

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

***Launching of the media campaign of "Enhancing status and working conditions of
female health staff in Lebanon" EU funded project***

Closing ceremony – Thursday 12 July 2012

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellency Minister Wael Abou Faour,
Dr Kamel Mohanna, President of Amel,
Ms Nada Karaevanovva, representative of CESTAS,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we come together as members of government, partners from civil society organisations as young people or as member of the international community, with one common goal: to say ‘NO’ to discrimination and violence against women in Lebanon.

In many countries, notably in the Southern Mediterranean region, women's political, economic, social and personal rights are still limited, often as a result of family laws and personal status codes. Lebanon is unfortunately among those countries. Although many women participate actively in public life, in universities, in businesses, and in social networks - and their professionalism is a tribute to their society - they are largely under-represented in senior positions, especially when compared to other countries in the region.

Women are inadequately represented in the Parliament and make up just 3% of its Members. It is similar for local government; of the 11,424 municipal posts available in Lebanon only 526 are filled by women. The current cabinet has no female representation. We should collectively ask ourselves: if there are so few women involved in the decision-making process, how can decisions genuinely reflect the needs of women?

In terms of legislation, discriminatory laws governing marriage, inheritance, divorce and custody continue to exist. Lebanon has signed numerous treaties aimed at improving the situation of women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), but with several reservations. Equality cannot be obtained with reservations. The European Union continues to call for Lebanon to lift its reservations as has been done recently elsewhere in the region.

There is also a significant gender-based discrimination in Lebanon in the workplace. Despite the higher level of education, women are still paid significantly less than their male counterparts. On average, a woman earns 71% of what a man earns. Even for the same job in the same company women are often paid less. "This does not equate to equal pay for equal work" (art. 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Women have fewer opportunities for career progression. In the past, draft laws to put an end to this aspect of gender discrimination have been discussed, but no real change has taken place. Women tend to work mainly in the so-called 'soft' professions (health care, education and public administration) with these professions being sometimes less valued than so-called male professions.

Although violence in the workplace in the form of physical or psychological abuse is regrettably common in many working environments, it is particularly acute in the health sector, and particularly affects women. A WHO report looking at Lebanon found that 6% of all health-workers in Lebanon reported experiencing physical abuse, with 41% of them experiencing psychological abuse, 2.3% reported experiencing sexual harassment. The imbalanced impact on women is not simply because they make up the majority of the employees; often such abuse is gender-based such as sexual harassment. This kind of ill-treatment can have severe consequences, ranging from depression, to decreased productivity, to even suicide, often with little or no consequences for the perpetrators. It is apparent therefore that raising awareness of these issues is of fundamental importance, consequently we laud the objectives and the results of the project run by AMEL and CESTAS.

I take this occasion to call upon the Parliament and the government, through the efforts led by Prime Minister Nagib Mikati, to fully recognise the importance of granting women in Lebanon their rights and giving them the legal protection needed.

The European Union is committed to strengthening gender equality in all its policies, and as part of its *Strategy for Equality between Men and Women (2010-2015)*. So far, much progress has been made in getting more women into the workforce in Europe. The EU average is now close to 60%, up from 52 % in 1998. The European Union is aiming for a rate of 75% for men and women by 2020. Efforts to reduce gender-based violence, including violence against women in the workplace are also integrated into the strategy.

Gender equality remains a cross cutting issue for the European Union in Lebanon, but is also being approached head on. Since 2009, Lebanon has benefited from six different actions for a total amount of 3.5 million Euros putting gender mainstreaming into practice, namely by helping to increase women's participation within local development processes, as by involving men in combating violence against women.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am therefore pleased to announce that additional funds will be available in 2012 for actions targeting Lebanese women. We are currently preparing for the new programming cycle with the Lebanese government; you can be assured that the future EU support to improving women's conditions will translate into concrete actions.

In conclusion, I hope to see more young people in Lebanon engaging with each other on the issue of discrimination and violence against women. I encourage young people to use social media tools, sharing messages with their community and government to change mind sets and attitudes about discrimination and violence against women. Talk to friends, peers and family about discrimination and violence against women and girls and how to end it!

I would like to thank *AMEL and its partner CESTAS* for their excellent work. Your efforts will un-doubtedly contribute to the society as a whole.

Thank you.

