

## DIHAD 2014 – Closing Remarks

(by H.E. Ms. Shaima Al Zarooni, CEO, International Humanitarian City (IHC), Dubai)

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are honored to be in the presence of all the organizations, among them our members and partners, in this year's DIHAD Conference.

With increasingly new challenges and repercussions rising from the rapid and ongoing incidents, disasters, and crises around the world, it is extremely important to build on humanitarian action and aid conferences like DIHAD now more than ever.

Equally, we cannot stress enough on the significance of this year's theme – Women and Aid, and the importance of recognizing the disproportionate amount of suffering but also the importance of women's role in development.

We are accustomed to hearing about women as victims of neglect and abuse, but what this DIHAD highlighted so often was how women can take the lead in solving major social and economic problems-- especially in areas like agriculture, nutrition and small-scale businesses. Women need to be empowered to be part of the solution to the economic challenges that affect them and their families.

We have concluded this conference by revisiting some fundamental topics that tackle what women face in war and disaster, and while we recognize the suffering and needs of all victims of conflict and disaster, we can all agree that the most vulnerable are children and women.

Women in particular, who are care providers for children and their families, experience conflict in a different way to men, and this has been a topic of debate for decades by people working on the field.

The vulnerability of women as a group when armed conflict breaks out is a distinctive experience, in that, war intensifies the inequalities that exist particularly in underdeveloped areas, where women are generally powerless to recommend any preventative action in conflict situations.

Lessons learned from much of the ongoing conflicts as the crises in Syria and Central African Republic stress on the vulnerability of women as a group further, with the many horrific cases of violence and abuse against women, and their immobilized position in these situations.

As the crisis in Syria passes 3 years, millions of lives are devastated, and among them, the devastation of women and children puts an entire generation at risk of being lost for good. The figures of refugee influx have reached incredible heights, with millions of women displaced and more vulnerable than ever.

In the earliest days of the conflict, 70% of the aid shipments were from stocks maintained at the International Humanitarian City, and while our members continue to be heavily involved in aid operations, women and children still make up the majority of the refugee population and continue to bear the burden of this conflict in many ways.

They face serious threats to their safety and security, lack of access to basic services including those related to reproductive health. And many women, who now have to head their households, struggle to find a source of income to provide for themselves and their families.

Access to education has been blocked, and this is perhaps the most fundamental topic that should be addressed, as the empowerment of women would not be possible without education.

Investing in women is investing in the future. 2/3rds of the world's illiterate population are female, and women bear most of the responsibilities for meeting basic needs of the family, yet they are systematically denied the needful resources, information and freedom of action needed to fulfill these responsibilities.

Investing in women's education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty and prepare women for difficult situations, self-sufficiency and capable of building resilience.

After all, women are beneficiaries and aid providers, and educating women is key for enabling them to do so.

We have an old saying...

...which means that the woman makes up part of society, and the other part she has given birth to, therefor woman is society, and when we educate the woman we educate the whole society.

Together, we must push forward for greater efforts in providing this necessity to every girl and women in need, and ultimately pave way for leaders and role models as many of whom I see here today.

As mentioned, this conference has also shed light on how women are increasingly seen as an important part of the international development agenda.

Change agents and voices of leading agencies and activism such as Ertharin Cousin, Valerie Amos, Helen Clark, Kristalina Georgieva, Fumzil MLambo NGuka, and many, *many* more serve as an inspiration to all of us.

Our Chairperson, Her Highness Princess Haya has worked to focus political and media attention on the persistence of hunger and to promote the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. She has also sought greater attention to how we count and manage international aid to give more credit to Arab, Asian and private donors whose contributions have risen dramatically in recent years.

At the IHC, our mission continues to be inspired by Her Highness's guidance that humanity is all about giving, but it is also about enabling those who want to give.

Women certainly need to be empowered to give.

As the UAE's stance in the top 20 donors in the world, women in the UAE play a significant role in the humanitarian field.

As a progressive country, the UAE has been recognized for its efforts in the empowerment of women, and the female participation in decision-making positions.

Leading women in the UAE have played a key role in shaping the country's humanitarian culture as well as development, women like:

HH Sheikh Fatima bint Mubarak, Chairwoman of the General Women's Union

HH Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed Al Qasimi

HH Sheikha Shamsa bint Hamdan Al Nahyan

HH Sheikha Sheikha bint Saif al Nayhan

HE Sheikha Lubna bint Khalid bin Sultan Al Qasimi

Dr. Manal Taryam

The right of Emirati women to take part in the development of all areas of society is not only laid out in the UAE Constitution, but encouraged by our leaders through educational opportunities, leading career positions and various facilities.

Quote by HHSM: "It is not strange for a UAE woman to be an ambassador; she who proves herself merits praise and encouragement.

Women's participation and presence in both the private and public sectors is an important step towards boosting the economy through effective participation in different development fields, and with the legacy of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, women in the UAE are now at the forefront of both public and private sectors. A number of high-ranking government positions are filled by women, politically, financially, academically and culturally, for example there are currently 4 women ministers in Cabinet.

UAE remains committed to investing in women's potential and skills for further growth of the country's economy, and our governments provide us with the facilities required to encourage initiative and participation especially in development.

The need to address women's voices everywhere, and a vision for bettering this through encouraging and enabling the freedom of women to practice and strengthen their rights to education and basic necessities in the region and around the world especially in developing countries, are two essential factors we must remain committed to in order to progress on a global scale.

At the end of this conference, when we all go back to our organizations, our work, and our homes, I urge you to think about how you can each contribute to making this happen, by examining what you can individually do to make a change, however big or small in a woman's life and ultimately yours.

I thank you all for being part of DIHAD this year, and I look forward to seeing you all next year.