

**Statement of Ms. Mona S. Kamel**  
On behalf of the League of Arab States

**The 2003 Mediterranean Seminar on the Comprehensive Approach to Security:  
The OSCE Experience and its Relevance for the Mediterranean Region**

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**Session III: The Human Dimension  
Democratic Institutions and Civil Society**

Madame Moderator,

It gives me great pleasure to address this esteemed gathering of distinguished intellectuals and diplomats on behalf of the League of Arab States. Indeed, it is an honor for me to convey to you the greetings and good wishes of his Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, the Secretary General of the LAS.

The participation of our organization in the activities of the OSCE is an indicator of the major changes that have been recently introduced to the concepts and objectives governing the role and performance of the Arab League. Today, the League of Arab States is committed to expand its outreach towards the region and the international community.

Moreover, our participation in your meeting today is an indication of the strong and developing relationship that ties our organizations and, in fact, our two parts of the world. We have to intensify our cooperation and join efforts in issues of mutual concern. I am glad to say that our cooperation has evolved, particularly, on global concerns especially on cultural and economic issues as well as issues pertaining to security with its numerous dimensions.

Madame Moderator

We believe that collective commitment to the principals of human rights is a pre-requisite for achieving human security. Arab countries have already drafted a charter on human rights. This blueprint is currently being revised.

The purpose of this process is to update the charter and make it more sensitive to and compatible with the new international norms in this regard.

This process is not strictly conducted by governmental bodies. It also includes a number of concerned Arab non-governmental organizations that have been participating in the discussion over what would make a new Arab charter of human rights. Meanwhile, some national laws are being revised to consolidate and promote the principals of human rights and to introduce instruments, which oversee the compliance of official authorities with these laws.

I am sure that many of you have followed recent developments in several Arab countries where fair and transparent elections have been organized. Bahrain, Morocco, Yemen and Qatar are but a few examples.

Madame Moderator,

The potential for change in the Arab world has become a popular topic for politicians and academic specialists alike. Questions of good governance are increasingly raised in public discourse. We do want to improve. We seek change and reform. However, we do not believe in superimposed changes. We cannot accept that change be enforced upon us. Indeed, the effective reform of our societies should be a process that is undertaken by our own people.

The UN Arab Human Development report released last year from the LAS offered an academic perspective of the main challenges and deficiencies that need to be addressed in our part of the world. It highlighted the need for the expansion of political freedoms, the empowerment of women, the improvement of education systems and the bridging of the knowledge gap between the Arabs and the West as key issues our nations need to face.

In many Arab countries the outcome of this report is being carefully examined by governments and non-governmental organizations alike.

Civil society organizations have grown in number, strength and significance in the Arab region particularly in recent decades. The Arab League is a strong believer in the role of civil society. Our objective is to integrate NGOs in all the activities of the Arab League. In fact, we are already working with a network of NGOs on a number of issues.

We also believe that the creation of a database of a wide range of civil society institutions in the region will be useful for encouraging region-wide contacts and fostering international partnerships. Creating these networks of NGOs and maintaining frequent exchanges is one of the main objectives of the newly established Commission for Civil Society in the Arab League headed by His Excellency Dr. Taher El Masry, former Jordanian Prime Minister.

Madame Moderator,

The Arab world, like many other parts of the larger developing world, remains predominantly patriarchal. This said women in most Arab countries have been making progress in gaining their legal and other rights. Only recently, several Arab Gulf states have adopted measures to allow a wider participation of and to secure more rights to women. In Egypt there is a serious commitment to amend the nationality law to grant women the rights to pass on Egyptian nationality to children of foreign fathers; the Saudi Foreign Ministry is about to allow women to join the diplomatic corps; and in Kuwait women are about to find their way to the seats of municipal councils.

We, however, believe that there is still room for improvement on women's rights in our countries. The governments are showing an increasing commitment on this front. Meanwhile, networking among women's associations throughout the Arab region is crucial to create a common goal upon which action could be planned and executed. The recent formation of the Arab Women's Organization is indeed a clear sign of the efforts currently undertaken to enhance the cause of women's rights all across the Arab world.

Moreover, the LAS is currently examining several initiatives and proposals that are meant to boost inter-Arab cooperation in order to serve the collective Arab interests. For example, the Arab League has proposed a move towards the establishment of an Arab Parliament that is inspired by the EU model. The intended outcome of such an endeavor is for elected Arab nationals to share in the decision-making process.

We are all aware that we, in the Arab world, are encountered with daunting challenges – some of them are really pressing. But we also know that we have the will to live up to these challenges. We are committed to exert every possible effort to serve the purpose of advancement and modernization in our countries. We know that the task is hard but we are confident that we can make it.

Thank you.