WHY DO WE NEED A MEDITERRANEAN WOMEN’S FUND?

Belonging to the same cultural area, under the influence of three monotheistic religions, women from the Mediterranean region are subjected to a common form of patriarchy and, despite living in apparently very different situations, share many similar aspects of their condition.

Whether they come from the southern or the northern shores of the Mediterranean, women know that they must not only fight to obtain equality but also to strengthen their existing rights which have been obtained thanks to their tenacity and their struggles.

They act in a climate of general regression which is the effect of radical conservative movements in societies undergoing changes and they are experiencing many difficulties in finding the necessary funding for their actions at a local or regional level.

This is why in 2008, women from North Africa and Southern Europe have taken the initiative to create a Mediterranean Women’s Fund whose aim is to help with improving women’s condition and to promote gender equality throughout all those countries in the Mediterranean region.

A FEW KEY STATISTICS CONCERNING THE FEMALE POPULATION OF SEVERAL COUNTRIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Fertility rate*</th>
<th>Average age at marriage</th>
<th>Literacy rate**</th>
<th>Literacy rate of those between 15 and 24 years***</th>
<th>Employment rate ***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SYRIA</td>
<td>2.9 children/woman</td>
<td>26 years</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
<td>95.6%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLOVENIA</td>
<td>1.5 children/woman</td>
<td>28.4 years</td>
<td>98.9%</td>
<td>95.6%</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PALESTINE</td>
<td>1.5 children/woman</td>
<td>28.4 years</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
<td>95.6%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISRAEL</td>
<td>1.5 children/woman</td>
<td>28.4 years</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
<td>95.6%</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYPRUS</td>
<td>1.5 children/woman</td>
<td>28.4 years</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
<td>95.6%</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALTA</td>
<td>1.5 children/woman</td>
<td>28.4 years</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
<td>95.6%</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONTENEGRO</td>
<td>1.5 children/woman</td>
<td>28.4 years</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
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Note: figures for men are given between parentheses.


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What is the point of the revolution if I cannot laugh with Constance and Nadia Roz sing with Isabelle Druel, Cloe Lican and Souad Masri tell stories by Cathina Barawi draw with the sponsorship of Plantart illustrated by Catarina Marciano and dance with Lamia Safeddine and Ninia Rovita-Salat. The evening also enabled us to collect 3000 euros that will be spent on the campaign for an egalitarian constitution that was initiated by United Nations women’s associations.

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These alarming steps backward contribute to the groundswell fed by religious fundamentalism, ordinary sexism, and the merciless law of the market, all without which are intent on explaining to women how they must act, be, appear, and disappear.

In response to the symbolic and real violence being exercised on them to control their bodies and lives, young women of the region (cf. N. Aissaoui www.medwomenfund.org) try very surprisingly, and with creativity and insouciance: when asked to make themselves invisible, they appear naked on their blogs; when asked to behave properly, they organize a "suit march"; when one part of their body is disavowed, they launch a campaign, “Try the clitoris”... They tell everyone, with determination: “We, human beings soared with breasts, a clitoris, a vagina, a uterus, claim the freedom to exist as we are and as we wish to be”. Without shame or fear.

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**SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS**

*Israel Palestine Women’s Centre*

Muntada - The Arab Forum for Sexuality, Education and Health in 2006 is committed to the social development of Palestinian society by addressing educational and counseling needs related to sexuality and reproductive health. Muntada’s belief is that sexual and reproductive rights are basic human rights and that their realization contributes in a vital way to sustained human development.

Its project Liberating our Minds and Bodies – Palestinian Youth Platform for Sexual Rights has three main objectives: to raise awareness in the Palestinian community regarding sexual health and sexuality education, particularly among youth; 2) To create a foundation for the development of knowledge and skills of Palestinian and other Arab professionals working in sexuality and reproductive health; 3) To enhance the right of each individual to freely choose a partner.

**CAPACITY BUILDING**

*The association des Femmes du Franc-Moisin (AFFM – comrades) *

The association des Femmes du Franc-Moisin (AFFM-Franco-Feminist Association) created in 1980, seeks to further the social and professional integration of foreign women in the Saint-Denis area and in neighboring cities (Aubervilliers, La Courneuve, ...). These women, who come from diverse backgrounds are housewives and mothers who do not work outside their homes, or do so very little. With the project AFFM on the web, a workshop, “Multimedia communication” was set up based on workshops on reading, learning computer tools, and facilitating the emergence of a common women’s voice through a web journal.

**COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

*ROSA Women’s Centre*

... TRAFFICKING

Rosa Center for Women War Victims – is a feminist, antiracist, non-governmental, nonprofit organization, founded in 1992 by feminist and peace activists. Their mission is to reduce patriarchal violence against women, to strengthen the position of women and to promote the empowerment of women. They are implementing a Program against Trafficking in Women and Girls for Sexual Exploitation by direct work with women survivors of trafficking - SOS Help line, counseling in person - legal and psychological support, helping finding accommodation in the shelters or other alternative solutions for socialization. They also work on raising public awareness on the issue of trafficking, and lobby for legal changes in favor of survivors of trafficking.

They expect to achieve better treatment and support to women survivors of trafficking in process of recovery from difficult trauma that they have survived as victims.

... DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

“Impuls” – Citizen’s Association for Legal and Psychological Assistance to Women was created in 2012. Their primary goal is overall improvement of the position of women and empowerment of women through greater participation in public, political and economic life of local communities. They are striving for more awareness among gender-related legal issues especially among young women.

One of their priorities in the project Let’s use our rights is to act against domestic violence, which is very spread, especially in rural areas of their town by providing legal and psychological counseling to women on a daily basis.

Other than that, they plan to print leaflets on gender related issues (domestic violence issues, rights regarding employment, etc) that would be distributed across town and in rural areas, as well as an association’s official web-page design and maintenance.

**TRAINING OF YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS**

*The Association Femmes et Progrès (Association of Women and Progress)*

The Association Femmes et Progrès (Association of Women and Progress) was created in 2011, gathers together 45 associations. After having organised their first events in July 2011, the Feminists in Movement collective now organizes the second edition of its summer meetings, which pursue the following themes: gather together feminist movements, produce analyses and proposals for elected officials and public authorities, work together in order to advance women’s rights and equality in society.

The themes of the meetings: Crisis, debt and austerity in Europe / International stances of female-male equality / Deconstruction of stereotypes, construction of equality / Women’s right what fields?

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**INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS**

*The Women’s Security Index (WSI) Coalition created in 2000 by six women organizations and hosted by the Usha - Haifa Feminist Center has the overall mission to promote the implementation of UN SCR 1215 in Israel. The aim of the WSCI is to develop the “Women’s Security Index”, a practical tool for women’s and state change organizations in Israel to advocate both for protection and civil participation of women from diverse communities. The Index is designed to address the needs of women, including the most marginalised, such as Palestinian women, women with disabilities, trafficking victims, and others. The index will challenge the militaristic view of security by offering a broad and positive feminist vision of human security, such as economic security, protection from domestic, sexual and institutional violence, protection against prejudice and discrimination, health concerns, and more.**

Here is an extract of the report written by Atiqah:

“Imagine that you are a young woman who probably knows little about feminism beyond what she feels in her own heart, that you live in a small town lost in western Algeria where conservatism and particularly patriarchal definitions of honour reign and are rooted, in most cases, in the tenacity of religious references and in an understanding of society, gender relations, and feminine identity that renders you not only a subordinate within the family and society, but particularly a sub-citizen in the legal sense. Imagine that on top of this, you have a dominating father who, when going to ask the hand of a girl for his son, mixes into the discussion that the future wife will have to ask his son permission to work. “A woman, it is like that. Crush her before she crushes you,” he says haughtily and with the blessings and proud complicity of an entire society.

Imagine yourself, still yourself, but this time at the largest feminist forum of the year held in a town that you have fantasized about, surrounded by 2200 women from all over the world, and this only because of your CV and in a letter of motivation. – Please excuse me in advance for the vocabulary which I am about to use, but no other words would capture the intensity of my meaning - Holy shit! Holy fucking shit! Yes, I know. It has exactly that effect.

If you came from so far away, would your priority be the full sessions and the 14 workshops with simultaneous interpretation? (...)

In my place, would you not feel it is even more special that a woman that only knew you through a few emails had enough confidence in you to present you to a women’s Fund, and that, with only your CV and a letter of motivation to go by, gave you everything you needed to realize a dream you thought would only be realized after at least ten years of experience and completed projects? Do you not shiver even more at the memory of the dozens of petitions that you signed or the tears of the young Yemenite in exile in Norway fleecing a crime of honour? Realising that, when presenting feminist literature at the university and becoming aware – suddenly – of the disdainful looks of men and women, (unfortunately) when you simply utter the word, “equality”, you no longer will feel as if you are being stabbed, your heart will no longer beat wildly because you simply said, “liberty”, you no longer will fear ceasing to be and the anger that has been eating at you will be transformed into a rage to live, would you not say that there was a ‘before’, and ‘after’, and “a burning to this forum?”

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... AND

THE PARTICIPATION IN THE 12th AWID FORUM, (Transforming Economic Power to Advance Women’s Right Justice) OF NUMEROUS ACTIVISTS FROM THE REGION, IN PARTICULAR FIVE YOUNG WOMEN UNDER 26 YEARS OLD: HSNAE from Morocco, WAFA from Tunisia, MASA from Egypt, RANIA from Lebanon and ATIQA from Algeria.

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More...
**October 11st Is to Be International Girls’ Day.** United Nations declared.

This is a way of recognizing that girls are particularly vulnerable to violence, poverty and discrimination. This day is destined to promote equal opportunities and equal treatment of children of both sexes in the fields of nutrition, health care, education, training, and legal rights around the world. It will affirm girls’ rights to a life without violence or abuse.

---

**The Mediterranean Women’s Fund Participated in the AWID’s Forum** “Transforming the economic power to advance women’s rights and justice”, held in Istanbul April 19-23, bringing female activists to the forum and holding a session on “Women’s relationship to money: how does it affect our activism?”

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**The Mediterranean Women’s Fund participated in the AWID’s Conference** conference on fundamental rights. The ad that the European Commission began to air in early June for its campaign, “Science is for Girls”, would have been extremely funny if the inherent image of women that it sent out was not so appallingly meant to change the perception that girls are assumed to have about science, the ad shows three young girls swaying bizarrely around a laboratory in high heels and lipstick.

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**Newsletter from the Mediterranean shores**

**Our Mediterranean Women’s Fund Information letter** from the Mediterranean Women’s Fund Address: BP 74, 40, place du Millénaire 34000 Montpellier – France Email: letter.info@medwomensfund.org Tel/Fax: 0033 –(0)4 67 67 08 73 Free bimannual newsletter Editor: Caroline Brac de la Pariente - Nadia Aissoui - Fawzia Baba-Aïssa Graphic conception: MIPhograph Translation complimentary: Grace Debélo
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34000 Montpellier - France

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