

Committee: Special Conference on the advancement of women
Issue: Empowerment of women in the context of political transition
Student officer: George Karchimakis
Position: Deputy President

Introduction

Women's contribution through history has been remarkably noteworthy. Characteristic example is the crucial role that they played during the Arab Spring. Despite the fact that women have struggled to vindicate and defend their fundamental human rights, they have faced puissant resistance especially in the countries of the Middle East. Bearing in mind the fact that the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women are two of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations, such a fact makes the empowerment of women economically, politically and socially essential. Furthermore it is extremely important for all the countries to ensure that women will have the right to speak out and express their opinions as far as economical, political, social and governmental issues are concerned, because especially during arduous political period, such as the one now faced by the south Mediterranean countries, that would be a fruitful effort to empower women on the context of the political transition.

Definition of Key- terms

Millenium Development Goals

The Millenium Development Goals are the eight international development goals that were set by the United Nations in 2000 after the United Nations Millenium Declaration. These goals should be achieved until 2015. The goals are :

- 1) Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger,
- 2) Achieving universal primary education,
- 3) Promoting gender equality and empowering of women.
- 4) Reducing child mortality rates,
- 5) Improving maternal health,
- 6) Combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases,
- 7) Ensuring Environmental sustainability,
- 8) Developing a partnership for development.

Empowerment of women

The empowerment of women is the vindication and the increase of political, educational, economical and social strength of the women community.

Arab Spring

It is the term that is used by media in order to refer to the revolutionary wave (violent-non violent) that began on the 18th of December 2010 in the Arab World.

Gender Equality

It is the term that is used in order to express that the two sexes should be treated equally. The whole concept is based on the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It aims to provide equal treatment of both sexes in all democratic activities and processes, as also in all social situations.

Background Information

During the Arab Spring steps were taken forward for the empowerment of women and gender equality in the countries of the Arab world. These countries are the countries where women have the lowest representation in the political domain. That seems unfair and for that reason the European Commission and UN women launched a program called “Spring Forward for Women”. The main purpose of this program is to promote gender equality and ensure the occupancy of women with political and economical issues in the context of the political transition. Štefan Füle , EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy put his sign on the new program in co-operation with John Hendra, the UN women Assistant Secretary General. Spring Forward for Women also aims to widen the regional knowledge of women in order to vindicate their political and economical rights. This program is financed by the European Neighborhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and by the UN women core budget. The United Nations have focused on many areas as far as women are concerned. First of all the domain of human rights which is the most important; women wanting to defend their fundamental social rights . For instance women are facing a lot of forms of discrimination such as discrimination in employment or even prevention on going to school. All these social problems have been touched upon by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms Against Women (CEDAW). The CEDAW have been ratified by 185 states and it was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979.

But despite their political and social pursuits women are seeking also economic empowerment;

an area where women face serious problems. The main obstacle for women is the culture of certain nations and the ideologies of various societies. Most of societies treat women inferior to men and many legislative bodies do not want to disrupt with the current status quo ,despite the fact that they are informed of the benefits attached to the economic empowerment of women. According to recent studies the participation of women in businesses and companies provide a lot of economic benefits for any company and for a whole nation. Women also represent the 70 percent of the global poverty. Additionally women are highly affected by the current financial crisis especially those who are living in Middle East countries. But if we wish to truly achieve gender equality, the participation of women in electoral process is more than essential. Due to the gender norms and prejudices women are still facing barriers for equal representation in politics and in public life. Such barriers are the legislative system of many countries, for example women are not treated equal with men above the law. In addition to that the Family Code does not allow women to have the same rights with men. The family code subjects married women to the guardianship of their husbands. It is easily understood that with the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women national economies are boosted by reducing the poverty percentage of every nation but also with the achievement of the development goals which have been set by all nations worldwide.

Especially in political transitions and after the end of conflicts and disputes the participation of women in public life is crucial in order to ensure that the transition to democracy and peace are legitimate and sustainable. But all these will be never achieved if regimes are not willing to train women of political parties and other governmental organizations and support the development of women's occupancy with politics. If women participate in political and post-conflict transitions that would facilitate their political integration.

Major Countries and organizations involved

Libya

The empowerment of women in Libya only started after the fall of the dictatorship. With the aid of the International IDEA and with the financial support of the global peace and security fund the processes started for the political transition and for the empowerment of women. Workshops were launched in many cities of Libya and various topics were discussed in order to educate women. Such topics were women's rights, human rights, democratic transition, political participation and the role of media during political transitions.

Tunisia

In Tunisia the first encouraging developments for the empowerment of women issue were observed. Tunisia adopted a law securing parity on candidate lists and of course the introduction of quotas for women parliamentarians. Despite the abovementioned facts, Tunisia and some other Arab States remain the sole ones that in their parliaments they have less than 30 percent women representation. We should also add that Tunisia has not signed and ratified the Maputo Protocol (see “Relevant Treaties and resolutions”).

Afghanistan

For more than 10 years women have fought to defend their rights. They have voted for a constitution that ensures equality above the law between men and women. They also hold 28 percent of the parliament seats and the law that was voted first is the one of ending violence against women. But as the processes of peace and recognition of women’s rights evolves we can also observe that the rythm of change has not only been slowed down but in some ways it has gone into reverse. In Afghanistan the legislative system prevents violence against women but impunity of the prepetators of violence is almost absolute. During such political situations (35 years of war) voices of women must be heard and be taken into consideration in the context of achieving peace and reconciliation.

Egypt

In Egypt with the help of USAID gender inequalities in education in politics and in the economic sector have been addressed. Women in Egypt have been mainly empowered in economics. In the agriculture sector women have started attending agricultural technical schools nationwide. They are involved with rural development and young girls are participating in afterschool career development program with local agribusinesses. But besides the economic growth, another problem that has been addressed is that of education. NGO’s have tried to reduce gender inequalities in Egypt by providing more school opportunities for girls and by providing scholarships to talented young women that deserve so and they are of high financial need. One other key to understand the policy of Egypt on the matter is that it has neither signed nor ratified the Maputo Protocol (see “Relevant Treaties and Resolutions”).

United States of America

The United States of America have tried to address the issue in countries of political transition. With the help of the program called USAID they have tried to reduce gender inequalities in countries such as Egypt, Libya and more. They try to eliminate all forms of discrimination against

women , and promote them in many sectors, such as the sectors of economy, politics, education and others.

Russian Federation

The United Nations co-operated with the Russian Federation in the context of gender equality and empowerment of women. The UN Theme Group on Gender worked with the Russian Federation based on the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of discrimination Against Women, the Millenium Development Goals and other Documents. The Russian Federation has set as a priority the empowerment of women in many sectors but especially in the economical and political. The Millenium Development goals are the main document consolidating the activities of UN agencies in the Russian Federation with regard to gender equality.

France

The respect and defense of women's rights had always been an issue that concerned France and it always kept a favourable stance to the empowerment of women. France is particularly connected with the advocacy of women's rights since it contributed to the 1325 resolution of the Security Council but also to the implementation of CEDAW. France has numerous times called upon all the States to increase the measures of the protection of women during conflicts but also it has called for the increase of the participation of women in peace negotiations and leadership processes. The year 2007 was covered by the adoption of " Gender and Development" strategy. It was an action plan for the empowerment of women in Africa. The main principles of that plan was the respect of human rights and the promotion of equality.

Timeline of Events

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| June 6, 1951 | Equal Remuneration Convention. |
| 1953 | Convention on the Political Rights of Women. |
| December 14, 1960 | Convention against Discrimination in Education. |
| November 7, 1967 | Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. |
| December 18, 1979 | Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) |
| October 31, 2000 | UNSC 1325 passes unanimously. |
| July 11, 2003 | Maputo Protocol signed. |
| October 17, 2012 | Implementation of Spring forward for women program. |

Relevant treaties and resolutions

Convention on the Elimination of All forms of discrimination Against Women

It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. It contains thirty articles where the discrimination against women is defined. The convention aim for the recognition of women's rights and aims at shaping the gender roles and family relations.

United Nations Security Council resolution 132

It was adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council in 31 October 2000. The resolution called for the adoption of a gender perspective that contained the special needs of women. It was the first legitimate document from the United Nations Security Council and it called for all parties to respect women's rights and patronize their representation in peace negotiations and post conflict reconstruction. Netumbo Nandi- Ndaitwah who was the minister of Women's affairs in Namibia was the one who initiated the resolution.

Maputo Protocol

Maputo Protocol or else known as The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa is the treaty that guarantees the political and social rights of women, such as taking part in political processes , social and political equality, and ending female genital mutilation. It was adopted by the African Union on 11 July 2003 and it was ratified on 25 November 2005. It has been signed by 46 countries but it has been ratified by 28. There are a few countries that have neither signed nor ratified it. These countries are Egypt, Eritrea, Tunisia and Botswana.

Possible Solutions

As we can understand it is of the utmost importance to find a solution to this topic due to the fact that women during the Arab Spring were at the forefront of the revolution and lead many protests. For the above mentioned reasons we can easily realize that it would be evenhanded for women to vindicate their political, social and economical rights. First of all a possible solution would be the facilitation of the development on national human rights framework in line with CEDAW such as constitutions laws and policies in countries of political transition. Emphasize also on vulnerable groups such as women that live in poverty so that national frameworks become more inclusive to the complete range of women's rights concerns. Moreover a revision of the Maputo protocol in order for it to become more effective would

accommodate the whole situation. At this point we should highlight the fact that the participation of women in electoral processes is a key to the political empowerment of women. In the economic sector governments should contribute by providing jobs, training and loans for small businesses but also access to trade opportunities to empower women, promote gender equality and lift families out of poverty. The United Nations can also contribute by sending high qualified teachers in order to educate people for the empowerment of women and gender equality issue in areas where women face such kind of problems but especially in countries that they are in political transition.

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