Statement by
Gary Lewis
UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative

Islamic Chamber Research and Information Centre
Conference on Women’s Entrepreneurship in Islamic Countries

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Excellency Dr Molaverdi, Vice-President for Women and Family Affairs,
Mr. Shafei, President of Iran Chamber,
Dr. Fakheri, Director General of ICRIC,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations in Iran please allow me to join in welcoming all participants to this important conference – especially those who have travelled from outside Iran to be with us here in Tehran.

- I am pleased that the Islamic Chamber for Research and Information Centre has organized this event – with the support of the Presidency and UNFPA. The United Nations is honoured to partner with ICRIC in this initiative.
This event offers us yet another opportunity to identify solutions to expand the role of women in the economic growth process – and, in this way, support their economic empowerment.

In United Nations we have always been keen to find creative ways to empower nations and people, and I hope that participants in our conference today will consider “inclusive economic growth” – and not simply “economic growth” as an idea to consider.

In parallel with this, we should focus on ways to empower the capacity of women to contribute to economic development.

Especially women in poorer households.

In poorer communities.

And in less developed regions.

Our goals should be to ensure the general economic empowerment of women from the bottom-up.

Women must see themselves as part of the economic growth process.

Why is this important?

As you know, the United Nations itself promotes women’s empowerment and economic capacity development.
• Our Millenium Development Goal Number 3 aims to eliminate gender disparity and empower women.

• MDG 3 specifically promotes the empowerment of women. It calls for the elimination of gender disparity in education.

• And MDG 5 seeks to assure maternal health.

• However, setting gender-responsive targets and indicators only in maternal health and female education is certainly not sufficient.

• Women must also be engaged in productive employment. This gives them greater economic options. And it also enables them to contribute to national growth and development.

• In many societies, female participation rates in the formal labour market rise well above 50%.

• When this happens, it translates into sustained capacity for women to access more choices – both for themselves and their families.

• Iran is, of course, a country which has successfully ensured the access of women to education at all levels and to comprehensive health services.

• According to UNDP’s latest Human Development Index, in three areas – those of life expectancy at birth, years of schooling and completion of
secondary education – women in Iran have done as well or even better than women in similar high middle-income countries.

- Importantly, the majority of the new entrants to universities in Iran are young women.

- But challenges to women’s economic empowerment and employment in the Iranian labour market remain.

- And these need to be recognized.

- National statistics tell us:
  - that formal participation of women in the labour market is less than 20% of the workforce – in most of Asia the number is well over 60%;
  - that women’s unemployment is well over 30%.

- These are real constraints to women’s empowerment – and, thereby, to national development.

- It is for this reason that the UN – in its work with the Government of Iran – focuses directly on women’s empowerment in much of what we do here in Iran.

- In Iran, the UN’s main contribution to development is through our UN Development Assistance Framework – or UNDAF. This is a plan which has
been agreed with the Government – and is well anchored in the priorities of Iran’s 5th National Development Plan.

- As you know, one of the 5th National Development Plan priorities is to support women’s economic empowerment and thereby contribute to the larger goal of ‘growth with justice’.

So as I move to conclude, I would say that engaging in productive employment offers women better economic options and improved livelihoods for themselves and their families.

- The issue is: choices.
- Choice is essential to development.
- It also allows women to contribute significantly and with dignity towards national economic growth.

- Ladies and Gentlemen, for all these reasons, we must strive to remove constraints to women’s empowerment – and the resulting limits to national economic growth.
- It is easy to imagine the significant increases in value added and GDP if these constraints are removed.

- I hope I have made the case that a conference like this one – with such distinguished participants – can help to improve the way our institutions support women’s economic empowerment, especially for poor – vulnerable – and often rural women.
• I sincerely hope that participants will – at this conference – create a practical action plan on how ICRIC and partners can work effectively over the next few years to improve the well-being of marginalized and vulnerable women all over the Islamic world.

• In this important effort, you can continue to count on the support of the United Nations.

• And we certainly intend to use your results to assist us in our work here in Iran.

• I would like to conclude by once again warmly thanking Dr. Fakheri and other organizers of this conference. They have put in significant effort to make this day a success.

• I would like to convey to these colleagues – on behalf of the United Nations family – our sincere appreciation for this excellent initiative.

*Kheily motashekeram.*