

**Forward
Global
Women**



Convening for Peace

Summary Report of the
FORWARD GLOBAL WOMEN
2020 e-CONVENING

The Social & Economic Impact of COVID-19 on
Women & Girls in the MENA Region

October 18, 2020

Introduction

Due to the worldwide pandemic, Forward Global Women (FGW) was unable to bring together our network of women leaders for our annual in-person convening in 2020. As an alternative, we organized our first e-Convening and chose as our topic *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Girls in the MENA Region*. It was held October 18, 2020, via Zoom.

FGW's objectives for the e-Convening were three-fold:

1. To address the social and economic impact of COVID- 19 on women and girls in the MENA region from local, national, and regional perspectives.
2. To assess how the pandemic has influenced women's participation in economic and social settings across the MENA region.
3. To provide a platform for women leaders to communicate with one another and form networks to work on critical issues facing women in their communities due to the pandemic.

Planning and Organization

FGW currently has teams representing Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and the US. In order to fully engage our membership in the planning of the e-Convening, each team leader was asked to consult with their members and put forward a speaker that could address an element of the pandemic and its impact on their country. We limited the agenda to five speakers in order to allow each one adequate time to present while keeping the e-Convening to a reasonable length (2.5 hours).

The individuals below, led by FGW President Rina Bar Tal, were responsible for building a substantive and cohesive agenda and addressing the technical aspects of the e-Convening. Many thanks go out to the following for their efforts:

Planning Team

- Rina Bar Tal, Israeli Team Leader and FGW President
- Dr. Fatima Sadiqi, Moroccan Team

Team Leaders

- Huda Abuaquob, Palestine
- Loubna Amhair, Morocco
- Mary Hatter Sweis, Jordan
- Amira Marzouk, Tunisia

Logistics Team

- Orit Zuretz, Israeli Team
- Patricia Davis, US Team
- Mary Jo McGuire, US Team
- Sandy Pappas, US Team and FGW Executive Director
- Rachel Carlson, FGW Program Director

e-Convening Agenda and Speakers



WELCOME and OPENING REMARKS

Sandy Pappas, US, is a Minnesota State Senator and Co-Founder and Executive Director of Forward Global Women.



Shorouq Shatnawi, Jordan, is a consultant, trainer, national gender advisor and founder of SHOURA for Building National Consensus. Shorouq presented on the **Economic Hindrances Affecting Women Working in the Informal Labor Market in Jordan during COVID-19**.



Samah Saliame, Palestine, is a social worker, community activist and feminist. She is the founder of Arab Women in the Center (AWC), an NGO that seeks to promote the status of women in the cities of Ramla, Lod and Jaffa and combat gender-based violence against women. Samah spoke about **Collaborations Between Women's Organizations in Palestine & Israel During COVID-19**.



Dr. Yael Winter Shafran, Israel, is an OB-GYN with Kaplan Medical Center in Israel. She addressed the topic **Women in Medicine in Israel: Challenges During the COVID-19 Pandemic**. She also shared the obstacles she faces as a woman doctor.



Dr. Zaynab El Bernoussi, Morocco, is a Professor of International Politics at the International University of Rabat, a member of the Beirut Forum, and a North Africa Representative on the Executive Committee of the International Studies Association Global South Caucus. She presented on the topic of **Domestic Violence Under COVID-19 Conditions in Morocco**.



Dr. Boutheina Ben Hassine, Tunisia, is a member of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sousse, Tunisia, and has participated as a member of FGW's Tunisian Team. She presented on the **Impact of COVID-19 on Girls and Women in Education in Tunisia**.



REFLECTION and THANKS

Dr. Fatima Sadiqi, Morocco, is a Professor of Linguistics and Gender Studies, University of Fez, and serves on the Board of Directors of Forward Global Women



CLOSING REMARKS

Rina Bar Tal, Israel, is a Co-Founder and President of Forward Global Women.



MODERATOR

Mary Jo McGuire, US, is a Ramsey County (Minnesota) Commissioner and Chair of the Board of Forward Global Women

For inspiration during the e-Convening, two videos were shared with our participants:

- The video “Still I Rise” by poet Maya Angelou.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fthugMaPe0Y>
- The music video “Prayer for the Mothers” by Israeli artist Yael Deckelbaum, filmed in 2016 during the March for Hope, an event organized by Women Wage Peace.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyFM-pWdqrY>



Key Points from Speakers

ECONOMIC

- Women have extremely limited **economic rights** in the private sector, and this has gotten worse during the pandemic.
- Another hindrance to women in the labor force is that MENA societies rely on **caregiving from women**, and this need has deepened with COVID-19.
- Women who have been able to continue working during the pandemic have faced a **double burden** as they are also responsible for the care of their children and families.
- Despite the challenges, **MENA women take an active role** in addressing labor inequities, calling out sexism, and opposing violence against women and girls.

EDUCATION

- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and increased **educational disparities** between girls and boys.
- The **digital divide** has created new challenges for all students and teachers – 51 percent do not have access to computers or the internet.
- The **school dropout rate has increased**, especially for girls in rural areas, but there is a lack of hard statistics and data.

HEALTH CARE

- More women are skipping prenatal check-ups because they are either locked down or are nervous about leaving home. They are also **nervous about potential COVID exposure** at the hospital.
- Because of the pandemic, the **birth experience** for women has become more clinical, cold and isolated.

SECURITY / SAFETY

- Many women have had to leave their jobs at NGOs during the lockdowns so these organizations have not been able to provide adequate assistance to women in need, especially in regard to **gender-based violence**.
- In the absence of services, women have pulled together to **collaborate and organize** to help women living in poverty and facing gender-based violence.
- **The National Action Plan on "Women, Peace & Security"** is considered the primary vehicle for addressing the needs of women during conflict and emergencies. Some MENA countries have recently adapted it to also address the needs of women during epidemics, including the current pandemic.
- However, national legislation is still deficient in protecting women from violence, exclusion and marginalization, situations that occur more frequently during conflict, emergencies and epidemics. Governments and civil society institutions must work on legislation to **guarantee protection and justice for women** in these contexts.

Participants

Due to the online nature of this year's convening, FGW was able to invite a much larger group of participants than our in-person convenings allow. As a result, 89 people registered to attend, doubling our usual reach. Actual attendees numbered at 52 over the course of the e-Convening. Participants included past and future conveners, activists and policymakers engaged on MENA issues, and current and potential funders.



Plans for 2021

We are encouraged by the interest in FGW events as reflected in the registration for the e-Convening. It is our intent to build on this going forward. For 2021, we are planning to conduct a series of online events (3-5) throughout the year and ideally, if possible, an in-person convening in late summer or fall.

For more information or to support our work, please contact:

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About Forward Global Women

Forward Global Women (FGW) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that promotes the voices and perspectives of women leaders as agents of peace. Through annual convenings, research projects and coordinated actions, we seek to empower and engage women to help transform conflicts within the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) into sustainable peaceful relationships. FGW is based in St. Paul, Minnesota, US.

OUR MISSION

Forward Global Women fosters the development of peacemakers by bringing together women leaders and activists from the MENA region to share knowledge and grow skills that help advance and facilitate sustainable peace, security and co-existence for the well-being of all.

OUR CORE VALUES

- We believe the meaningful participation of women in all stages of the peace process is imperative to achieving sustainable peace.
- We believe that non-violent movements are the most effective way to push the peace process forward.
- We believe empathy is critical to achieving a just peace in the MENA region and that providing opportunities for women to share ideas, experiences and narratives will promote understanding.
- We believe that educating women and girls is the key to educating families and communities.
- We believe in the development of women as leaders and that having more women in leadership will further the pursuit of peace in the region and bring positive change to the MENA countries.

OUR OBJECTIVES

- To create a space for women from the MENA region and the US to have an inspiring convening of connections, conversations and relationship-building through a dialogical engagement with old and new paradigms.
- To transform conflict into more sustainable, peaceful relationships that are based upon principles of justice and equality to build support networks that cross geographic, political and cultural boundaries.
- To facilitate new understandings of political and social problems through the lens of women leaders and to pursue potential solutions for which no answers or pathways currently exist.

ANNUAL CONVENINGS

On an annual basis since 2011, FGW has brought together 25-30 women leaders and policymakers from government, academia and civil society from the Middle East, North Africa and the US, with the goal of advancing the role of women in the peace process.

These convenings allow women in the MENA region to build networks and discuss the challenges that women face around security and conflict in their home countries, identify areas of common ground, and seek ways for women to lead transformational change. Our past convenings and topics are:

2020 The Social and Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Girls in the MENA Region
e-Convening

2019 The Impact of Climate Change on Women and Girls in the MENA Region
Marrakech, Morocco

2018 Education as a Mobilization Tool / Women in Politics
Washington, DC, US



Morocco convening, July 2019

2017 Changing the Narrative: Women's Role in Countering Violent Extremism
Oslo, Norway

2016 Peacemaking, Women's Rights and Women and Children Refugees
Nicosia, Cyprus

2015 Women's Challenges for Security, Peace, Rights and Equality in the Middle East: Reducing Vulnerability and Building Resilience
Minneapolis, MN, US

2014 Women, Peace and Security: Implementing UNSCR 1325 in the MENA Region
Berlin, Germany

2013 Women's Participation in Peacebuilding and Leadership
St. Paul, MN, US

2011 Inaugural Global Women's Leadership Convening
St. Paul, MN, US

SPECIAL PROJECTS

In addition to our annual convenings, FGW undertakes periodic projects designed to bolster peacebuilding efforts and empower women from the MENA Region. These include the following:

- **Survey and Study on Women and Security (2014-2017)**

Through personal interviews, women from Israel, Jordan, and Morocco shared their views and concerns about the state of security in their lives and the MENA region – what security means to them, to what

degree they feel secure, and what level of security they still seek. A report is on the FGW website with plans to publish.

▪ **March for Hope and Journey to Peace Demonstrations (October 2016 ongoing)**

Women Wage Peace, an Israeli NGO, organized a very special meeting at the Dead Sea in 2016 – Kaser el Yahud – the womb of the earth. There, Israeli women marching from the Allenby Bridge in Jerusalem met up with Palestinian women marching from Jericho. Together they prayed for peace, led by Leymah Gbowee, Nobel Prize peace winner from Liberia. To amplify this message for peace, FGW organized social media and solidarity events in the participating countries we represent.

▪ **Rula Quawas Research Fellowship (2019 ongoing)**

In honor of our late co-founder and with the support from the Quawas family, FGW has established an annual research fellowship to be awarded to a young female scholar from the MENA region. The fellowship recipient is required to produce a white paper on an issue relevant to FGW’s mission.

OUR FOUNDERS



L to R: Bar Tal, Quawas, Pappas

SANDY PAPPAS, Minnesota State Senator and former Senate President

RINA BAR TAL, former Chair, Israel Women’s Network and former Deputy Mayor of R’anana

The late **DR. RULA QUAWAS** (1960-2017), Professor of American Literature and Feminist Theory and founding Director of the Center for Women’s Studies at the University of Jordan, co-founder of the Jordanian National Commission for Women

FGW

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- **Rina Bar Tal** – Former Chair of the Israel Women’s Network, Israel, FGW Co-Founder & Board President
- **Sandy Pappas** – Minnesota State Senator and former Senate President, St. Paul, Minnesota, US, FGW Co-Founder & Executive Director, non-voting Board Member
- **Mary Jo McGuire** – Ramsey County (MN) Commissioner, Former Minnesota State Representative and State Senator, St. Paul, Minnesota, US, FGW Board Chair
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- **Mary Hatter Sweis** -- Women Helping Women Network, Amman, Jordan
- **Amira Marzouk** -- Former Member of Parliament, Tunis, Tunisia
- **Dr. Fatima Sadiqi** -- Professor of Linguistics and Gender Studies, University of Fez, Fez, Morocco
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- **Phyllis Kahn** -- Former Minnesota State Representative, St. Paul, Minnesota, US, FGW Ex Officio Board Member