



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

***Presenting the Third Document on Eliminating All Forms of  
Discrimination Against Women***

Hotel Monroe, Beirut  
3 June 2015

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*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*

Excellencies Members of Parliament,

Your Excellency President of the Rene Moawad Foundation Mrs Nayla Moawad,

Representative of the Ministry of Justice Judge Mohammad Saab,

President of the National Committee for the Follow up of Women's Issues Dr  
Fahmiya Sharafeddine,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Before I say a few words about women and men and society, allow me to thank  
H.E. Mrs Nayla Moawad who is with us here with us today.

I remember vividly our first meeting at the beginning of 2011 - in fact we met  
virtually before, because Mrs Moawad is well known in Brussels and I was given  
many recommendations about her work before taking up my position here in  
Lebanon. At that first meeting you told me: 'The European Union needs to help the  
women in the North of Lebanon'.

Since that first meeting and every time we met – and these were many times - you kept on repeating: 'The European Union needs to help the women in the North of Lebanon.' It happened to be, Nayla, and this is something I did not know at the time, that the Rene Moawad Foundation had indeed already been doing a lot of good work in the North.

I learned about this through you, through the visits we did together and also individually, through your and my team and the many beneficiaries we met along the way. And when the Foundation submitted a quality proposal for further support I was pleased the European Union could accept it and work with it. With the vision, the consistency, the perseverance, the non confessionalism, the pure professionalism.

The programme was presented as one with the right mix of awareness and capacity building, one with the right tools of what we call empowerment, the skills building sessions and the small community grants. This is the right mix with, hopefully, guaranteed success.

There is still so much work to be done. Many of you know that I have spoken many many times about women's rights, human rights and gender equality in this country. And I always start with the legal framework. I firmly believe we are all equal before the law, but really, is the law really equal to everyone? Unfortunately the answer is still 'no'.

Too often when gender equality is part of the conversation, I hear reactions like: *but we are not equal... men and women are different...* And we then often hear the reasoning that, *therefore, treatment should be different.* This is wrong.

One can never be really sure where interlocutors are going with this or where the conversation leads to, but these are the necessary conversations we need to have, this is a 'must-have conversation' because the necessity to distinguish between equal rights and equal opportunities, and 'being the same' need to be explained over and over again. Equality in the eyes of the law and most people is *about how one is treated*, not how one is made up, acts or looks.

We are all created to be treated equally. We all have the same basic rights. This does not mean we are the same. I fail in areas where others excel. But this does not mean that my rights are different than theirs.

Dear friends,

I continue to hope that this is what our daily conversations should be like; what teachers could address at school, in class, and parents could discuss with their children. I always use the example of the question: When did you last vote for a woman? Or when did you last hire or promote a woman? This is the basic part of the efforts of the women's committees, cooperatives, associations and other partners gathered today to present the result of their joint endeavour in finalising a Lebanese Document on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. All steps in the right direction.

It is such a pity this government and previous governments continue to have reservations about the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), about those articles that are considered essential to improve economic rights, to eliminate gender discrimination, particularly in relation to family personal status, Penal Code, citizenship and the Nationality Law. This is clearly addressed in Lebanon's third periodic CEDAW report: "*Whichever denomination she belongs to, a Lebanese*

*woman is a victim of gender discrimination in her contact with the personal status laws."*

Very few people in Lebanon really know about the CEDAW and Lebanon's reservations. And yes there are good examples of achievements (allowing women to start a business without their husbands' approval).

If gender equality promotes healthy economic growth, then gender inequality will have multiple negative effects on communities. Apart from the overarching human rights framework that the EU fully embraces, it is also this economic aspect that is at the heart of the EU's engagement across the world and among its core principles. Societies that give women an equal chance to prosper and participate freely in social, political and economic life are not only more peaceful but also more prosperous.

Change does not happen overnight; it will eventually come through concrete joint efforts. We look forward to the day the Government and Parliament will amend the legal provisions and when society works to change the social practices that have discriminatory effects on women's advancement.

Let me thank H.E. Mrs Nayla Moawad, the Rene Moawad Foundation, the partners and all those who worked hard and continue to work hard for the right cause.

Thank you.