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PRESS RELEASE

International Women's Day: The National Commission for Lebanese Women and the Delegation of the European Union launch the media campaign: "Women in Municipal Elections"

On the occasion of International Women's Day on 8 March 2016, the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) and the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon launched a media campaign targeting women and the municipal elections at the Municipality of Beirut.

The media campaign "Women in Municipal Elections", which was prepared in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, highlights the added value of women's role in decision making at local level and promotes **women's** participation in municipal elections as candidates and voters. The campaign includes billboards encouraging women to participate in municipal elections. It also includes a TV spot to be aired on the Lebanese TV stations, as well as a short movie highlighting the importance of women's participation in the decision-making of municipalities and shedding light on the role played by women presidents of municipal councils.

The launch of the campaign was followed by a panel discussion with the participation of the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon, HE Ambassador Christina Lassen, the President of the Shouf Sweijany Federation of Municipalities, Dr Nouha Ghosseini, the President of Aintoura Municipality, Mr. Labib Akiki, and the representative of The Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform (CCER), Dr. Makram Ouais. The panel was moderated by Mrs Rita Chemaly from the NCLW.

The event was attended by Mr. Bilal Hamad, President of Beirut Municipality, Mr Fady Karam, Secretary General of the NCLW, Mrs. Afife El Sayed, Member of NCLW Executive Board, representatives of EU Member States embassies, State institutions, civil society organisations, universities and media.

H.E. Ambassador LASSEN highlighted the multiple challenges that need to be tackled to increase women's participation in politics both on a local and national level: "It is difficult to change things when you are not represented at the table. When women are underrepresented in politics and board rooms, their voices are not heard equally in the decisions that most affect their lives." She said that "the participation of women in politics in the EU countries has increased considerably over the last few years, and in 2015, women accounted for on average of 28% of members of Parliaments in the EU countries. In some EU countries, the numbers are much higher, for example in Sweden (43.6%), Finland (41.5%), or Spain (40%)."

The President of Beirut Municipality Mr. Bilal Hamad said that "democracy does not add up unless everyone is involved in the exercise, and the starting point of this renaissance is the participation of women at all levels of decision-making to have a competent and inclusive country." He pointed out that the Municipality of Beirut is fully ready to help achieve the social justice that "we aim for, and we know that this requires a long struggle."

For her part Mrs. El-Sayed highlighted that "this year, NCLW is launching a campaign to support women's participation in municipal elections, based on one of the strategic objectives tackled by the National Strategy for Women in Lebanon 2011-2021 which was developed under a participatory approach by NCLW in collaboration with civil society organisations and relevant ministries." Mrs El Sayed restated the importance NCLW attaches to the need to hold the elections on time. "This is only a part of NCLW's action plan, especially that we are approaching the municipal elections which we hope will take place as scheduled."

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