

## **MENA regional meeting**

On August 29 and September 4, the Middle East and North Africa region of the World March of Women held its regional meeting.

About 8 countries from the Middle East and North Africa region participated in the virtual sessions through Zoom in a meeting that is also a preparation for the international conference to be held in October 2021.

The meeting was opened with an opening statement by the regional coordinator and member of the International Committee, Rubah Odeh, with a presentation on the struggle of women in the region, despite the challenges faced by women and their ability to complete the march until we are all free. Also Khadija Ryadi, coordinator from Morocco made an analysis of the context.

A total of 33 women from Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Kurdistan, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco attended the meeting.

Although the meeting was online it was very coordinated. At the meeting, each country presented its own situation.

The meeting was an enriching occasion to come together and discuss their actions and concerns. The Delegate women presented their situation and struggles in their own countries/regions in the form of reports. Thus, it became clear how common the women's problems of all countries are. All of the women came from different cultures and backgrounds but they were united in a common women's struggle.

The meeting was successful in the sense that it allowed each of the countries to present their situation and know about the diverging and similar issues of the participating countries. It also allowed for a communal thinking about the region.

This meeting came to be after the expansion of our group, which has in the last year witnessed the inclusion of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and finally Algeria, which all include young women from different areas, classes, and cultural backgrounds. It is worth mentioning that the Algerian coordination, which left after the international meeting in Bilbao 2018, then rejoined and attended for the first time in the regional meeting after coordination with it, thanks to the women's school in which the Algerian sisters participated, where they were contacted through it.

In the context of this meeting, the situation of women under occupation in Palestine was a crucial discussion point. Specifically, the Palestinian comrades spoke of the situation of women political prisoners in Israeli jails, and the dire conditions they have to go through, specifically our comrades Khitam Saafin and Khalida Jarrar.

The topic discussed at the meeting was the situation of political female detainees. Particularly, the situation of female prisoners who contributed to the women's struggle in Palestine and Kurdistan was mentioned. Mostly women are affected; Political pressures, economic crises, violation of freedoms, all kinds of violence against women by the state and society, the situation of women with the corona virus were discussed too.

The meeting also discussed the situation In Iraq, Jordan, Kurdistan, Lebanon, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, where the common denominator was the supplementary exploitation and abuse women suffer from. The meeting was an opportunity to discuss the situation in the region. In particular, the repercussions of wars and armed conflicts on women, which pay a heavy price for them; economic crises and the almost complete deterioration of public services in many countries; The fragility of the political situation in our countries is the reason for the absence of democracy, the dominance of repression and the systematic violation of freedoms. Violence against women in very serious forms including femicide, which has increased in the context of COVID; Exploitation of the health crisis by the existing authoritarian regimes by

tightening the screws around the citizens to control the public space and ban the various forms of expression that are suppressed using political arrests and trials. The meeting also discussed the struggles of working women in our region, whose conditions have deteriorated terribly under the pandemic and emergency laws imposed by the regimes. Also among the preoccupations that dominated the discussion was the issue of alliances that must be built to unify efforts while dwelling on the difficulties facing us in this regard.

#### **Advances facing the international agenda from the region's experience:**

- The inclusion of 4 more countries into our regional group is definitely an advancement of our action. There is a need to include more countries and territories, which is something we will be working on in the coming year.
- The different actions that we were able to perform this year, despite the pandemic, lockdown, and almost complete hibernation of political action, or else the grip of oppressive regimes and the occupation.
- The development and consolidation of the new groups that joined the March this year, in their respective countries, and their comparatively rapid growth in one of the most challenging years
- Expanding some national coordination enabling them to participate in local mobilizations such as: fifth international campaign organized on the occasion of on-line talks despite the difficult conditions of the pandemic, progress in the integration of the region into international activities, solidarity with the Palestinian people, and celebrations of October 17.
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#### **Challenges facing the international agenda from the region's experience:**

- Working under the pandemic, lockdown and political oppression.
- Strengthening the struggle of women against authoritarian regimes in the countries of the region: After the region witnessed many political turmoil 10 years ago, stability has not yet regained, making the gains made very fragile or even threatened by the deteriorating general conditions of the overwhelming majority of the peoples of our region, which poses a challenge real in front of our movement in the region.
- The discourse of liberal feminism through well-funded NGOs, which is in many of the MENA countries, hijacking the feminist discourse and coopting political action.
- Arrest of delegates due to political pressure, change of delegates.
- Despotic regimes in the region; pressures on women's struggle and labor.
- Women's struggle and strong alliances were prevented in the region where the masculine mentality, authoritarian states, fascism, racism and capitalism prevail.
- Language: There is a need for the Arabic language to be one of the March this requires human resources and logistical capabilities to provide interpretations, as the women of the MENA speak Arabic, despite the diversity of cultural identities, as some countries, especially in the Maghreb countries, where the majority of the population are Berbers, and their language and culture are still present.
- The challenge of building coalitions against the onslaught of capitalism and its predatory policies that prey on the poor, threaten women's achievements and increase their vulnerability. As a result, we are called upon to challenge the differences between the different anti-exploitation forces in each country, and to strengthen the struggle against the barbarism of capitalism.

### **The expectations of the region for the MMF International Meeting:**

- The Palestine Coordination recommended the necessity of international solidarity on the part of the World March towards the issue of women in Palestine, especially since Palestine is the only country that suffers from an occupation of its land, people and resources, emphasizing the adoption of the issue of demanding the liberation of all female prisoners and prisoners from the prisons of the occupation in all the struggle stations of the march and its activities in All of its formats.
- The inclusion of the Arabic language among the languages used by the march due to the large number of women in the region and the percentage of illiterate women who only speak Arabic, in order to be in harmony with the goals and axes of the march, which is to reach the feminist base in our coordination.
- Implementing political and technical schools for our region and respective countries. (Feminism, political economy theory, sexual and reproductive health, media, arts, etc., as well as technical trainings in painting, writing, music, etc.)
- Our opposition to religious extremism and patriarchal thought must be at the fore of global solidarity
- Giving priority to the worsening economic and social crisis that increases the poverty and vulnerability of the situation of women in our region and in the world.
- Adding struggle stations to the agenda of the World March:
  - 1- **March 30**, the anniversary of the Palestinian Land Day as a global solidarity station with the Palestinian people, and in particular as the last stronghold of settler colonialism
  - 2- **November 29**, the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, as it is a global day and requires the global march of international solidarity on this day that marks the day of the partition of Palestine.
  - 3- Creation of **a global day against violent religious** extremism and solidarity with its victims and against all forms of terrorism practiced by extremist groups, states and occupation everywhere