

Concept note

Regional consultation on the status of women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa

with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities

3-4 December 2024

Kuwait - Kuwait

Objective	Discuss the situation and challenges of women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region.
Participants	Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, civil society organizations on the rights of persons with disabilities and women's rights, international organizations, United Nations specialized agencies and academic institutions.
Organizers	Kuwait Union of Women's Associations/Geneva Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs
Place	Kuwait
Date	3-4 December 2024

About the Organizers:

KUWA:

The Kuwait Union of Women's Associations was established as a general benefit organization on 25/6/1994 by ministerial decision to unify the representation of women's associations in all forums inside and outside Kuwait, with the membership of the Islamic Welfare Association, the Biader Peace Women's Association and the Kuwaiti Voluntary Association for Community Development, as well as the Girl Club.

The empowerment and support of Kuwaiti women and the creation of more inspirational women in the process of sustainable development by all possible means, in all local, regional and international spheres, through a series of programmes, projects and initiatives supervised and embraced by the Federation, together with the great partnerships and high competencies with which it is distinguished.

The Honorary President of the Federation is Her Highness Sheikh Latifa Al-Fahad Al-Salem Al-Sabah. The Board of Directors is currently chaired by Her Excellency Sheikh Fadiyah Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah. In 2000, the Kuwaiti Federation of Women's Associations obtained consultative status at the United Nations in 2000.

GIHR:

Established in 2004, the Geneva- based Institute advocates the promotion of the understanding and application of human rights in the MENA region. During its last 20 years, it implemented various related projects in 19 countries of the region.

GIHR fostered working relationships with organizations, individuals and institutions among civil society organizations and governments of the region. Equipped with an observer status at the UN, the Institute provides technical advice, logistic and strategic support to governmental and non-governmental actors in defining and implementing their strategies in using international human rights procedures.

I. Background

Women with disabilities enjoy the same human rights as anyone else, as mentioned in various international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities specifically defines the rights of women and girls with disabilities and, to date, 186 States have acceded to the Convention. A number of States in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) have acceded to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with the exception of Lebanon. However, its dissemination and implementation at the national level appear to face many challenges in many respects.

In fact, persons with disabilities are twice as vulnerable to physical, psychological and social violence because of their relatively low social and economic situation or their relatively high financial or physical dependence on their partners or caregivers. Women with disabilities form a more vulnerable subset of these groups, and their experiences of violence are shaped by their disability and exacerbated by negative social perceptions or attitudes such as dehumanization, will, stigma and pathological diagnosis. Women and persons with disabilities are also more likely to experience disrespect at home and in the workplace which may harm their dignity and make them feel deeply violated.

Women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region face multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization due to gender and disability status.

Many research and studies focused on exploring and understanding the challenges and barriers faced by women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region, as well as their experiences and perspectives. Here are some key findings:

- According to UN-Women, women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region often face significant challenges in accessing education and employment opportunities. They face multiple barriers, such as inaccessible physical environments, stigma and discrimination, and lack of supportive policies and programmes. This limits their access to education and employment and perpetuates social and economic exclusion (source: UNESCO, 2018).
- They are also often excluded from decision-making processes and leadership positions, both in the public and private sectors. This limits their participation and influence in the formulation of policies and programmes that affect their lives and enhance their marginalized status.
- Last but not least, women with disabilities in the region often face significant obstacles in accessing health care and support services. This includes lack of accessible health-care facilities, medical equipment, trained health-care providers, as well as limited availability of support services, such as counselling and rehabilitation.

Above all, the intersection of discrimination faced by women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region based on their gender, disability status, and other factors such as age, race and socioeconomic

status makes all the above challenges deeper. They are more vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization and limit their opportunities for full participation in society.

In general, these findings highlight the urgent need for greater attention and support for women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Several recommendations from various United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and special procedures, have called on each State to develop policies to ensure equality of opportunity and individuals, including persons with disabilities. This includes providing accessible public transport, education, health care and employment, as well as raising awareness of women's rights with disabilities and addressing discrimination and stigma.

The recommendations also highlighted the fact that it was essential to involve women with disabilities in decision-making processes and to provide them with the necessary support to realize their potential and contribute to their communities. Policies and programmes must be designed to address the multiple and interrelated forms of discrimination faced by these women and provide them with equal opportunities to participate in all aspects of life.

Furthermore, adequate human, financial and technical resources should be allocated to ensure the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I. Specific objectives

Recognizing the above challenges, the Geneva Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs wishes to contribute to the current dialogue on women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region by organizing a two-day regional consultation where these topics will be addressed from several different academic and professional perspectives.

The objectives of this event are:

- A. Discuss ways to raise awareness and sensitize women with disabilities on their rights in the Middle East and North Africa region, while advocating for appropriate policies and laws;
- B. Increase knowledge and information on women's rights with disabilities;

- C. Raise participants' awareness of the importance of working with special rapporteurs as a means of addressing various human rights issues in their country;
- D. Encourage non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders to urge Governments in the region to extend an open invitation to their country's special procedures;
- E. Strengthening participants' capacities to understand the United Nations special procedures system;
- F. Exchange of curricula and strategies for the promotion of women's rights in the region;
- G. Provide participants with the necessary knowledge to be involved in monitoring the implementation of women's rights in national public policies;
- H. Identify the challenges and forms of violence and discrimination faced by women with disabilities;
- I. Addressing needs and gaps and reviewing national laws and policies;
- J. Exchange of experiences and good practices at the national, regional and international levels;
- K. Identify ways for women and disability-oriented organizations to cooperate with local authorities and actors, regional and United Nations human rights mechanisms.

Languages

The Workshop will be conducted in Arabic and English. and interpretation will be provided in sign language.

I. Methodology for work

A. Participants

The consultation with the United Nations Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Dr. Heba Hagrass, will bring together about 50 individuals representing civil society organizations on the rights of persons with disabilities and women's rights, international organizations, United Nations specialized agencies and academic institutions.

B. Methodology

The methodology will be in a participatory manner, with interactive discussions with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, an exchange of views and testimony from participants. Participants will be requested to prepare a 3-5-page paper listing the observations and recommendations they wish to share with the Special Rapporteur.

- The meeting will be done according to the Chatham House rule, respecting the anonymity of the participants who do not want to show their participation on any public platforms or social media.
- Workshop will use “World Café” method, in which participants will be divided according to the themes of the Workshop and will have a discussion with the experts. The participants will rotate and contribute to each topic.
- At the end of the two days, we would have a plenary to share the main findings and conclusions to develop indicators for the Transitional Justice in Sudan and action that are needed to be worked on within the coming three years.

C. Format

Panel discussions will be held for two days, followed by interactive discussions.

Organizers will provide coffee breaks and lunches during the two days of the consultation.

D. Topics

- The observance of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on the 3rd of December each year, proclaimed in 1992 by United Nations General Assembly resolution 47/3, aims to promote understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to raise awareness of how persons with disabilities are integrated into every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life and how beneficial it is to social justice, balance and prosperity in societies.
- Inclusion of disability is a prerequisite for supporting human rights, sustainable development, peace and security. It was also central to the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development not to leave anyone behind. On this occasion, the consultative panel will be held to highlight the above issues.

- Each panel discussion will ensure that the cooperation of all stakeholders is integrated into the discussion.

Sessions:

- The role of the United Nations special procedures and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities.
- Discussion on multiple discrimination and violence faced by women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region: social and cultural stigma.
- Discussion on the challenges faced by women with disabilities in accessing education, employment, adequate transport and health care.
- Discussion on existing laws, policies and programmes for women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region.
- A road map to strengthen existing institutions and strengthen cooperation between local actors and United Nations human rights mechanisms to advocate, monitor the implementation of effective policies and strengthen existing laws.

I. Expected results

A report will be issued on the recommendations and further cooperation among all participants.

The outcome of the meeting should be an in-depth discussion leading to practical recommendations on:

- The role that the Special Rapporteur plays and continues to play on the rights of persons with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region (within her mandate);
- Follow-up on possible activities of UN-Women, UNFPA and OHCHR through their work in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Dates and Venue

The Consultation will take place on 3-4 December 2024 in Kuwait, Kuwait.

Regional consultation with the United Nations Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa

Draft Programme

Day one

9.00 - 8.30	Registration
9.00 - 9.30	Opening Session Kuwait Union of Women's Associations, Geneva Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs/UN-Women/UNFPA
10.00 - 9.30	Self-presentation to participants
10:15 - 10:00	Objectives and expected outcomes of the regional consultation
10:30 - 10.15	Break
11:15 - 10:30	Session I: Overview of the role of the United Nations special procedures
13.00 - 11.15	Overview of the role of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities
14.30 - 13.00	Lunch break
14:30- 15:30	Session II: Discussion on multiple discrimination and violence faced by women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region: social and cultural stigma
16:30 - 15.30	Discussion of the 2nd meeting Sharing experiences and best practices and identifying challenges
17:30 - 16:30	Session III: Discussion on the challenges faced by women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region to access education, employment, appropriate transport and health care
18:45 - 17:30	Discussion of the 3rd meeting and closing day one

Day II

09:00 - 08:45	Opening and summary of the first day's discussions
10.00 - 9.00	<p>Session IV</p> <p>Discussion on existing laws, policies and programmes for women with disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region.</p>
11.00 - 10.00	<p>Discussion at the 4th meeting</p> <p>Sharing experiences and best practices and identifying challenges</p>
11:30 – 11.00	Break
3 1 - 11.30	<p>Session V: Road plan to strengthen existing institutions and strengthen cooperation between local actors and United Nations human rights mechanisms to advocate, monitor the implementation of effective policies and strengthen existing laws</p>
14.30 - 13.00	Lunch break
15.30 - 14.30	<p>Discussion at the 5th meeting</p> <p>Sharing experiences and identifying challenges</p>
16.30 - 15.30	<p>Practical session on how to work with the technical expertise of the special procedures on how to submit individual complaints, provide analysis and information, advocacy and call for an open invitation to the special procedures, and disseminate, follow-up and implement the work of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities</p>
16.45 - 16.30	Break
17:15 - 16:45	<p>Open debate with representatives of the United Nations</p> <p>Discussing challenge strategies</p>
17:45 - 17:15	Closing session



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