

**FEMINIST POLITICAL ECONOMY OF WOMEN AND GENDER  
IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (FEMME)  
STATEMENT ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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The COVID-19 pandemic poses unprecedented challenges to women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, as well as to religious and ethnic minorities, prisoners, refugees, and LGBTQ citizens. As co-founders of the FEMME initiative (Feminist Political Economy of Women and Gender in the Middle East and North Africa), we are deeply concerned about the disproportional impacts of COVID-19 on those groups, and caution against any replication of pre-existing forms of discrimination as governments and communities tackle the pandemic. For the region's women in particular, possible impacts include but are not limited to:

- Increased domestic violence;
- Job losses and lower demand for workers, especially women;
- Increased vulnerability of women workers to COVID-19 infection in feminized sectors, especially healthcare;
- Increased demand for women's reproductive labor at home to care for the sick, elderly and children, and to compensate for the lack of schooling.

In light of these concerns, we recommend the following urgent actions by governments:

- Addressing the needs and rights of women victims of domestic violence
  - Operating hotlines and publicizing assistance programs;
  - Making sure that women's shelters remain open and funded;
  - Ensuring that women in shelters receive adequate healthcare and that pregnant women do not lack reproductive care;
- Addressing the needs and rights of poor and low-income women and their families
  - Financial support for all workers who lost their jobs;
  - Supplying food, basic supplies, cash transfers, and healthcare;
  - Commencing plans for affordable and safe housing post- pandemic;
  - Ensuring that domestic workers, both native and migrant, be given adequate healthcare and shelter;
- Releasing women being held in prison to their families;
  - Women political prisoners must be released immediately;
- Ending all occupations and military incursions, such as:
  - The Saudi and UAE assault on Yemen, which unfurled a humanitarian catastrophe;
  - Turkey's assault on northern Syria, which displaced citizens and overturned Rojava's feminist-inflected municipalism;
  - Israel's blockade of Gaza and the military occupation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem; Palestinians must have access to free healthcare and basic supplies;
- Addressing the needs and rights of those in refugee camps
  - Ensuring medical care
  - Continuing international assistance programs.

We ask that multilateral organizations and international non-governmental organizations assist the region's governments in implementing our call for attention to vulnerable communities and especially to the specific needs, interests, and rights of the region's women.

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