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Your Excellencies, Ministers, Parliamentarians, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- What a pleasure it has been to participate in this conference which focused on moving from policies to impact of gender-sensitive policies. The exchanges that we have been having helped to sharpen our understanding about what it takes to incorporate gender considerations into policy-making, implementing gender-sensitive policies and the importance of monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability. Thank you to all who have contributed to this important dialogue.
- This conference has been critical for raising awareness about the economic and social benefits of women as economic and political actors in the region, which is so important to promote inclusive growth and tackle the challenges related to persistent unemployment, sluggish growth and social risks. We have systematically taken stock of the progress in advancing equality and remaining barriers and challenges, which we hope will promote the development of a consistent policy response across the countries.
- **I am proud to co-chair the MENA-OECD Governance Programme which has made an important commitment to promote gender equality as a priority issue, recognizing that it is crucial to sound governance.** The MENA-OECD Gender Focus Group “Women in Government Platform,” chaired by Ms. Soukeina Bouraoui who we heard from previously in Session 3, was established in 2009 to ensure that gender considerations are integrated in all programme activities and working groups of the overall MENA-OECD Governance Programme.
- The **MENA-OECD Gender Focus Group** aims to generate dialogue and exchange good practices among MENA and OECD countries to eliminate gender-based discrimination in laws and policy-making and to promote gender equality in public life. As we witnessed in the past several days, the Platform provides stakeholders from the MENA region a voice in policy dialogue and access to international policy fora, networks and resources. It provides a space for a range of stakeholders and the OECD to collaborate with governments to improve policies and legislation to enhance women’s economic and political standing.
- The collaboration between OECD and MENA countries could support unlocking social and economic development in the region. MENA countries can both benefit from and contribute to the network of peer experts and policy-makers that the MENA-OECD

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Governance Programme brings together to meet the challenges posed by the ongoing democratic transitions and ensure the sustainability of social development and economic growth in the region.

- We hope that the dialogue from this conference will transcend this space and continue within your respective countries – to ascertain the impact of incorporation of gender considerations and gender-equality policies on women’s empowerment, societal well-being, and the economy at large.
- Achieving gender equality must be a cross-cutting theme in any policy and objective in any country. **Spain has introduced important reforms in this regard.** Recognizing that gender stereotypes often create a division of work that burdens women with unpaid care work, Spain passed the 2006 Dependency Law that provides state assistance for the care of elderly, disabled and dependent people to enable women to actively participate within the formal labour force.
- To institutionalize gender equality, Spain created the Ministry for Equality in 2008, following passage of the 2007 Law on Gender Equality. The law requires public administrations to consider gender in the adoption, implementation and budgeting of all policies. Without doing so, policies may inadvertently disadvantage or discriminate against women. In order to integrate gender considerations into all public policies and budgets, Spain has also introduced equality units in all ministries and gender impact reports. Understanding that gender based violence –from sexual harassment to domestic violence -- impedes women’s full participation in public life – Spain passed new laws to protect women and crafted specialist courts for gender based violence.
- Due to these reforms, Spain experienced a wave of progress that enabled women to participate more equally in public life and gain political voice. Half of all judges and magistrates in Spain are women. Before 1977, there were zero. Spain appointed its first woman as its Minister of Defense from 2008-2011. Women hold 41% of seats in the Congress of Deputies and 34% of seats in the Senate – one of the highest shares of women in all of Europe’s national legislatures.
- In this regard, Spain is delighted to share with MENA countries its experiences and lessons learned in this important area.
- Tremendous progress has been made in Spain to empower women, but we cannot assume that this progress will automatically sustain itself. Countries around the world must make continuous efforts to ensure that gender equality achievements are not

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being rolled back. We must be aware of pressure points that can setback progress and the challenge of sustaining it.

- Spain is also supporting gender equality efforts through its MASAR programme. , as was also elaborated by my esteemed colleague from AECID Ms. Ana Maria Salazar de la Guerra earlier during the conference. The programme seeks to provide a pathway for Arab countries to modernize and build the capacity of their institutions, as well as strengthen civil society. It recognizes that development is underpinned by good institutional governance and guaranteed fundamental rights both of which are not possible without representative institutions – that equally include women -- and strong and organised civil societies. The movements of women’s organizations make an important contribution to change, and gender equality receives priority attention from the MASAR program. The *OECD-CAWTAR Report on “Women in Public Life: Gender, law and Policy in the Middle East and North Africa”* launched last year in Amman marks a very important contribution of the OECD to the advancement of the gender equality agenda, both in the public sector and more broadly. It shows that despite progress in the region, the educational gains achieved by women have yet to translate into greater empowerment in public life. It shows that while laws are an important avenue to codifying gender equality and equal access principles – enforcing compliance and ensuring that they are correctly implemented requires systemic incorporation of gender considerations in policy formulation and within institutions, social change, and confronting gender biases by tackling gender stereotypes. The report also underlines that achieving gender quality must be a horizontal initiative, requiring coordinated efforts from an array of stakeholders, buttressed by accountability mechanisms and monitoring, for a sustained period of time.
- Over the course of the past three days, we have taken stock of the recommendations made in this report. We have seen that there have been important advancements, such as in Tunisia where there is a constitutional requirement for equal representation in legislative bodies – a gender parity principle in elected councils and in electoral law, which represents an important achievement for the region and the world. Tunisia now has the highest levels of women in political representation than any other country in the MENA region. Also, in Bahrain where the Cabinet of Ministers took the important step to reflect on Bahrain’s reservations to CEDAW and agreed to reformulate some of them in order to realise the state’s commitment to implementation of CEDAW’s provisions and to gender equality.

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- Yet, we also see that many challenges remain and new obstacles and risks emerge that may undermine the efforts across the region to enable women’s empowerment. This tells us that we need to continuously monitor the developments that may affect the state of men and women in the region and join our efforts in the concrete implementation of the proactive initiatives aiming to eliminate remaining discrimination and maximize the potential of men and women in societies and economies.
- This high-level conference **confirms the OECD’s continuous commitment to support MENA countries** in reinforcing gender equality to foster inclusive growth, to better cope with their current challenges and achieve greater socio-economic development. Some of the challenges faced by MENA countries are also true for many OECD countries. As such it will be very important to advance joint efforts in MENA and OECD countries to close the remaining gender gaps and continue exchange of information and good practices.
- I would like to congratulate all of you on a successful conference and am pleased to report that the OECD will report on the outcomes of this conference at the Government Summit held in the UAE in February. We will also use the discussions from this conference to prepare the next edition of the regional report on gender equality in public life.
- I would like to leave you with some sage advice – and that is **that empowering women is smart economics**. The OECD’s Deputy Secretary General Mary Kiviniemi quoted an astounding number in her opening speech; that balancing the scales between women and men could increase GDP by 12% over the next 20 years if labour force participation rates among women in OECD countries reached those of men. Imagine the growth that could be accomplished in the MENA region if gender gaps were narrowed. To **not** institute corrective policies to close gender gaps is not only unjust – it is unwise. This conference calls for sustained and focused public action – for governments to institute corrective policies without delay. Doing so will yield substantial payoffs.
- Thank you once again to Bahrain and the Supreme Council of Women for hosting a fantastic conference.