The Voice of Libyan Women Presents

National Policies on Ensuring the Economic Empowerment of Women in Libya
Libya, a country in the midst of transition, serves as an inspiration for us all. It goes without question that there has been astonishing progress, however we cannot forget that we have now reached the most important milestone in Libya’s history - our transition to a truly transparent, representative and prosperous democratic state. We hope that the position we are in now - to write our constitution and readdress the most important laws and issues which most affect Libya and its citizens in the hopes that we can build up on our transition and encourage further development.

The Voice of Libyan Women would like to address Libya’s ultimate resource, which unfortunately has yet to receive the attention it deserves: women. Women make up over half of the Libyan population, and yet are not major players in Libya’s economy. In addition to their role in the workforce, women are also playing their extremely vital roles as mothers and community leaders. It is our hope that through policies and target initiatives, the women of Libya and the governing bodies, presently the NTC can work together to lay the foundation for economic growth that creates quality jobs, incomes and economic security for all Libyan women. So that Libyan women may be further promoted and encouraged to enter the economic sphere, as it is only through the economic empowerment of women that Libya can truly be an effective, equal and successful democracy.

Currently in Libya the majority of college graduates are women; this is a sure sign of the potential that Libyan women, with the proper support, have to truly drive the new Libyan economy, which is increasingly reliant on knowledge and innovation. Furthermore, following the February 17th Revolution, many women may have to become the sole breadwinner for their family, to ensure their families’ independence. Since women are over 50 percent of the population, the economic impact is more consequential for the economy than before.

It is women, who lead families, bond communities and truly reconcile a country, and it is only through their investment that Libya will realize its true potential.
Recommendations
**Capacity Building**

"Urge the Government to increase attention and focus on capacity-building courses to train and rehabilitate at home and abroad to raise the efficiency of women."

- One Voice Conference Recommendation, November 15th 2011

It is universal knowledge that targeted occupational and skill training programs are essential to support employees entering the workforce. We call upon the Libyan government to Invest in Libyan Women, as they are the economic future.

1. Establish “Foundation” occupational and skill set training programs for first time employees, particularly targeting adult female education.
2. Internships and orientations for recent university graduates in their own field, so that they may be able to better understand and attach to their selected career. The internships would be implemented in the final six months of their final year.
3. “Refreshment” courses for established employees, particularly in the sectors which currently employ the majority of female employees in Libya.
   1) Healthcare

Currently the majority of medical graduates and nurses in Libya are women who would particularly benefit from vocation specific capacity building. Through a variety of programs that re-fresh what nurses’, physician assistants, and primary care physicians have already learned, we ensure that one of the largest employers for women is promoting their growth & supporting their dedication. We request that these “Refreshment” courses begin as soon as possible, and be done regularly; sustained and supported by the Local Labour Councils, which are directly responsible to the Ministry of Labour as well as the Ministry of Health.

We also request that the government creates a grant program which would help create jobs in the health care sector, as they are jobs that are disproportionately held by women. We request these grants support small, rural clinics and hospitals in smaller cities.

We also propose an initiative to operate Nurse Managed Health Clinics to provide primary care to underserved, rural or vulnerable populations. These clinics will serve as invaluable training sites for more than 900 advanced practice nurses and will increase the percentage of women in rural community workforce.

2) Education

As the majority of the primary & secondary educators are women, it is our recommendation that there be greater support for teachers. Through the establishment of a “Continual Education Improvement Program”, which would be
formed off all ministries, and would work to refresh and support women already working the field of education.

4. The training of future employees, or employees in career-transition at Community Colleges, or Local Training Facilities. They are more convenient, which will cater to women who may not have access to transportation. They also have more flexible course schedules, and they work with businesses, industry, labour, and government to create tailored training programs to meet economic needs. We propose the use of Local Training Facilities or Community Colleges especially with illiterate women and women in rural communities.

**The Wage Gap & Women in Management**

In some of the world’s most developed countries, women still make a significant amount less than men, and are underrepresented in high levels of management and high paying industries. Libya is no different, as there is a slight gender wage gap in the private sector, influenced by the fact that management states that female availability is limited.

However, it is the main challenge of underrepresentation of women in managerial positions within Libyan owned companies. Women are graduating from college in record numbers, yet of the women who enter into the workforce do not do so in high paying/skill industries or as members of management. We request that the Government establishes a target percentage and makes an effort to reach that percentage, for women in high level positions within the public sector.

**Empowering Entrepreneurs**

With Libya’s cultural and social framework we must address that many Libyan women defer from entering the workforce because they are not comfortable in the workplace, whether it be for social, cultural, religious or personal reasons. For this reason Local Labour Councils, working under the Ministry of Labour, as well as the NTC local representatives should take proactive steps to ensure the growth & support of women-owned businesses, in particular those which serve the female community by further driving economic empowerment in women, and economic growth in their own community.

Unfortunately very few women in Libya hold high level positions, or have businesses with success that is parallel to male owned businesses in the same field. The largest challenge for women-owned businesses is the lack of technical & education support, access to capital, and opportunities to grow.
The Government has the responsibility to predetermine and provide access to capital for Women-owned businesses, with an emphasis on minorities, and rural businesses. The government is also to blame as women-owned businesses are rarely given the opportunity to do business with the local or federal governments, and for that reason may not achieve large scale success and which instead is achieved by their male-owned counterparts (who receive partnerships with the government). For that reason we believe the government needs to establish targets, for example 20% of government contracts which go to locally owned businesses should be awarded to women-owned businesses.

We also request that the government should also support Women’s Business Centers around the country. The centers will be responsible for the counselling of female entrepreneurs and business owners by providing hands on training, mentoring and networking that they need in order to start and expand their businesses.

The Department of labour should also host regional and national women entrepreneurship forums around the country to facilitate conversations about how the government can expand its support of women-owned businesses.

**Workplace Flexibility**

Workplace flexibility is incredibly important in facilitating an environment in which women can succeed in the workplace and at home. Flexible workplaces often lead to increased productivity, better economic return and the ability of the company to attract and retain their best employees.

- The Department of Labour should facilitate a nationwide dialogue about workplace flexibility and how it can work in different types of industries.
- We believe that the Government, in partnership with civil society organizations dedicated to the economic empowerment of women should assist Libyan women to hold their own discussions on workplace flexibility, in which ideas & recommendations will then be communicated to the Government.
- Workplace Flexibility has a particular importance with working mothers, as parents cannot thrive in a job where they are unable to care for their children.

**The Unemployed & Unemployment Benefits**

We cannot ignore that some Libyan women may choose not to join the workforce. We do not believe that these women should be ignored in any way. To
the contrary, we believe that the government has the direct responsibility to empower unemployed women to make smart choices. We believe that classes and seminars targeted at the unemployed demographic and stay at home mothers, focusing on financial education and management as well as time management and many other important issues. These classes would promote consumer financial education and economic understanding, we also recommend the creation of a dedicated committee focused on raising awareness, so that we may educate and empower this demographic to avoid unfair practices and make smart economic choices.

In addition the Department of Labour should provide benefits for stay at home mothers, which would provide them with the financial means to support themselves and possibly their families, if need be.

**Issues facing particular groups of Libyan Women**

Many Libyan women who choose to balance family & work, we recommend that the Government support the working mothers by guaranteeing subsidized child & daycare facilities. We also advise that the wages of lower income working women, particularly working mothers, be supplemented.

Minority groups suffer disproportionately; as Libya is a tribal community we have noted that particular tribes are preferred for employment in the smaller & rural cities. We recommend that the government address this, and implement educational and awareness campaigns.

Single mothers, widows are also at a disadvantage when entering the workforce, as they are usually the sole breadwinners for their families, for this reason the support for them needs to be amplified.