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OECD and Union of Arab Banks hold conference on improving the business environment for women entrepreneurs in the MENA region

A conference on “*Enhancing the Business-Enabling Environment for Women in Arab Countries*” will open on 24 November in Beirut to discuss ways to create a more favourable environment for women entrepreneurs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The event will be co-organised by the Union of Arab Banks and the Paris-based Organisation for Co-operation and Economic Development (OECD).

Lebanese Minister of State, Mr. Adnan El Kassar and Minister of Finance, Ms. Raya Haffar El-Hassan will welcome participants. Moroccan Minister in Charge of General and Economic Affairs, Mr. Nizar Baraka and Sheikha Hissah Saad Al Sabah, President of the Council of Arab Business Women, as well as Ms. Karen Kornbluh, the United States Ambassador to the OECD and co-Chair of the OECD-MENA Women’s Business Forum, will launch the conference.

The conference will provide an opportunity for representatives from both MENA and OECD countries to exchange information and good practices for removing obstacles to the full participation of women in economic activity. Participants will include high-level government and business leaders from across the MENA and OECD regions as well as representatives from key businesswomen’s associations, NGOs and academia.

It will focus on three key areas for improving the operational conditions for women’s enterprise development. The first session will explore innovative means to secure adequate financing for the growth and development of women-led businesses. Participants will discuss both supply side (encouraging financial institutions to reach out to female clientele with diversified products) and demand side (improving women’s financial literacy) issues.

A second session will look at improving women’s access to business development services, a key success factor for ensuring the start-up and development of women-run businesses. Discussions will focus on how stakeholders can ensure that business support services are adapted to a female clientele and how to effectively inform women about their availability. Participants will also give consideration to business incubators as a tool to ensure the survival of start-up firms.

A third session will provide the opportunity to review the preliminary results of the country-level inventory of policies, institutions and programmes supporting women’s enterprise in the Middle East and North Africa. The inventory will showcase policies and programmes to support private enterprise development in the region, and act as a practical guide for women entrepreneurs by providing contacts from government, private sector or NGO agencies where they can access business development services, financing, training, networks and other types of information.

The opening session of the 24 November meeting will be open to the press. For more information or to register, please contact: Nicola Ehlermann-Cache (Nicola.Ehlermann-Cache@oecd.org, +[336] 21 82 04 56).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an inter-governmental organisation bringing together the governments of 33 countries committed to democracy and the market economy to promote economic growth, prosperity, and employment through co-operation and policy dialogue between members. The Organisation benchmarks best practices and develops non-binding recommendations to promote rules of the game in areas where multilateral agreement is necessary for the correct functioning of markets. Increasingly, this dialogue has brought to the table key non-member countries and regions, who have become important actors in today’s globalised economy.