



Under the Auspices of the Grand Imam

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Workshop Title:

"Toward Enhancing The Faith-Based Organizations' Role in Arab States in the Field of Sexual and Reproductive Health Beyond 2015"

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We, the participants at this workshop, emphasize that Al-Azhar's role is of paramount importance which is characterized by being fair and moderate institution in the Islamic world. We appreciate Al-Azhar's role in addressing the contemporary issues and we extend our gratitude to the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research, affiliated to Al-Azhar University, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Arab States Regional Office for organizing this workshop. After the presentation of the national and the global reviews data, we recognized that the promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive health and the protection of reproductive rights, as well as addressing the gender-based violence (GBV) are necessary not only to achieve social justice and ensure sound healthy life style but also to fulfill national and international commitments towards sustainable development, including the international development agenda beyond 2015, therefore we underscore the following points:

1. We appeal to the faith-based organizations in the Arab States to adopt the comprehensive reproductive health concept which copes with life cycle; protect females from early marriage and pregnancy and early child birth; provide quality information and services to enable married couples in all Arab States to take appropriate reproductive decisions based on sound knowledge and exercising their rights to access quality services without any financial, cultural or institutional or other hindrances, all within the frameworks of divine religions.
2. We invite the Arab governments to pay special and intense attention to Adolescents and youth reproductive health within the framework of divine religions as those categories are most vulnerable to health risks, particularly HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases.

3. The faith-based organizations call upon the Arab governments to adopt preventive and remedial measures for improving child health and reducing maternal morbidity and mortality and protecting mothers against risks through improving health services and systems, including provision of family planning services and supportive infrastructure, and rectifying reproductive behaviors in accordance with the divine frameworks.

4. The faith-based organizations call on the Arab governments to support scientific research and studies in all areas of reproductive health and rights, including child and maternal mortality, harmful practices, early pregnancy and violence against women and girls.

5. The faith-based organizations call for teaching age and culture appropriate sex education, according to the divine teachings in schools and universities taking into account the sex differences and life skills.

6. Islam, similar to all other divine religions, is the religion of mercy and equality whose teachings forbids stigma and discrimination. Accordingly, we ask for the protection of human rights for those living with HIV/AIDS and the prohibition of all forms of stigmatization and discrimination and violence against them.

7. Based on the teachings of divine preaching that exalt motherhood and maternity, we underscore the respect and enforcement of legislations which focus on the reproductive health rights of working women, such as maternity leave and childcare vacations.

8. Islam, similar to all other divine religions, exalts and honors woman and prohibits discrimination based on gender, religion or sex. Therefore, we urge the Arab governments to incorporate mechanisms that realize the dimension of gender and to empower women and abolish all forms of discrimination against women in the holistic and sectoral development strategies and plans in order to provide equal opportunities in education and access to health services, employment and resource management. We also urge the governments to adopt decisions and laws that augment participation of women in political and legislative decisions.

9. Islam fights all forms of violence, especially those committed against women and female children. Therefore, we call for taking appropriate and effective measures for disseminating and applying the national and international standards and procedures for fighting violence against woman in compliance with the divine legislations.

10. Based on the unequivocal stance of Islam against practices that cause harm to maternal health, we call for the elimination of child and forced marriage; the prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation as soon as possible; and the prohibition of practices that violate the reproductive rights of women and adolescent girls, such as forced sterilization and abortion or discrimination in education and employment on the basis of pregnancy and maternity or age or family status.

11. The faith-based organizations promote the adoption of national interest-based policies for tackling the problems of reproductive health and addressing GBV without having the source of funding as a deterrent.

12. The faith-based organizations intensify their communication with parliamentarians, policy makers and political leaders to demonstrate the position of divine religions regarding reproductive health issues and GBV.

Recommendations

1. To disseminate knowledge and correct misconceptions through speeches and representation; to begin with the points of agreement with others; and to issue publications, books and religious opinions supporting this topic;

2. To improve behavior through enacting legislations and laws and complying with the principles of justice, equality and dignity;

3. To provide victims and male and female survivors of GBV with protection through enactment of laws and criminalization of violence;

4. To encourage dialogue on various issues with religious institutions; to revive the heedful and balanced religious discourse; and to pay attention to interactive communication;

5. To emphasize the translation of convictions into positive behaviors

6. To raise awareness about the sexually-transmitted diseases and eliminate the misconceptions about them by stating that they are like any other diseases that afflict people and should be treated as a religious commandment, and people may not conceal being afflicted or feel ashamed to approach medical services for treatment,

7. To encourage the provision of free of charge treatment to patients and encourage the well-to-do people to give financial support;

8. To develop and enhance the capacities of Muslim and other preachers;

9. To develop comprehensive programs on medical and jurisprudential aspects for the training of physicians, workers and imams working in the health and safe motherhood field;

10. To introduce, in agreement with the concerned ministries, the aspects of health culture and safe motherhood into the courses of religions curriculum in schools and universities;

11. To support scientific research on reproductive health, such as projects and seminars in areas relating to societal opinion;

12. To introduce a premarital education course including information on reproductive and sexual health as a requirement, prior to the conclusion of any marriage contract,

13. To develop educational media programs on reproductive and sexual health in all mass media;
14. To coordinate among religious, educational, health and media institutions for developing educational programs on reproductive and sexual health through a joint committee, including in humanitarian settings and war/conflict affected zones and those affected thereby;
15. To call upon the faith-based organizations and religion specialists to pay attentive listening to and understanding of youth problems and their references so as to render programs and messages responsive to their actual needs;
16. To establish a board of trustees or coordinating council for the faith-based organizations in the Arab States and to call on the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the United Nations Population Fund to follow up on that matter based on the agreements reached during this workshop.