

*SEMINAR: Women in labor law
and work-family life balance
in the MENA region*



Labor law and work-family life balance in the MENA region. Situation and problems

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« ... A reconciliation of rights»

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would first of all like to greet you, and to praise the idea of organizing a seminar that aims to seek legislation reconciling the two rights currently faced in women's lives: their right to work, to succeed in their professional lives and their right to assume their family life. A process of reconciliation that is still far from being achieved in our region of the Middle East and North Africa. So I thank the "Euro Arab Network for Development and Integration" for having given me the honour of being here with you, and to share together our current status as working women, and our future prospects. My speech is an introduction to the magnitude of this reconciliation that aspires to the integrity and complete human development of women, to the opportunities of this process at a social, cultural and even economic level. This general consideration requires a prior cultural position by the legislator, firstly regarding the person and the role of women, the concept and role of the family, or in other words, a basic fundamental choice.

Approaches that can help reflection

- 1- **Thinking about employment law regarding women and the demands of their family life brings to mind for us, in my opinion, the debates of the last century, agitated by the stirring effects of the industrial revolution when economic matters and an interest in productivity were more important than human matters. Today we may wonder: to what extent would economic progress be real and viable if it occurred at the expense of women, of their basic needs that are ignored by the process of productivity and profitability, such as family life or the demands of motherhood, for example? Are women, as females, really, fully-fledged human beings who enjoy all rights and duties?**
- 2- **Is it really possible to develop a productive strategy, to establish fair, lasting and effective employment law if it is not in harmony with the nature of man, which makes him happy and is his reason for being? Is it possible in this respect for him to continue to avoid his distinguishing marks and his supremacy with respect to any system, when he himself is the ultimate reason for any enterprise?**
- 3- **What consideration should the legislator give, from which socio-cultural consensus, to the place and value of family in society? As for the structure of society, is it not essential that this natural institution should precede any social order? Is it not essential with respect to the socialization process of human beings, to their relational dimension, their mental balance, openness and emotional fulfilment? Is a successful family not a school par excellence that gives society so many essential values for its humanization? A natural, unique and irreplaceable school in which man identifies with its dignity, loved for what he is, beyond his wounds and failures, at any age and in any situation. Is a successful family not an element of stability, peace, social integration and solidarity, a harmonious meeting place between unequals? Finally, is a successful family not a positive economic factor that could reduce the costs of a social fund in immense demand? Because it is respected and supported would a successful family not be a factor in increased profitability and safer and more balanced progress?**

At present, NGOs prefer to deal with social needs by classifying individuals or "beneficiary" organizations according to age categories or types of needs (the elderly, people with special needs, the sick, children, female victims of violence ...), and the family never figures on the list even though it may be an ideal partnership framework to simplify and facilitate intervention.

Some deductions

- 4- Safeguarding the family to have greater peace and social stability forces the authorities to take the necessary steps that help the different players to carry out their tasks successfully, especially the mother specifically intended to be present with her children. It should be noted that any investment in this area may increase opportunities and promote mutual interests: those of women themselves, of children, family and society as a whole. A woman aided by the law is a more capable and effective citizen.**

- 5- Allowing women to reconcile their professional and working life means wanting to and knowing how to invent solutions and “tricks” that are in the end the telltale signs of an intelligent strategic choice that consists in opting for an economy and social policy to suit our humanity and dignity.**

- 6- The challenge would therefore consist in the ability to achieve the reconciliation of various complementary rights: a child's right to maternal and family warmth; the right of women to succeed in their motherhood and a professional life that will allow them to make a specific contribution that is essential to social development; the right of society to benefit from the talents of women without having to renounce uplifting family riches.**

In conclusion, I do not think there is any shortage of examples and experience to help avoid the deviation of an alienating choice. Two efforts must be maintained to achieve a healthy and lasting recovery process: an effort by the woman herself who must not give in by sacrificing essential things, a serious, sustained commitment at the various social organizations that should promote awareness of the alarming situation and encourage appropriate solutions. A position by the legislator that is based on a healthy and respectful view of man's dignity should achieve real and specific harmonization of rights that are essentially complementary.