

## **Palestinian Women Do Not Need Western Colonial Conferences on Gender Equality. They Need Liberation from Occupation and the Implementation of the Islamic System**

### **News:**

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, the Faculty of Law at Al-Quds University, Jerusalem, hosted an international conference entitled, “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Challenges, Solutions and Best Practices in the Mediterranean Region.” It was organized in partnership with the Palestinian Ministry of Women’s Affairs, the Palestinian NGO Forum for Combating Violence Against Women, the UN Population Fund, and the University of Perugia in Italy. The event was funded by the Italian Cooperation, and addressed 5 main themes: violence against women, gender equality in the labour market and workplace, women and society, gender and governmental sectors, and the Italian experience. Speakers emphasized the need to promote gender equality programs and policies within the society, as well as women’s economic empowerment through increasing their participation in the labour market. Mirko Tricoli, Head of the Italian Cooperation Office in Jerusalem, commented that the conference reflected a strong collective commitment to gender equality. The initiative aimed to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence in Palestine through social, cultural and economic transformation.

### **Comment:**

It is staggering that despite the genocide in Gaza and the daily terror that Palestinian women in the West Bank and elsewhere in the Blessed Land have been subjected to under a murderous occupation – including systematic torture and sexual violence in the occupation prisons – that Al-Quds University and their Western backers should decide to focus on ‘Gender Equality’ imbalances in society as a priority that necessitates an international conference! What kind of women’s empowerment can ever happen under a brutal occupation?!! Surely, it is uprooting this barbaric entity which should be the primary subject of discussion amongst academics and civil society in Palestine!

It is further proof that Western funded and supported conferences and initiatives to promote gender equality within Muslim lands are not aimed at sincerely improving the lives of women in the region but rather part of an ongoing colonial legacy of imposing Western beliefs, culture, lifestyles and systems upon Muslim societies and states. The aim is to erase Islamic social, cultural and family values and laws and replace them with western compliant ones which facilitate political control over these lands by western colonial governments.

Education and educational institutions in particular have been a favourite tool employed by colonialist states – past and present - to try and spread western secular liberal culture and eliminate Islam from Muslim communities. The European missionary and cultural associations established in the Muslim lands in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, and the American University of Beirut are examples in point. Furthermore, it is nothing new for particular Muslim academics, enamored by Western culture and groomed by colonial mentors, institutions and organisations, to serve as vehicles in spreading Western beliefs to their societies. They follow the footsteps of academics such as Qasim Amin, who travelled as a foreign student to France and enrolled in the Montpellier

University in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only to return in 1885 CE fully saturated with the Western thought and mode of thinking to go on to criticize the Hijab, polygamy, and the Islamic view on divorce and inheritance in his writings. This included his book, “The Liberation of Women” which promoted western thought including the idea of unrestricted freedoms.

This conference organized by Al-Quds University simply replicates Western secular narratives on women’s rights and empowerment with no objective critical analysis on the credibility of the concept of ‘Gender Equality’ in actually solving the multiple problems that women face – whether domestic violence, sexual harassment, poverty, or the lack of educational, economic, political, legal or health care rights. Gender equality, which is sold as a panacea for women’s problems, seeks to equalize the role, rights and responsibilities of men and women within family life and society with the belief that this will establish respect, justice and a better quality of life for women. It is a Western construct, born as a result of the direct failure of European and other secular states to afford value to women’s lives and grant them basic economic, political, legal and educational rights. However, despite ‘Gender Equality’ being enshrined in the constitutions and laws of states across the world, the scale of violence against women, harassment, poverty, economic and sexual exploitation, and deprivation of justice and political, economic, educational and health care rights that women face remains dire in lands across the world – East and West. Furthermore, the narrative of women’s empowerment through employment is false, for many working women entered low paid, poor quality, and often exploitative jobs – which not only failed to lift them out of poverty but forced them to sacrifice and compromise their vital role as mothers and deprived them of valuable quality time with their children. In addition, the call for gender equality in marriage and family life resulted in confusion and discord in marital and parental responsibilities, undermining the harmony of family life and contributing to a rise in divorce.

Empowering women in Palestine requires first, uprooting the Zionist occupation in its entirety by calling for the mobilization of the Muslim armies to liberate the whole of the Blessed Land from this murderous entity. Secondly, empowering women in Palestine and across the Muslim lands requires the establishment of a system that has a sound political, economic, judicial and education system – which has the ability to secure the rights of all human beings – male and female – in a just manner and ensure a good quality of life. This can only be achieved by a system ordained by the Creator, Allah (swt), the All-Knowing, the All-Wise, and not any man-made one. And thirdly, empowering women requires the implementation of a social system that achieves cooperation of men and women in all spheres of life to ensure that the dignity of both genders is protected, as well as prescribing rights and duties which complements their nature, achieves harmony in marriage and family life, and truly values the vital role of women as wives and mothers. This can only be achieved by the Islamic social laws, and not laws based upon gender equality. Therefore, for those who truly seek a better life for women in the Muslim lands and beyond, it is the call for the System of Allah (swt), the Khilafah (Caliphate) based upon the method of the Prophethood which should be the primary subject of discussions and conferences!

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by**

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