

EU Head of Delegation's Op-ed on the Occasion of the International Women's Day

Sana'a, 8 March 2014 - Today is a special day for Yemen as we are celebrating international women's day. And women here have a reason to celebrate their distinct contribution over the past three years towards changing Yemen for the better.

Yemeni women have shown extraordinary courage and have led by example in shaping a brighter future for their country and their children.

But I am in no doubt about the formidable challenges Yemen's women are still facing across the nation as they want to ascertain their basic human rights to girls' education, access to health and other social services, full participation in professional and public life and in making sure that they are equal before the law. For many years, Yemen has been trailing the international gender index – effectively, here, women and men have been the least equal worldwide.

But this is about to change: the National Dialogue Conference, which concluded on 25 January 2014, is certainly one of the most inspiring successes achieved to date for the cause of women in Yemen. For the first time, women were given a prominent role in an inclusive political process, which has not been witnessed anywhere else in the region. Together with all the other delegates, they managed to come up with ambitious recommendations, which – if effectively implemented – will dramatically improve the conditions of women and girls in Yemen. These include the recognition that all citizens are equal and the acknowledgement of the need to protect women's rights. The Dialogue agreed on many key reforms, such as the criminalization of violence against women, setting the minimum age for marriage at 18, and ensuring a 30% quota for the representation of women in all political instances.

With this vision in hand, we must not delay implementation of these recommendations and ensure that, more broadly, women can now fully assume the role they must play to make Yemen a more peaceful and more prosperous country. Around the world there is much evidence that, in concrete terms,

- educated women will ensure that health and education of the next generation improve considerably
- empowered women are key to preventing conflict and achieving reconciliation.
- educated women will help to unleash the economic potential of a country

In brief, women are a driving force in making nations around the world successful. I am confident that Yemen will follow this path and the EU will continue to support Yemen's women as they contribute to such positive change.