

Report by Malika Benarab-Attou:
Women and illiteracy in the Euro–Mediterranean Region

Committee on women's rights in the Euro-Mediterranean countries

- Having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948,
 - Having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights entered into force on 23 March 1976,
 - Having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 2 September 1989 and the Optional Protocols,
 - Having regard to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 18 December 1979,
 - Having regard to the World Education Forum held in Dakar from 26 to 28 April 2000 and its Framework for Action entitled: Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments,
 - Having regard to Decision No 1098/2008/CE of the European Parliament and the Council of 22 October 2008 on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010),
 - Having regard to the Millennium Development Goals Report 2010,
- A. Whereas education is a fundamental right according to which every person- child, teenager and adult - shall benefit from an education designed to meet the basic learning needs, in the broadest sense of the term;
- B. Considering that the right to education is essential to the exercise of all other rights and fundamental freedoms; considering that it aims both to promote individual freedom and autonomy and to allow effective participation in society;
- C. Whereas one of the eight Millennium Development Goals aims at achieving universal primary education for all; whereas 189 UN member states are signatories of the Declaration of 23 September 2000 on the MDGs and committed themselves to meet its targets by 2015;
- D. Whereas, according to statistics from the UNESCO and the UNDP, illiteracy in Arab countries was estimated at 27.6% between 2005 and 2008, meaning 60 million people including 39 million women;
- E. Considering that gender discrimination is a major obstacle to the exercise of the right to education and underlining, to this end, the importance of improving and strengthening women literacy in order to promote girls' education;**
- F. Whereas progress has been made in recent years in terms of access to primary education especially in Southern Mediterranean countries; stressing the continuing

gap between boys and girls, noting that 66% of non-enrolled school-age children in North Africa are girls, according to the 2010 report on the MDGs;

G. Whereas there are strong correlations between illiteracy and poverty and differences between rural and urban areas remain important; whereas other factors related to quality of life such as violence, disability, conflicts and social disintegration have a strong impact on the possibilities to access to education;

H. Whereas education has a vital role to play in preventing conflict and building long-lasting stability and peace;

I. Whereas a decrease of illiteracy and better access to education would allow more space for debate and freedom in Southern Mediterranean countries affected by recent democratic movements;

1. Welcomes all initiatives - global conferences, national action plans, measures and strategies taken at the international, European and national levels in order to promote literacy and access to education; considers that, despite the progress accomplished, fight against illiteracy must be a top priority for all Euro-Mediterranean countries;

2. Believes that the right to education, as a fundamental right, is both a matter of public health and a prerequisite to sustainable development; as such, recalls the commitments from UN Members' states to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals by 2015;

3. Stresses that the education of girls remains a major challenge and stresses the importance of eliminating gender inequalities in primary and secondary schools, of achieving equality by ensuring fair and unrestricted access, for girls and women, to basic and quality education, with equal chance of success;

4. Recalls that the right to education as an inclusive principle should include not only formal education but also early childhood education and literacy programs and acquisition of skills that are useful in everyday's life; hereby stresses the importance of using both formal and informal approaches in order to take into account the needs of disadvantaged people, including rural population and nomads in isolated areas, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, youth and adults affected by some conflicts;

5. Calls upon all Euro-Mediterranean countries to fully implement all international conventions relating to children's rights, access to education for all and equality of opportunity between men and women, to lift existing reserves to those rights and translate them into national legislation;

6. Believes that the European Neighbourhood Policy should put greater emphasis on the right to education and make it a priority within the framework of its strategic revision, using all technical and financial means to its disposal in order to support ambitious and holistic literacy programmes;

7. Suggests to develop partnerships between schools of the two sides of the Mediterranean and to favour establishments promoting girls education and, more broadly, respecting the right to public, quality, free and accessible education for all;

8. Underlines that the implementation of literacy policies must be part of a more global programme, aiming to establish political, economic and cultural conditions favourable to literacy for all;

9. Recommends that policies, programmes and literacy projects be conceived on the basis of concrete and necessarily differentiated demand of populations, and be completed by research and evaluation programmes.