

**Speech by Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst,
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

CEDAW Lifting Reservation Campaign
funded by the European Union and managed by KAFA

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Mrs Zoya Rouhana,
Minister Mona Afeiche,
Member of Parliament Deputy Ghassan Moukheiber
Ambassadors, distinguished members of the diplomatic corps,
Gentlemen and Ladies!!!,

- Tomorrow, all over the world, women and men will be marking International Women's Day. This special day was initiated one hundred years ago in four countries: Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. Three of these countries are now members of the European Union. All twenty seven Member States of the European Union to date call jointly and individually for gender equality and women's rights, both in country and in our relations with partner countries all over the world.
- Beyond paying tribute to all those women and their advocates who, during the past decades and through their strides and struggle, have had many achievements, we also renew our commitment to the respect and promotion of equal rights for women and men, boys and girls, everywhere, in our households, at work, at school, in clinics, in refugee camps, in zones of conflict, and on islands of peace.
- Women's rights are not something to be given or taken away. Women's rights are human rights. To date, in some countries, and thanks to the efforts and

sacrifices of many, the millennial woman has a new, self-defined “place” in the world – a place of her own choosing and making. Her rights are only natural and ‘so obvious’.

- However, in some countries, women's political, economic, private and social rights are still limited, many times as a result of family laws and personal status codes. Lebanon unfortunately is among those countries.
- I am therefore pleased to be with you today for the launching of a campaign which promotes lifting the reservation on Article 16 of the International Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women - CEDAW. Article 16 is related to the personal status code and calls for equal rights within marriage and inter-family relationships.
- Lebanon has indeed made an important step by ratifying CEDAW in 1996. Yet there are also still reservations to specific provisions with respect to marriage and divorce, equality within the family, and the right of women to pass on their nationality to their foreign-borne spouses and children.
- The 2009 Hariri-government ministerial declaration recognised the vital role of women in development and called for "enforcing legislation and implementation of mechanisms to combat all forms of violence". Lebanon took a step forward with the "Gender based violence law" endorsed by the Council of Ministers in 2010. This initiative was initially supported by the European Union through our partner KAFA. Still law has still however not been adopted by Parliament.

- We also call upon the Parliament and the new government in-making, through the efforts lead by Prime Minister designate Mikati, to fully recognise the importance of granting women in Lebanon their rights and giving them the legal protection needed to fully exercise their rights.
- A decision to lift formally the reservations to CEDAW would not only signal that Lebanon is really committed to improving women's rights but it would also set an example of modernity for many countries in the region that still have reservations to some core articles of the Convention. In a Lebanon of 2011, policies and laws should no longer be discriminatory and national legislation should be aligned with international commitments.
- Let us therefore all work together, with KAFA and many other civil society actors and individuals to make this important awareness campaign a success and look forward to the day Lebanon has adopted a unified, civil personal status code which is in line with the Convention and is applicable to all women in Lebanon.
- Fighting discrimination also implies working on gender stereotypes – starting with the younger generation. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you that the European Union will soon be launching the International Drawing Competition on Gender Equality. Lebanon will be participating and I look forward to seeing the creativity and imagination of Lebanese boys and girls on this important subject. In this world we need innovative thinking and listen to our youth: the young generation can teach us that we should not continue to repeat the same words and use the same methods, but that we need to find new words and creating new methods.

- They would typically remind us that celebrating one day per year the rights of women does not mean that the other 364 days are the days of men. There is one man in Lebanon who would definitely agree on this and I am pleased he is with us today. I wish to welcome Deputy Ghassan Moukheiber's relentless efforts to continue to fight against the violation of women's basic rights and against the cultural ideology, doctrines of privacy and government in-action.

- Together with deputy Moukheiber and our colleagues from KAFA, I wish all girls and boys living in Lebanon a bright, healthy and peaceful future. A future whereby the rights of all women and men of Lebanon will be recognised to the full.

- Thank you.