

Statement by
Dr Hussein A. Gezairy
WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean

On the occasion of
International Women's Day 2010: Equal rights, equal opportunities: Progress for all
Monday, March 08, 2010

Today is International Women's Day. Let me join you in celebrating and acknowledging the contribution and meaning that our mothers, wives, grandmothers, sisters, daughters, female colleagues and friends, and indeed all women, bring to all our lives. The theme for International Women's Day 2010 is *Equal rights, equal opportunities: Progress for all*. This in perfect alignment with Article 1 of the WHO constitution, which states that the objective of the World Health Organization shall be the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health. Health policies and programmes must address the underlying social determinants of health, including gender inequalities, if they are to improve women's and men's health and achieve health for all. WHO recognizes that the 'all' targeted in "health for all" comprises diverse women and men, who do not all have the same opportunities to secure their optimal health. It is our responsibility to ensure that health systems address the distinct and differential needs of women and men, especially those who are most vulnerable.

15 years ago the Beijing Declaration, issued by the Fourth World Conference on Women, made it clear to all women and girls that equality is their inalienable right. The third Millennium Development Goal – to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment – confirms the Beijing Declaration. The 2007 World Health Assembly, in resolution WHA60.25, similarly affirmed the Beijing Declaration and urged WHO's Member States to formulate national strategies for addressing gender inequality in health policies, programmes and research. And in November 2009 Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General, launched the global report entitled: *Women and Health. Today's evidence, tomorrow's agenda*, again reaffirming the human right of women and girls across the life cycle to equal opportunities for optimal health.

We can all agree that women and girls are entitled to equal rights and equal opportunities to promote and protect their health. This includes the right to education. The high levels of illiteracy that persist in some parts of the Region not only hamper women's health and development but health and development as a whole. WHO is working with Member States and United Nations partners to ensure that those rights to health are attained. Today we celebrate progress towards those goals, and reaffirm WHO's commitment to their full achievement. Fellow colleagues and staff members, please join me in celebrating International Woman's Day, and thanking our mothers, wives, grandmothers, daughters, sisters and female friends for all the meaning they bring to our lives.