the ground. The Euromed Gender Equality Programme therefore set itself an initial task of drafting a work plan following an in-depth analysis of the situation in the nine countries covered by the programme.

So far the programme has received eight national reports, drawn up in accordance with a precise set of guidelines. The reports have been studied by EGEP's experts. Each report includes a diagnosis of the situation of women in the given country and a table of the main bodies dealing with the issues. The priority questions that need to be resolved are managed in two main threads; the first refers to

the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the second uses the recommendations of the ministerial conference held in Istanbul in 2006 on 'Strengthening the Role of Women in Society'. The main focus of these reports is to consider women's human rights and equality between women and men. They give a picture of the legal framework in each country and an assessment of their national dynamics evident in the work undertaken to improve human rights in general and those of women in particular.

The reports also include a section specifically aimed at making CEDAW effective and ensuring that there is

follow-up to the Istanbul Process. They also make it possible to assess the measures taken in each country and provide an inventory of its legislation and institutions.

Reading through all the reports is also extremely enlightening, as this gives an idea of the opportunities that exist in the region to achieve gender equality. It also shows the obstacles and makes it possible to identify priorities for action. In consequence, EGEP, in collaboration with its governmental partners in each country, has decided to organise workshops at national level. These workshops will study the national reports in order to transform their conclusions into action plans.

THE TEAM

Florence Raes, Public policy expert in gender issues



Florence Raes is responsible in the Euromed Gender Equality Programme for the follow-up given to the recommendations of the Istanbul Conference on strengthening the role of women in society.

Florence Raes holds a first degree in international relations, a master's in political science from the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and a master's in Latin American Studies from the University of London. As a member of the Belgian national scientific research fund (FNRS), Florence Raes has completed studies on democracy, citizenship and human rights, focussing on women's rights and gender-based equality. She has worked as a researcher at ULB's Centre for Political Sociology and Centre for Latin American Studies.

For six years Florence also held several posts in the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in North Africa and Latin America. In particular, she was director of a regional programme on gender-responsive budgeting and on state reform and equality between men and women. She has also coordinated several programmes for UNIFEM and the

British government's Department for International Development (DFID) focussed on poverty reduction, good governance, and gender-based racial and ethnic discrimination, combating violence against women, and on gender mainstreaming in macro-economic policy. Florence has undertaken several national and international consultancy briefs in Latin America, Africa and Europe, in particular to evaluate and build institutional capacity in order to mainstream gender issues into governmental and non-governmental policies and programmes.

For the past two years, Florence Raes has been international coordinator of the world research network on participation and local governance, a programme run by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), the Ford Foundation and the POLIS Institute (Brazil).

Florence has published numerous articles and given lectures and training courses on gender-responsive budgeting, participatory democracy and women's human rights.

INTERVIEW

Salwa Hadib Ganam, Palestinian Authority: 'In the infernal circle of violence, women are vulnerable to all kinds of aggression'



We met Ms Salwa Hadib Ganam, Secretary of State of the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Women's Affairs at a regional workshop which brought together our programme partners. The interview she gave us sheds light on the practical results achieved by the Palestinian Government in a difficult context.

How would you describe developments in gender equality in the occupied Palestinian territories?

Undeniably, Palestine has made progress. Nonetheless we suffer from inertia given the influence of fundamentalist extremist movements which propagate a politico-religious doctrine that keeps women down. And this is happening under the yoke of the longest occupation in human history, suffered by four or five generations, who have continually been subjected to the worst forms of violence. This has become the daily bread of the Palestinian people. Political violence pushes all sections of society into a triangle of death, beginning with political attacks, continuing with unemployment and increasing rates of poverty which in turn lead to violence. In this vicious circle, women are directly and indirectly vulnerable to all kinds of aggression.

The Palestinian government is, however, resolutely committed to gender equality. For instance, you have started a pilot experiment in education.

This is a cross-cutting experiment,

initiated by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and implemented in synergy with other institutions. So, together with the Ministry of Education we introduced the gender approach in the syllabus for the tenth grade (designed for 15 year old adolescents). We have also been working with the Ministry of Labour, which has enabled us to assess the growing gap between men and women in terms of equality in the workplace and, in particular, with respect to equal job opportunities for all. We have also been working with the universities. A series of lectures was completed with an official meeting with their rectors, who then agreed to include gender issues in the curriculum for social sciences, education, information science and contemporary Arab studies. Gender is even becoming a compulsory requirement for graduation.

Are all the universities making gender studies compulsory?

Birzeit, Al Quds and An-Najah universities are doing so, yes. However, Hebron (Al-Khalil) University has an optional gender course, but is promising to make it compulsory for the academic year starting in September 2009. In addition to these achievements we are also noting other positive signs. Post-graduate students (specialised diplomas, masters, etc.) are increasingly choosing to study gender issues for research dissertations. This shows that mentalities are changing in Palestinian society.

What are the signs of this change?

We see change, for instance, during elections organised by consultative assemblies in civil society – such as the Women's Parliament and the Youth Parliament – which are there to give ideas for new laws, or in universities, secondary schools and in other bodies, too. Several of these assemblies, including the Women's Parliament, have quotas for men and women.

What did you get out of the regional workshop organised by EGEP on research into gender-based violence?

For me, this workshop was a source of inspiration, an opportunity to assess the various strategies to adopt in the fight against gender-based violence. It has produced ideas about how to overcome the obstacles.

More widely, the regional Euromed Gender Equality Programme is in harmony with the strategy of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and with the reform and development plans for the 2008-2011 period. For this reason, there are several opportunities to work together, particularly with respect to the exchange of know-how, the assessment of different strategies and the tools and methods used in the Arab world and elsewhere to rise to the challenges we face. We have adopted the methodology recommended by the programme. For example, we organised a training course for judges, the police and representatives of the Interior Ministry, men and women alike, so that they can manage situations arising from gender-based violence. I mention these examples as I think they lay the foundations for fruitful cooperation with the programme. Furthermore, we should take into consideration the fact that the Euromed Gender Equality Programme acts as a political tool for the European Union, which is being called on more than ever before to act as an honest broker in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It should therefore, as should the Quartet, adopt an official position vis-à-vis the attacks that Israeli occupation is continually committing against the Palestinian people.

THE PARTNERS

The Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Women's Affairs

The Ministry was established in November 2003, to support the struggles of Palestinian women, for the recognition of their State's right to independence on the one hand, and to obtain the social, economic and political rights for which they are fighting in order to contribute to building a society centred on human rights.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs puts forward policies to enhance the status and role of women in the economic, social and political walks of life. It also endeavours to put in place an appropriate legal and legislative platform so that women can be included in the development process. The Ministry therefore seeks to communicate an objective view of women's place in society without being partisan or corporatist. The Ministry also coordinates the work carried out by governmental bodies and civil society organisations working to defend women's rights. The Ministry has therefore built closer partnerships with institutions active in defending women's rights, such as the General Union of Palestinian Women.

The Ministry includes among its priorities the integration of gender studies into university curricula and the setting up of a national committee to combat violence against women.

Ten Ministries and several civil society associations will be invited to participate in this committee, in order to draw up a strategic plan.

**EQUALITY AROUND THE WORLD**

The International Federation of Journalists says No to discrimination

At the end of May some sixty journalists of the International Federation of Journalists published the Brussels Declaration. It sets out their position on countering all forms of discrimination carried out against women journalists. The declaration was adopted by journalists from 45 countries who took part in an international seminar held in Belgium on: 'Ethics and Gender: Equality in the newsroom'.

The declaration highlights the need to end all forms of discrimination in the social, economic, politic and cultural spheres. The signatories demand that issues of gender-based discrimination be included as the highest priorities in trade union action plans and that all forms of violence, sexual harassment and threatening behaviour in the profession are denounced.

www.ifj.org

EQUALITY IN THE MEDIA

Global Media Monitoring Day

The Global Media Monitoring Day to monitor the portrayal of women in the media will take place in November 2009. This monitoring initiative is considered to be one of the most important in the world and is organised by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC).

The day has been held once every five years since 1995 and promotes a fair and balanced representation of women in and through the news. Results from the 1995 monitoring day showed, for example, that "86% of all 'spokespeople' in the news are men while women are featured as 'experts' only 17% of the time".

The 2009 monitoring day will make it possible to follow the trends in terms of the balance between men and women in the media following a methodology.

www.waccglobal.org

EQUALITY ON THE WEB

The European Women's Lobby, a portal for organisations

The European Women's Lobby website is one of the largest umbrella organisations for European women's groups on the internet, as it includes more than 2000 organisations in 30 countries within the EU and in candidate countries.

The European Women's Lobby aims to "promote equality between women and men, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, the respect for women's human rights, as well as the elimination of violence against women and the systematic consideration of gender equality in all the European Union's policies".

The website publishes reports by the EWL which can be downloaded, including publications on the participation of women in political life, the follow-up to the Beijing Conference, its annual reports, conclusions of its conferences and seminars, etc.

www.womenlobby.org



Continued on page 8



LEBANON

Women demand their place in politics

Excerpt of an article by Dalila Mahdawi, The Philadelphia Inquirer (Beirut, 19 June 2009)

[...] Lebanese women were granted suffrage in 1953, yet to this day they face considerable obstacles to entering politics in a country where political dynasties and patriarchy rule. Most Lebanese women who do go into politics do so "wearing black" - that is, filling a position made available by a deceased male relative [...].

Unfortunately, the issue of women's political participation was only superficially addressed by Lebanon's elections on 7 June. [...] But out of 587 candidates, only 12 - or a mere 2 percent - were women. Worse, only four of those 12 [...] were elected to Lebanon's 128-member parliament. And all of them belong to political dynasties. [...]

But during the run-up to the elections, the closest the country came to a national debate on women's role in politics was a war of slogans. The

opposition's Free Patriotic Movement played on the well-known French saying "Sois belle et tais-toi" ("Be beautiful and shut up") with posters urging women to "Sois belle et vote" - "Be beautiful and vote". The March 14 coalition responded with "Sois égale et vote" - "Be equal and vote". The parties were keen to attract women voters. But none of them explained how exactly they intended to promote women's rights.

Women will be able to play a greater role in the governance of Lebanon only if the country's political system moves away from its traditional sectarian system and toward a secular meritocracy. In 2005, a national commission to draft a new electoral law suggested introducing a 30 percent quota for women, but this was rejected.

If the parties are serious in their calls for equality, they could impose

voluntary internal quotas to ensure that a minimum number of women run in intraparty and national elections.

Lebanon has a duty to eliminate gender discrimination. Beirut amended the national constitution in 1990 to embrace the International Bill of Human Rights, paving the way for international human rights to be applied to national legislation. It might be too late for this year's elections, but greater political participation by women could be encouraged in the 2010 municipal elections. [...]

Lebanese women have had the right to die as part of their country's army for the last 18 years. They should also have the right to help formulate the laws that govern every Lebanese citizen - man or woman.

MOROCCO Continued from page 7

Marrakech now has a woman mayor



Fatima Zahra Mansouri, 33 years old, has been elected Mayor of the city of Marrakech. It is the first time that a woman has been elected to this office in the city's history and the second for Morocco.



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INTERNATIONAL

Irina Bokova, the first woman to head Unesco

Irina Bokova, a Bulgarian diplomat, was elected to head Unesco on 22 September. This is the first time since the creation of this prestigious institution in 1945 that a woman has been elected to this post. Fifty-seven year old Irina Bokova is her country's ambassador to France and to Unesco. Ms Bokova was elected by Unesco's Executive Board in a fifth round, by 31 votes to 27, to beat Faruk Hosni, Egyptian Minister of culture. Her election still has to be confirmed in October at the General Conference, the plenary assembly of the 193 members of the organisation. There were nine candidates, including four women from Lithuania, Bulgaria, Ecuador and Austria.

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