



**National Council for Women**  
Arab Republic of Egypt

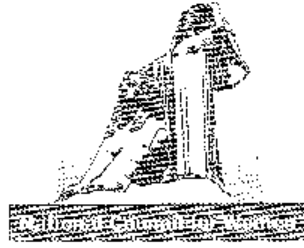
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**Building Bridges**  
**Creating Partnerships**

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**Prof. Dr. Farkhonda Hassan**

Secretary General of the National Council for Women  
Chair of the Committee on Human Development &  
Local Administration, Shura Assembly of Egypt  
Professor of Geology at the American University in Cairo



## **Building Bridges Creating Partnerships**

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## **BUILDING BRIDGES CREATING PARTNERSHIPS**

### **Distinguished Guests**

It gives me great pleasure and honor to be here with you today to discuss a timely issue of vital consequence and global significance, an issue that imposes itself today on the world agenda as perhaps never before. This is the issue of building bridges and creating partnerships amongst cultures and nations of the world.

Throughout history, peoples have exchanged cultural experience, ideas, philosophies, inventions, values and goods through trade, art, migration, exploration, conquests, war and peace. Such cultural exchange and interaction has enabled people to refine and embellish their cultures.

Today, the racial, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of mankind continues to enrich human existence and inspire creativity and progress. But the avenues and channels for cultural exchange and discourse are now virtually unlimited.

Satellites, fibre optics and other revolutionary advances in communications are of monumental contrast with the maritime navigation and caravan routes of the past.

Cultural exchange today is taking on new dimensions as part of globalization, that "invisible hand" controlled not by people and nations of the world, but by powerful media giants and multinational corporations. The pros and cons of globalization are debatable. But in the context of this discussion, one question needs to be addressed.



Have globalization and recent technological advances helped forge bridges of understanding and deeper knowledge among nations, cultures and religions of the world? I believe the outcome so far is far from satisfactory.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The shocking events of September 2001 and its aftermath were a grim testimony to the fragility of some inter-cultural bridges. The events highlighted beyond doubt the collective lack of fundamental knowledge that nations and peoples have of one another. It is indeed sad and ironic that such events have unfolded in the very same year designated by the United Nations as the Year for Dialogue among Civilizations. Yet the "Great Depression" in international relations and politics that ensued immediately following these events and the bleak uncertainty which faced the world highlighted many realities and lessons to be learned. Let me share two of my thoughts with you on this matter.

First and foremost, recent global events testify that cultural bridges and partnerships that have taken many years to build may subside in seconds. This fragility clearly points out to the need for fundamental and deeper knowledge and appreciation of our cultural pluralism. There is a pressing need for the respect of the dignity and equality of all human beings and of nations large and small, compliance with fundamental principles of justice, morality, and international law as well as the Charter of the United Nations. Nations also need to search for common grounds among and within civilizations in order to address common challenges. This is the collective responsibility of governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society at large.

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Advancement of knowledge on world cultures and religions through incorporation of programs to study various cultures and civilizations in the educational curricula, including teaching of languages, history, socio-political thoughts of various civilizations appears to be now indispensable. Similarly, the objective portrayal of other civilizations in educational curricula in keeping with the principles of diversity and freedom of choice is now more essential than ever.

This will allow future generations to better learn and appreciate about our similarities and differences. An equally colossal responsibility falls upon the shoulders of the media and press to ensure a more objective projection of events and greater neutrality in the channeling and analysis of news.

Second, it is clear that although we live in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, our world is troubled with growing disparities and gaps. Such disparities, in part aggravated by the current world order and globalization, need to be addressed so that countries small and large may equally benefit from the fruits of world integration. The pursuit of equitable sustainable human development requires peace, security and friendly relations among nations. It is imperative that development continue with a "human face".

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would now like to talk to you about how, the National Council for Women (NCW) presided by Egypt's First Lady is contributing to building bridges and creating partnerships in our part of the world. But first, allow me to familiarize you with NCW.



The National Council for Women (NCW) was established in the year 2000 by Presidential Decree No.90 as an autonomous entity with the purpose of advancing the status of Egyptian women. Nationally, the establishment of NCW crowned achievements scored during the twentieth century such as constitutional gains attained in terms of women's equal rights to education, health services, employment, marital and family life, voting and nomination for public office. NCW also represents a culmination and continuation of national efforts to further enhance the social, economic and political status of Egyptian women spearheaded by Egypt's First Lady.

The mission of NCW is to enhance the status of all Egyptian women and to maximize their contribution to the growth and development of Egypt. The focus is on narrowing existing socio-economic gender gaps and addressing women's strategic needs.

In order to fulfill its mission, NCW has been entrusted with a broad, and multi-sectoral mandate and carries out numerous functions. NCW is entrusted with:

1. Policy Analysis and Upstream Advocacy
2. Gender Planning, Mainstreaming and Monitoring
3. Networking and Partnerships
4. Communication and Awareness Raising
5. Capacity Building and Training
6. Research, Documentation and Dissemination
7. Pilot Activities

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I mentioned earlier that one of the key functions of NCW is networking and partnerships. I would now like to focus on this issue. The purpose of networking is to lobby support for women's issues, disseminate and share information with development partners through publications and conferences, initiate collaborative work and raise resources for interventions and programmes. Networking also involves the forging of a vast number of linkages with development partners within Egypt and outside including governments, NGOs, universities, research institutes, the private sector etc. In this context, NCW has been entrusted with the key responsibility of representing Egypt on all women issues at international conferences and articulating and communicating Egypt's position on all women issues both nationally and internationally.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Let me give you a recent example of the kind of work the National Council for Women is currently involved in with regards to building bridges and forging partnerships.

Initiated by Egypt's First Lady through NCW, the first Summit for Arab Women was held in Cairo in November 2000. Attended by the first Ladies and dignitaries from all over the Arab world, the conference discussed challenges confronting Arab women in the context of the broader socio-economic and political situation of the region. In recognition of the contribution of Arab women, the conference declared the year 2001 as the year of Arab Women. This conference represented an unprecedented landmark in the Arab world's recent history and was the launching pad for a movement to institutionalize and



consolidate efforts by individual governments and institutions in the Arab world under one umbrella.

It was a year later, based on the initiative of Egypt's First Lady, that the creation of The Organization of Arab Women was announced in November 2001, at the Extraordinary Summit of Arab Women held in Cairo.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Organization for Arab Women is intended to be an autonomous entity concerned with fostering the cooperation to advance the situation of Arab women. The organization will be composed of member countries in the Arab League and will be hosted by the country where the Arab League headquarters reside.

### **The purpose of the organization is to:**

- 1- Promote greater solidarity among Arab women.
- 2- Coordinate and unify the position of Arab women in regional and international circles.
- 3- Promote knowledge and awareness on the social, economic, political, cultural, legal and media related issues of Arab women.
- 4- Support cooperation and coordination among member countries through the exchange of information and expertise in women related issues.
- 5- Mainstream women concerns in governmental policy making and planning.
- 6- Enhance and build the capacities of women in order to maximize their contribution to development in the Arab region.

7- Improve the basic services provided to women, particularly health and education.

**In order to fulfill this mandate, the Organization of Arab Women will undertake numerous functions including:**

- 1- Collection, analysis and publication of statistics on Arab women.
- 2- Support to national efforts in the advancement of women.
- 3- Follow-up on international developments in various fields.
- 4- Formulation of regional programmes for the empowerment of Arab women in different areas.
- 5- Networking and creating partnerships with governmental and non-governmental institutions within and outside the Arab world.
- 6- Organizing conferences and workshops to discuss and coordinate interventions across the Arab world.
- 7- Carrying out studies and conducting research on women related issues.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

There are great hopes and expectations that the Organization of Arab Women will help women in the region achieve their dreams and aspirations for a more developed and prosperous Arab world. Like the Arab International Women's Forum and many other organizations around the world, the organization of Arab Women will seek to forge avenues of collaboration within and outside the Arab world. But most of all, it is hoped that this organization will help contribute to demystifying Arab women and uncover their contributions in many domains. It is also hoped that the Organization of Arab Women will help correct faulty and



stereotypical images of Arab women and contribute to greater knowledge and appreciation of one of the world's greatest religions, Islam.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Organization of Arab Women is but the first in many dreams that Egypt aspires to achieve in its outreach to the women of the world. NCW is also planning to reach out to its Mediterranean neighbors towards the end of 2002 in a gathering inspired by the forthcoming opening of the Alexandria Library. We are also hoping to organize a global gathering of governmental and non-governmental partners in 2003 around the issue of how to engender development.

With these and other initiatives by women organizations all over the world, I believe that women can be a great force for increased international understanding and cooperation. For women share a universal instinct of motherhood, love and compassion. Women also have a peaceful disposition and a great propensity for tolerance, understanding, patience and endurance. These appear to be the ingredients we are very much in need of today.

Finally, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Mrs. Haifa Al Kaylani, Chairman of the Arab International Women's Forum for giving me this valuable opportunity to address this distinguished presence and for her very kind hospitality. I would also like to thank all those who contributed to the organization of this event and look forward to continuing dialogue and cooperation in the future.

**Thank you.**

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