

Presentation by Heba El-Kholy at Roundtable on Gender and Citizenship at the 4<sup>th</sup> MDF, October, 2002.

Thank you Farida.

What I would like to do so to give you UNDP's perspective on three questions:

- (1) Why the focus on Gender and Citizenship
- (2) What the UNDP has done in this area so far
- (3) Where are we going with this initiative

Before doing so and to give you the broader picture of this initiative, let me make three comments:

- (1) This initiative is a sub-component of the Bureau of Arab States Regional Governance Programme (POGAR)
- (2) This is an initiative launched in partnership with regional and international partners, including Maroc 20/20 and the International Development Research Center (IDRC)
- (3) Most importantly that starting point and the platform for this initiative is the recently launched Arab Human Development Report, which has identified women's empowerment as one of the three key deficits in the Arab world. Arab women lag behind all other regions on practically all major development indicators relating to women. As Dr. Rima Khalaf, the Regional Director of UNDP's Bureau of Arab States, emphasized in her speech this morning, ensuring women's equal citizenship must be a key priority to address this deficit.

This is just to give you the overall context. Now let me go back to the initial three questions:

### Why Gender and Citizenship??

We in UNDP consider that a "citizenship framework" allows us to significantly broaden the debate on gender; it allows us to go beyond more traditional and often technocratic debates on "women's issues", to more fundamental discussion about the nature of the State in the Arab World and about the role of the family and kinship in the Arab social fabric.

We also believe that discussing gender within allow for a more nuanced analysis, a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and risks which have faced attempts at gender equality in the past and which will continue to face such attempts in the future.

It is not by accident that the most heated debates in the Arab World center on women's integration into public life. When women's access to the political

community is being debated, what in essence is being contested is the very and the very future nature of social and political organization in the region.

On a more positive note, we also believe that the notion of citizenship can be used strategically as a strong basis for mobilizing for change to empower Arab women. Citizenship is emerging as