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OF BEIRUT**

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A Discussion on Women's Economic Empowerment in Lebanon's Industrial Sector at AUB

The Center for Women in Business at the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business (OSB) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Association of Lebanese Industrialists (ALI), presented the results of a study on women in the industrial sector in Lebanon as part of the first phase of the project "Women in Management Initiative". This event aimed to highlight the pivotal role that women play in driving economic growth and promoting sustainable development in Lebanon and the region, while proposing ways to address the obstacles they face in accessing and thriving in industrial environments.

The event began with a speech by Dr. Nada Khaddage-Soboh, director of the Center for Women in Business, highlighting women's roles in all economic sectors for any nation's growth. She emphasized that the center aims, in addition to scientific research, to enhance working women's professional skills as well as advocating for their rightful causes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Professor Yusuf Sidani, OSB dean, welcomed the attendees, emphasizing, "The Suliman S. Olayan School of Business at the American University of Beirut is committed to supporting women in the business sector throughout the Middle East and North Africa." He affirmed full support for all initiatives that help advance women's progress in the field of business and at all professional levels.

Then the General Manager of the Association of Lebanese Industrialists (ALI) Talal Hijazi, considered that through strategic cooperation with the International Labor Organization, ALI is leading the process of empowering industrial women in Lebanon by benefiting from the collective efforts of the Women Task Force to ensure their success and influence in the industrial scene.

This was followed by a speech by Senior Specialist in Employer's Activities at the International Labor Organization (ILO) Jose Manuel Medina Checa, who explained the role of ILO in the field of developing women in the world of business in the world in general and in Lebanon in particular. He said, "From ILO's side, we are working with ALI to increase the number of women industrialists and the number of women in board and management positions. The launching of

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the Women Taskforce today and the awareness campaign are specific efforts to attract more women industrialists to become member of the association and shows the leading example of the organization and commitment to 'walk the walk' within their own structure."

An explanation of the results of the study conducted by the Project Manager at ILO Melissa Badr was presented, confirming that "According to surveys conducted in mid-2023 among ALI members, the participation of women in the labor force stood at 25 percent, slightly below the MENA average of 27 percent. Regarding management positions, the representation of women aligns with the global estimates range of 20-31 percent , with women comprising 27 percent of managerial roles."

The session continued with a panel discussion moderated by Jose Manuel Medina Checa with Lina Tannir, lecturer at AUB's OSB and co-founder of Lush; Patricia Hashim, owner and chief financial officer at MPTICO; and Rindala Qasim, chief executive officer of PandaPlast.

Lina Tannir, OSB lecturer and co-founder of Lush, who said, "I joined the entrepreneurship ecosystem by starting my own venture because I genuinely wanted to put to practice my knowledge. I knew I could because many obstacles facing women entrepreneurs have been overcome over the years with increasing awareness around gender equity. I did start my own business back in 2011, yet, and similar to many other women-led businesses, I faced challenges mainly related to access to financing. Finding capital to sustain and growth business ventures remains a challenge for us, women. Nonetheless many women-led networks have been developing to facilitate and provide access to funding to further promote business venturing for women."

Patricia Hashim, owner and chief financial officer at MPTICO, added, "As a proud member of the Women Task Force, and a dedicated industrialist, we strive to inspire and empower women in the industry. Leading by example and driving positive change towards greater representation and success for all women in industry. Together, through cooperation and collective efforts with ILO and ALI, we are reshaping the industrial landscape and paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable future."

Likewise, Rindala Qasim, chief executive officer of PandaPlast, confirmed; "As a woman and an industrialist, I believe that the inclusion of women in the manufacturing industry is critical and offers abundant opportunities. We must ensure the industry moves in the most effective direction. Collaborating with esteemed organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Association of Lebanese Industrialists (ALI) can facilitate women's presence not only in decision-making capacities but also in operational roles. Together, we can cultivate a competitive environment and foster innovative solutions. Furthermore, I advocate for women's entrepreneurship, as women possess unique insights into market needs. Their involvement ensures tailored solutions that effectively serve diverse consumer demographics."

The meeting concluded by introducing the goal and aspirations of ALI and emphasizing their commitment to fully supporting women in the industrial sector due to their belief that they are always the supportive partner in successful institutions. Dr. Khaddage-Soboh then presented the study's roadmap and spoke about how to closely follow up on supporting women in Lebanon, and the entire Middle East and North Africa.

ENDS

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Note to Editors**About AUB**

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 750 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 8000 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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