

Closing Remarks: Mr. Carlos Conde

High Level Conference “Women in Public Life: From Policies to Impact”

10th December 2015

- We are pleased and humbled that MENA countries are joining forces with the OECD to address a shared problem that is at the crux of stagnated development, societal well-being and economic growth – and that is gender gaps. The MENA region faces a number of challenges – sluggish economic growth, lack of regional and global integration and new risks to security.
- A critical ingredient of any strategy for more inclusive growth and a multiplier for any other development objective is gender equality. Thus closing the gender gap – in the labor force, political posts, decision-making positions, within business and entrepreneurship -- not only makes sense in terms of fairness, but it is also makes sense for curtailing the sort of p
- This has been empirically proven and OECD studies provide evidentiary support to substantiate it.
- OECD horizontal findings divulge gender gaps globally -- in all regions of the world, not just in MENA countries. In both MENA and OECD countries women are not equal in the labour market. They are not equal in entrepreneurship. They are not equal in politics. This is a shared problem.
- The gender imbalance found in senior levels of central government and in legislative bodies limits the role of women in the decision-making process, adversely affecting the fairness of public policies and laws and idling progress of a broader gender equality agenda.
- Investing in human capital by stimulating female labour force participation, and hence women’s contribution to growth as business actors and consumers is a lever for growth, but significant barriers exist in female labour force participation and women’s access to resources -- stoking gender inequality and gaps.
- So how to address these gender gaps?
- One answer is in the name of this conference. Policies.

- The mission of the OECD is to promote policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world, according to the OECD motto: “Better policies for better lives”. The role of women in social and economic life is central to this goal.
- The main goal of the OECD work in gender is to propose policy options, operational recommendations to obtain results. Gender inequality has many different roots, including social norms and practices. But inequality also comes from policies, economic incentives, laws and regulations. And we can impact and influence policies by identifying the right incentives needed and evaluating laws and regulations from inception to implementation to ensure they provide for equal opportunity and are not gender blind. This is our *raison d'être* at the OECD. Our reports are thus about solutions, about policy measures that work. **We have learned over the past 30 years that policy works. This is a positive message, and we have to build on this.**
- Throughout the course of the conference we have learned that narrowing the mixture of economic and socio-cultural factors that contribute to gender gaps requires a comprehensive approach. Gender-neutral policies that enshrine equal access and rights for men and women do not always lead to gender equality. Gender consideration should be embedded in the design, development and evaluation of relevant policies and budgets and the impact that discriminatory social norms and practices have on women’s equal rights and opportunity need to be recognized and confronted through awareness-raising.
- Collecting gender-sensitive data and monitoring progress is also essential – with a focus on barriers associated with institutions, the law and gender stereotypes. This must be done in order to consistently inform policy, assess its impact and measure progress.
- In our view, the policy tools to promote gender equality cannot be disconnected of the overall strategies for better governance and more economic efficiency. On the contrary, there is a continuum between the general institutional, policy and legal frameworks, and those that have a specific impact on women.
- We have shared this spirit with our partners and friends from the Middle East and North Africa through the **MENA-OECD Initiative on Governance and Investment. Gender occupies an important place in this Initiative.**
- A continual assessment of progress and of practices that achieve results drives our work at the OECD.

- There is currently in-depth research being carried out with consultants on the ground in 6 countries in the MENA region that will result in a harmonised report on various legislation for women accessing the labour market. This in-depth analysis of women's participation in the private sector, as entrepreneurs and in business is complementary to the 2014 OECD-CAWTAR report – proceeding to cover the full spectrum of impediments to women's equal participation in public and private life. Parallel to this is an examination of some social and territorial factors --such as security and transportation – that serve as barriers to women's full participation, which can be curbed with the right policies.
- One focus of this conference has been on taking stock of the recommendations made in the 2014 OECD-CAWTAR Report. It also examined laws and policies that impede women's full participation in public life – particularly female labour force participation in the civil service, in political decision-making, and the judiciary.
- Laws, leadership and thus policies, are in flux in the MENA region. Thus re-assessing the opportunities and solutions that exist to correct inequality and the gender imbalance based on recommendations made in these reports is a must. I think we all recognize that despite trending progress – we have a long way to go.
- There is still a need for gender-responsive laws and policies; for the integration of government tools for gender equality that are highlighted in OECD reports; and for embedding gender considerations in public policies and within the private sector to speed up and sustain progress in closing gender gaps.
- The OECD **Women in Government Platform** and the **Women in Business Forum** which is an inter-regional network of over 500 representatives from MENA and OECD governments, the private sector and civil society, are a space for continued dialogue and assessment of progress. They serve to promote efforts to accelerate women's entrepreneurship development and participation in public life in the MENA region.
- Allow me to thank each of you for your dedication to resolving this shared problem of gender inequality and for your presence here, as well as our co-hosts, Bahrain's Supreme Council of Women. The OECD looks forward to continued engagement with our partners and friends here in the MENA region to close gender gaps and foster inclusive growth.