

**Declaration Of**  
**"The First International Conference and Exhibition on Women and Trade"**  
**Tehran, Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines**  
**July 13-14,2010**

The First International Conference and Exhibition on Women and Trade was held in Tehran, Iran from 13 to 14 July 2010, under the auspices of Iran Chamber of Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines, and close cooperation of UNCTAD. The main objectives of the Conference were: to promote women entrepreneurship, to enhance women presence in foreign trade; to identify legal, structural and cultural challenges women face in their economic and social activities, offering some possible solutions; and to explore partnership among the chambers, national governments and international organisation to assist women in international trade. Participants from the following countries attended the Conference: Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Canada, Iran, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Poland, Romania, Tajikistan and Turkey. The Conference was also attended by the resident Coordinator of the United Nations in Iran; the representatives of UNCTAD, ECO, and the Federation of D-8 Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

The Conference was attended by stakeholders from different sectors, combining representatives of Government, the private sector and civil society. The discussions were organised in four panels: Success Stories of Women Entrepreneurs in the World, Women Challenges and Opportunities in Trade, Capacity Building for Women in International Organisations, and Women and Civil Society. Presentations were followed by interactive discussions. There was a consensus that such events have important awareness and advocacy effects and those chambers as umbrella organisation of private sector have important responsibilities to play. The need for creation of an enabling environment in which women entrepreneurship could prosper was emphasised.

The Conference provided a forum for exchange of views and experiences among participants. It also provided the opportunity for the women entrepreneurs to bring to the attention of national governments some of their major problems.

The main factors that are obstacles to greater benefits and increased growth of enterprises run by women, and therefore limiting an equitable women's participation in economy and trade, might be summarized a below:

- (a) limited access to credit for women entrepreneurs;
- (b) cultural barriers that may restrict women's contacts with institutions;
- (c) women's lesser control over capital assets that could be collateralized to secure credit;
- (d) lesser networking opportunities including for access to information, and their lesser access to skill development and capacity building programmes.

Proposals for a more active participation of women in trade include recommendations for actions at the national and international levels.

At the national level they include:

- (a) identification of viable sectors that at the same time are female-labor intensive;
- (b) creation of a dynamic and competitive export sector with more participation of women;
- (c) identification of key sectors in national export strategy where women constitute the major labor force and where women have potential for entrepreneurship and investment;
- (d) enhancing the capacity of women to formulate bankable project proposals;
- (e) building entrepreneurial competencies among existing and potential women exporters;

(f) strengthening capacities and competencies of the private sector and private sectors institutions - such as chambers of commerce — for advocacy, and measures conducive to mainstreaming women into trade. Other initiatives to encourage establishment of enterprises by women could include provision of financial incentives to women entrepreneurs such as provision of soft loans and grants; reduced interest rates and reduced fees on loans; extension of tax exemptions, in particular for those regions that are in dire need of job creation; facilities with respect to social security — a reduced rate for contribution from women entrepreneurs; and facilities with respect to provision of services in industrial zones (such as water and power).

Governments and chambers should broaden their policy objectives, frameworks and activities with respect to trade and women by incorporating aspects such as those referred to above. Networking among women entrepreneurs was identified as an important vehicle for the growth of enterprises owned and managed by women, and for enhanced contribution of such enterprises in the development process of the country.

A stimulating policy could perhaps be institution of rules that would favor creation of enterprises owned and run by women entrepreneurs and in which women constitute the main and major labor force. This however should be carefully weighed so as to avoid discrimination and institutionalisation of "gender-segregated practices". In order to follow up on the recommendations of the Conference, participating countries may consider organisation of "National workshops", within a specific time frame, e.g. six months from now. They also agreed to create and join a follow up committee that will act under the auspices of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines.

At inter regional level initiatives should be undertaken for exchange of experiences and best practices, particularly among those countries of the region having similar cultural and social Framework.

At the international level, in view of the recent creation of a new United Nations entity for women, "UN Women", close working relations should be established with that entity for the benefit of women entrepreneurs. The host institution of the Conference — Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines — would act — through the Government and the United Nations Resident Coordinator — as the liaison with the "UN Women", and if required requests Governments and institutions represented in this Conference to support its initiatives. The Chamber in cooperation with the UN Resident Coordinator, will also establish

contacts with the UN Inter-Agency on Trade and Productive Capacity in view of coordinated assistance to women entrepreneurs in Iran. The Cluster is coordinated by UNCTAD that initiated an important program on trade and gender.

Two major factors hindering establishment and / or growth of women entrepreneurship are difficulties associated with access to credit, and limited existing and potential capacity of women to venture into a business of their own. The Conference may therefore wish to consider establishment of a "national" financial institution in the form of a "development fund" or a bank-or any other form of financial institution. The terms of reference of the Bank would be:

- (a) Provide Micro-credits to women entrepreneurs running enterprises that employ mainly women; and
- (b) Provide financing for training and capacity building programmes.

Countries may also consider creation of regional — at the country level — cooperatives to provide financing facilities to women entrepreneurs operating at microenterprises level.