

**G8-Broader Middle East and North Africa (G8-BMENA) Forum for the Future VII
Conference on the Private Sector's Role in the Area of Social Responsibility
October 9-10, 2010 - Istanbul**

Final Communiqué

The international conference *The Private Sector's Role in the Area of Social Responsibility* was held in Istanbul on October 9th and 10th 2010. The conference was organized by the Global Political Trends Center (GPoT) and the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) under the coordination of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the National Human Rights Committee and the Arab Democracy Foundation and in cooperation with the Governments of Canada and Qatar, co-chairs of the Seventh Forum for the Future.

The conference brought together civil society and government representatives from the countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa region, the countries of the G8 and Turkey. In the spirit of government-civil society dialogue and cooperation as envisaged by the Forum for the Future process, participants discussed the prospects for corporate social responsibility in the region and the effect it could have on participation and civil society. Participants' deliberations took place in four thematic workshops. These were:

- *Civil Society and Business*: where participants discussed the complexities of the relationship between civil society and the private sector in the region, but acknowledged that they have common objectives that they should work together towards, in order to ensure a more just and sustainable society;
- *Women's Economic Participation*: where participants assessed the barriers to women's economic participation in the region and discussed how these barriers might be overcome. The most pertinent barriers were identified as the rigid perception of a woman's role that is prevalent in the region, the portrayal of women in the media and a private sector that does not facilitate women's employment;
- *The Next Generation*: where participants agreed that youth unemployment and disenchantment are major problems in the region, which have to be overcome through education and training as well as the creation of opportunities for young people;
- *Capacity Building*: where participants debated how the private sector can assist civil society in developing its capacity to achieve common objectives.

Participants developed recommendations for governments from the region and G8, the private sector and civil society, which are designed to instill a culture of corporate social responsibility in the region. These are:

To the Governments of the Region and G8:

- Express their commitment to corporate social responsibility as a means to tackle many of the social problems that affect the region;
- Adopt favorable fiscal frameworks and legislative landscapes that incentivize corporate social responsibility where appropriate;
- Acknowledge the absolute necessity to fully incorporate less advantaged members of society (including the region's women and youth) in related programs;
- Work with civil society and the private sector in developing education and training programs designed to reduce youth and female unemployment;
- Reiterate their commitment to a proposed Gender Institute and expand its remit to include programs related to women's economic empowerment;

- Ensure that multinational private sector organizations based in the countries of the G8 follow the same corporate social responsibility rules that apply within their national territories to their operations in foreign countries;
- Further engage the private sector as a partner for change in the Forum for the Future process.

To the Private Sector:

- Acknowledge the multiple benefits of corporate social responsibility (not just limited to good public relations);
- Recognize that civil society is a legitimate partner that can contribute to the delivery of a better, more equitable, society and that women and youth represent highly capable members of the workforce and thus should be encouraged to participate;
- Establish a work environment that is more supportive of women who chose to work, including the introduction of, for example, crèche services and flexible working hours;
- Work to better develop civil society's capacity, be it through management training programs, technical assistance (for example in the field of communications), financial planning, the development of secondment programs, or encouraging their employees to donate some of their time or income to civil society.

To Civil Society:

- Look towards the private sector to instigate greater levels of professionalism in the region's civil society organizations;
- Conduct a study of corporate social responsibility in the region, detailing willing interlocutors, highlighting best practices and mapping private sector-civil society cooperation in the region;
- Recognize that the private sector has legitimate objectives and that civil society has a responsibility to understand them if it wants to work effectively with the private sector in solving social problems;
- Establish a "watchdog" tribunal made up of legal professionals to monitor the media's treatment of women, and when appropriate bring cases to the tribunal to draw attention to the media's social responsibility regarding women.