

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE OIC PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (OPAAW)

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This paper explores several grounds to provide a comprehensive examination of the overall purpose as well as what constitutes the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) as an international instrument for women's human rights. To achieve this purpose, it starts with an introduction designed to provide an initial definition of the Plan of Action. It includes three major themes that can be considered as the principal characteristics which define the methodology of the Plan of Action. The examinations encompass the foundational and technical aspects of introducing the OPAAW as a Plan of Action within the realm of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Furthermore, it explores the institutional background of the Plan of Action. Initially, it achieves its objective by providing a relevant explanation to the OIC itself and its structure. It presents the mechanisms and intricacies of endorsing OPAAW as a collective will of the OIC Member States. Additionally, it presents the progress and evolution of the OPAAW since its conception in 2006 until 2018. While doing so, it provides an introductory comparison between the two main versions of the OPAAW, the 2008 as well as 2016, and a summary of the structure of the OPAAW as a

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document. In combination to examining the structure of the Plan of Action, it explores the themes that categorise the approach and methods of the OPAAW while some of these themes are identical to other international instruments. Finally, it presents how the Plan of Action continually can aspire to work in partnership with the CEDAW at national, regional and international level.

INTRODUCTION

The concern of women empowerment has occupied various activists from all backgrounds and beliefs throughout the ages. In effect, in the modern era, at the international level, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has pioneered this cause. Amongst many achievements, it places the concerns of women on the most prominent international forum, i.e., the United Nations (UN). Nevertheless, for many reasons, the CEDAW confronts a considerable number of reservations particularly from Muslim Nations. It should be noted that these reservations are not only on the State level but more alarmingly on a societal level. Putting the dispute regarding the reasons for these reservations aside, the reality is that it is significant in number and influence. The unfortunate consequences of such reality result in a dilemma with considerable negative outcomes. As it often places a substantial number of women and girls with a choice of either complying with the norms and beliefs of their societies or upholding international standards. Hence, the OPAAW has critical importance as an international instrument as it has no reservation at all.

The OPAAW is an international human rights instrument concerned with the advancement and empowerment of women. It is a Plan of Action that was endorsed in November 2008 unanimously by OIC Member States. Since then, it remains in the process of gaining momentum and establishing effective recognition. Essentially, since its endorsement, the 57 OIC Member States delegated ministerial-level representatives to discuss,¹ develop and refine the Plan of Action and consequently producing the OPAAW version. In doing so, Member States demonstrate a commitment and considerable determination to see the advancement of the OPAAW objectives within Muslim Nations.

The overarching aspiration to the Plan of Action emanates from a united belief among the OIC Member States that “women have contributed effectively and actively to all social, political, cultural and economic fields and also participated in the building of civilisations and training of generations”.² Yet, today, they have to endure discrimination in various aspects of their lives.³ The central section in the OPAAW is composed of nine Objectives, none of which evoked any reservation from the Member States. This is just to highlight one of the uniqueness of the OPAAW particularly compared to any other international instrument devoted to the advancement of women. Hence, it is considerable significance in exploring its contents including some of the OPAAW main characteristics.

Initially, it should be noted that the OPAAW is adopted by the OIC, the second largest inter-governmental organisation after the UN.⁴ The OIC is formed of 57 Nations with diverse cultures and backgrounds spread over four continents. Thus, it is safe to assume that applying the contents of the Plan of Action could affect a large scale because the contents of the OPAAW are unanimously endorsed by these States. Hence, the relevance of the status of women in the OIC societies is not in question. A firm demonstration to such commitment potentially on a wide scale of influence is the 32nd Resolution adopted by the “Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers”.⁵ This Resolution points out the essential need to advance the standing of women in all walks of life. It also takes all possible measure to eliminate all forms of discriminations against women and girls.⁶ It makes a strong intention to “communicate directly with communities, national and international media outlets, as well as trade unions and NGOs”.⁷ Hence, it has the potential to “equip nation-states and decision-makers at all levels with vital input and direction with a focus on the advancement of women within Muslim societies”.⁸

Secondly is the ability of OPAAW to represent the identity and values of the Islamic world. Since it is a product of these Nations of the OIC, it is able to permeate the societies in the realm of the OIC on international, regional and national levels. In

Muslim Nations, it is a reality, rightly or wrongly, that Muslim scholars and the general public are selective in endorsing projects that may represent, what is perceived as an external agenda. However, in the case of the OPAAW, such a concern is unfounded.⁹ Therefore, the OPAAW opens the minds and hearts of the society to the urgently required change. It is unequivocally a local formula with international standards.

Finally, the OPAAW, as an international instrument, has the capacity to coordinate and learn from other international women's human rights instruments especially the CEDAW. While the OPAAW is unique in its approach, it actively acquires partnership with the CEDAW. The OPAAW recognises the necessity to coordinate with and learn from the CEDAW. There are a considerable number of reasons explaining the need for the OPAAW to work closely with the CEDAW. However, it can be argued that one of the most critical reasons is the OPAAW's lack of applied experience and practical knowledge in dealing with the variables on the ground whereas the CEDAW has extensive experience in this field amongst many others.

Effectively, the OPAAW can be viewed as a solution to what may be considered an international desire to advance the status of women. It is a project that is supported by international scale determination and it can cause practical change for the benefit of women within OIC Member States. It uniquely represents the values and identity of Muslim Nations and involves Islamic discourse regarding the change, thereby affording its agenda a higher possibility of success. Yet, the Plan of Action continually aspires to work in partnership with the CEDAW, a UN Convention.¹⁰

THE STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANISATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION (OIC)

At this juncture, it is pertinent to shed light briefly on the structure of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) before the formal introduction of the OPAAW to have a better comprehension of its functions within the Member States. The OIC was established in

1969 by a collective decision during a summit in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco.¹¹ Initially, it was called the “Organisation of Islamic Conference” with 30 Member Countries.¹² Today, the name and the logo were reformed to become the “Organisation of Islamic Cooperation” with a more cooperative manner as it expands to include 57 Member States from four different continents.¹³

Member States of the OIC view the Organisation as an international forum with vital necessity. It uniquely provides a system with an inter-governmental standard that takes into consideration the values of Member States. Therefore, it arguably encompasses the broad view of universalism yet does not ignore the ethical relativist perspective. The shared source of ethical guidance for all Member States of the Organisation is the Islamic values.¹⁴ It is referred to in almost all documents and resolutions as the most unifying factor. Therefore, OIC Member States are able to, during the various sessions of the OIC, to deliberate over perspectives that are often avoided during sessions in secular oriented organisations such as the UN. Therefore, it can be assumed that the relevance of the OIC can be in its complementary nature to the role of the UN. In fact, providing an international forum for OIC Member States allows a better chance for change and transformation of societies.

It is critical to note that, despite the name the “Organisation of Islamic Cooperation”, it is not to be mistaken for a religious organisation.¹⁵ The OIC is an international political entity. The political matters, as well as subject matters in which the Member States deal with, are political in nature and in context. Admittedly, Islamic values remain the guidance, inspiration and the common ground of the Organisation, but during deliberation, States are expected, first and for most, to consider the best interest of their nations in a spirit of cooperation and ethical commonality. Matters the OIC Member States consider include various aspects such as peace and security, particularly regarding the extreme injustice Palestinians are confronted with on a daily basis. The OIC also deliberates over other critical issues for the Member States such as poverty and methods of development,¹⁶ investment and finance,

food security, science and technology and climate change, amongst many others.¹⁷ Finally, the OIC places a particular focus on the issues of human rights, good governance, and the empowerment of women.¹⁸

The Organisation depends to a great extent on its organs which are divided mainly into specialised, affiliated or subsidiary organs.¹⁹ The organs of the OIC also include Islamic universities, offices standing committees and the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC).²⁰ Each organ of the OIC has an objective made public at the OIC website. These organs differ in their purpose and manner in which they operated or managed.²¹ For instance, unlike other organs, the budget of the specialised organs is independent of the OIC Secretariat General who ultimately grants it a form of freedom in operation.²² Some of the specialised organs of the OIC include:

1. Islamic Development Bank (IDB) with its headquarter in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia;
2. Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) with its headquarter in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco;
3. Islamic Organisation of Food and Security (IOFS) with its headquarters in Nur-Sultan, Republic of Kazakhstan;
4. Science, Technology and Innovation Organisation (STIO);
5. Islamic Broadcasting Union (IBU) with its headquarters in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia;
6. International Islamic News Agency (IINA) with its headquarters in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; and
7. Islamic Committee of the International Crescent (ICIC).

The eighteen affiliated organs are as follows:

1. Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (ICCIA);
2. Organisation of Islamic Capitals and Cities (OICC);
3. Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF);

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4. World Federation of Arab-Islamic International Schools (WFAIIS);
 5. Organisation of the Islamic Shipowners Association (OISA);
 6. Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYF-DC);
 7. International Union of Muslim Scouts (IUMS);
 8. Federation of Consultants from Islamic Countries (FCIC);
 9. Islamic World Academy of Sciences (IAS);
 10. General Council for Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions (CIBAFI);
 11. Federation of Contractors from Islamic Countries (FOCIC);
 12. OIC Computer Emergency Response Team (OIC-CERT);
 13. Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC);
 14. Islamic Cement Association (ICA), Istanbul, Turkey;
 15. International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM);
 16. Association of Tax Authorities of Islamic Countries (ATAIC);
 17. Real Estate Union in Islamic States (REUOS); and
 18. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Broadcasting Regulatory Authorities Forum (IBRAF).
- Finally, there are six extremely effective subsidiary organs as follows:
1. The Statistical, Economic, Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC);
 2. Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA);
 3. Islamic University of Technology (IUT);
 4. Islamic Centre for the Development of Trade (ICDT);
 5. International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA); and
 6. Islamic Solidarity Fund and Its Waqf (ISF).²³

Furthermore, there are also OIC's key bodies such as the Islamic Summit, the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), the General Secretariat, in addition to the Al-Quds Committee and three permanent committees concerned with science and technology, economy and trade, and information and culture.

THE OPAAW IN THE CONTEXT OF THE OIC

The diverse political, cultural, economic and social backgrounds of the OIC naturally shape the political direction of those Member States. They also, most critically, shape the vision of any progression, particularly when related to changing social norms. While deliberating over critical matters, such as a plan of action for the advancement of women, the OIC eventually aims at producing a document considering the concerns of all Member States.²⁴ During the deliberation, officials from the OIC Member States present the perspective of their nations regarding any proposed matter throughout a number of channels. Some of which are conferences held by the Executive Committee of the OIC, or the Annual Coordination Meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Additionally, in cases of emergencies, the OIC Member States commonly utilise the Extraordinary Islamic Summit Conference to forward their standpoint.

However, one of the most effective avenues for deliberation has been the Sessions of the Council of Foreign Ministers which meets annually. In fact, up until March 2019, there has been 46 Sessions of the Council of Foreign Ministers.²⁵ Hence, it is considered the most practical decision-making mechanism within the OIC. During these sessions, ministers of Member States concluded resolutions encompassing a wide range of aspects and concerns. Often the resolution of these sessions forms the basis for further action such as the case with the Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women.²⁶

In order for an OIC Resolution to pass as the Plan of Action, its content has to meet to the consent of all Member States.²⁷ Only then it is considered by the OIC a document with merit consequently with an allocated budget and further pursuant. The

full consensus is unique, yet in the cases of resolution and the Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women, it is still in the observed condition within the OIC system. It is described once by the Tenth OIC Secretaries General, Iyad Ameen Madani, in an interview as “a system where everyone has an equal weight, somewhat like a United Nations system however with all Member States having the right of the ‘Veto’”.²⁸

It can be argued that granting the right of “Veto” to every Member State regarding every resolution presents the process with considerable difficulties, particularly in case where the issue of concern has the potential to challenge norms of social order such as the desired effect of the OPAAW. Consequently, it is safe to assume that the objectives of the Plan of Action were examined thoroughly and critically by all Member States. The final draft of the OPAAW had to meet the approval of each and every Member States not only in its overall objective but as well in the details of its wording. During this process of enduring the OPAAW, every individual State had to take into consideration a number of vital aspects. For instance, they needed to incorporate their own nation’s cultural and societal background, which is often complex in addition to the need to take into consideration their international commitments and obligations towards other conventions such as the CEDAW.

Given the above conditions, the process of passing a unanimous resolution regarding the empowerment of women is a task not many organisations would embark on. However, for the credit of the OIC Member States and all its organs, the OIC has managed to conclude and pass the OPAAW as a Plan of Action endorsed unanimously with no reservations.

The challenges caused by granting all Member States a right equivalent to the right of “Veto” also arguably has its advantages particularly in the case of passing a plan of action, one like the OPAAW. Initially, for the reason that the outcome of unanimous agreement, at least theoretically would leave Member States enthused to put the details of the agreement into practice, most critically in the case of an unbinding resolution such as the OPAAW.

It is reasonable to assume that the Member States will be eager or at least willing to take all possible steps to make the required changes in the Plan of Action for the advancement of women within their societies.

Another likely benefit for the system practised in the OIC can be observed in the details of the final draft of the Plan of Action. The content of OPAAW encompasses the cultural, social and political input of every Member States making the document itself a true representation of the involved Member States. For instance, while debating OPAAW's mechanisms of change and the approaches Member States will take to reform social norms, the 57 Member States of the OIC had a practical and considerable contribution which resulted in a set of mechanisms that are applicable in each and every society at all times. Since OIC Member States have no reservations on the content or the mechanisms of change in the OPAAW, it is safe to claim that it is an extremely rare international instrument standing for the advancement of women.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE OPAAW

The OIC proclaims that it places great significance on the role of women within its Member Nations. A claim backed up by relevant declarations and resolutions made during the "7th Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of OIC Member States".²⁹ Since 2006, every two years, ministerial-level delegation from all Member Nations met aiming at the advancement of women within Muslim societies. Up until the 2018 Conference, the outcome includes the "OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW)".³⁰ During these conferences, the drafting of OPAAW was negotiated, adjusted, debated and eventually concluded and endorsed. The Plan of Action itself was amended primarily twice. The first drafting was at the 2nd Ministerial Conference held in 2008. The second and final amendment was during the 6th Ministerial Conference held in 2016. The later is acknowledged in the OIC and its organs as the most encompassing and conclusive version of the Plan. Hence,

the 2016 version of the Plan of Action, included in the Appendix B is currently considered the official OPAAW.

Since its conception, the OPAAW was aspiring to be an international instrument that is able to reflect the reality on the ground for women in the OIC Member Nations. With the constantly changing global environment and the rise of new concerns from 2006 until 2018, the Plan went through a process of fine-tuning and, finally, resulted in a matured Plan of Action in 2016 that is considered an independent international instrument with a unique approach. The progress the OPAAW undergone so far, with all the required recourses demonstrates the significance of the issue for OIC Member States. It arguably also demonstrates the continually rising difficulties that the OIC Member Nations face regarding women and their development.

The Process of Adopting the OPAAW

Ordinarily, the primary forum for OIC Member States to explore details related to the advancement of women and their role within Muslim Nations is the biennial “Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of OIC Member States”.³¹ The Ministerial Conferences can be lengthy and comprehensive. These conferences are composed of the various involvements and contribution, not only from Member States but also from experts with diverse backgrounds.³² Additionally, there are also the acute inputs contributed by the organs of the OIC such as SESRIC, ISESCO, International Islamic Fiqh Academy as well as the Islamic Development Bank. Eventually, conferences are commonly concluded by addressing the issues concerning the empowerment of women in a final declaration and/or a resolution.

While the Ministerial Conferences are the most prominent platform for addressing a concern, it is not the only forum. OIC Member States discuss their concerns regarding women within the “Council of Foreign Ministers”, which effectively meets annually.³³ During these annual sessions, matters related to women, amongst many other issues of concern, are discussed and deliberated upon. It is critical to note that the outcomes agreed

upon in the sessions of the Council of Foreign Minister often echo loudly in the resolution and declaration during the Ministerial Conference. Since the Ministerial Conferences are the specialised forum for the role of women and for the sake of simplicity, the analyses of the progress of OPAAW will focus primarily on documents of the Ministerial Conference.

Regarding the advancement of women in OIC Member States, initially, the “Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women”³⁴ in the development of OIC Member States was convened in 2006 in Istanbul. This initial meeting was direct consequence of the recommendations in the 33rd session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Yemen 2005.³⁵

In effect, the 33rd session forwarded a number of requests for Member States regarding the advancement of women. Amongst the many requests, b (3) of the 33rd session’s resolutions “Requests the General Secretariat to liaise with the Member States in order to hold a ministerial conference on women with a view to developing an action plan to enhance women’s role in the development of Muslim societies and creating greater opportunities for women in all walks of public life”.³⁶ Essentially, the 2006 Ministerial Conference marked a landmark for the initiation and progress of what is to become known as the OPAAW. The Plan of Action gained its structure as well as its stand and was officially being adopted as the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in 2008 in the 2nd Ministerial Conference in Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt.³⁷

Since its adoption in 2008, the objectives of the OPAAW have been the subject matter of regular ministerial conferences. Its contents evolved and progressed to become a regular agenda of the OIC Member States. The evolution of the OPAAW was assisted by the 3rd Ministerial Conference in 2010 in Tehran³⁸ followed by the 4th Ministerial Conference in 2012 which took place in Jakarta;³⁹ the 5th Ministerial Conference in 2014 convened in Baku, The Republic of Azerbaijan;⁴⁰ and the 6th Ministerial Conference in 2016 held in Istanbul where a milestone in the evolution of OPAAW was achieved.⁴¹ During the Ministerial Conference in

2016, the most comprehensive version of the plan of action was adopted.

Finally, in the 7th Ministerial Conference held in 2018 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso,⁴² the outcome and contribution resulted in a great deal of optimism. During this Conference, there have been a relatively large number of resolutions passed focusing on advancing and empowering women. Furthermore, the number of involved Ministers in the Conference was notably high in addition to that fact the language in support of the resolutions seemed determined and united.⁴³ During the 2018 Conference, eighteen resolutions were passed including Resolution No 2/7-W on Promoting Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education for Women;⁴⁴ Resolution No. 3/7-W on OIC Awards on Women Achievement;⁴⁵ and most critically, Resolution No.7/7-W on Guidelines for Preparing, Drafting and Submitting Progress Reports on Implementing OPAAW.⁴⁶

The progress OIC Member States made regarding the OPAAW can be considered noteworthy. The initial document in 2006 seems humble in comparison to the 2016 OPAAW. The objectives in both documents reflect that they have been adequately expanded and itemised. The language and the structure of the plan advanced to become more encompassing and developed. The Plan maintained an international perspective yet increasingly gained a unique identity of its own. Most importantly, the OPAAW has transitioned to a plan of action that has the actual potential to change the life of women within Muslim societies to the better. Since it gained the required focus, the potential to cause the advancement of women and result in their empowerment improved and consequently, providing OIC Member Nations with one of the vital missing element in its development and a cause of prosperity.

Progressive Amendments and the Emergence of 2016 OPAAW

It is possible to argue that the 2016 OPAAW emerged as an effective international instrument yet with its own unique identity and structure. As the 2016 version includes its own matrix of

measures and mechanisms of implementations,⁴⁷ it also utilises specific and unique terms which are qualified and clearly defined. Hence, it is possible to conclude that the amendments to the OPAAW adopted by the 6th Session of the Ministerial Conference in 2016 present the latest version of OPAAW in a focused unique structure. It is possible to claim that the Plan emerges as part of the international system yet with its own new identity. Unlike the 2008 plan of action, terms such as “elimination all forms of discrimination”⁴⁸ or “gender equality”⁴⁹ are utilised in the 2016 plan yet they are used in a specific meaning that serves the purpose of the Plan as a whole. For instance, the introduction of the 2016 plan states: “Therefore, through OPAAW, OIC is taking steps towards eliminating all forms of discrimination against women in order to reduce inequalities between women and men pursuant to Islamic values of social justice and gender equality”.⁵⁰ It is also used in Objective Six regarding the Protection of Women from Violence: “Combating all forms of gender-based violence”.⁵¹ As these two examples demonstrate the objective consist of a clear and focused wholesome approach which serves the purpose of the relevant point.

Another historic amendment to the OPAAW since it was first adopted is the addition of three objectives related to women during a humanitarian crisis. The 6th Session of the Ministerial Conference in 2016 added Objective Seven titled: “Women in Crisis Situations”;⁵² Objective Eight titled: “Women in Disaster”;⁵³ and Objective Nine titled: “Women in Armed Conflict” to the OPAAW.⁵⁴ These three objectives have proven extremely significant to the conditions inflicted on a substantial number of women living in OIC Member States. The dedication the Plan of Action has to these special circumstances arguably enhances the relevance and potential of the OPAAW.

Since its first draft until the 2016 amendments, the OPAAW experienced a transformation in a number of its components nevertheless it retained its key essential elements. The first is the overarching principle and the reason for the Plan itself; emphasising the necessity of the advancement of women in Muslim Nations.

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Starting from 2006 until today, there is a clear determination to address issues of concerns that holding women back. The desire to address and resolve these issues has been declared to be the reason for the existence of the Plan.⁵⁵ Therefore, it can be argued that despite the modifications in its language, objective or structure; it maintained throughout the amendments and all reports of the ministerial conferences an unequivocal determination to fulfil its overarching objective.

The second continues quality the OPAAW upheld since its conception is its regards to other international instruments. Despite a slight change of wording in its content, the OPAAW maintains a strongly worded commitment for international instruments and related conventions, particularly the CEDAW.⁵⁶ It also states, in its introduction, its commitment to “the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (the Fourth World Conference on Women 1995), the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly entitled: “Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century”.⁵⁷ Both versions, the 2008 and 2016 adopted by the Ministerial Conferences make an unambiguous statement demonstrating their commitment to work with the international system and its key instruments. Notwithstanding the fact that majority of Muslim Nations have reservations against some of the articles in the CEDAW, besides the fact that three of the OIC Member Nations⁵⁸ are not signatories to the Convention. Nevertheless, the OPAAW retains its commitment to work with the CEDAW and other international instruments for a number of reasons. Above all, it is believed that the empowerment of women is a task that requires every possible effort. Therefore, the principle of coordinating is a constitutional principle embedded within the code of the OIC. Additionally, it can be argued that it is imperative to cater for the fact that OIC Member States are also part of the international system both politically and legally and thus, there is a necessity to include the commitment to all international instruments in the OPAAW. Nevertheless, this presents them with a challenge which is discussed in the challenges section despite the reason that the plan of action can claim legal and political

maturity by consistently working with other international instruments and primarily placing the advancement of women first.

Finally, the third overarching principle in the OPAAW is the upholding of the “Islamic values”⁵⁹ as the ultimate guidance during the advancement of women. The terms “Islamic values” or “Islamic Principles”⁶⁰ is directly or indirectly referred to during OIC Ministerial Conference declarations. Islamic values are evidently the principle upheld throughout every report and resolution including the OPAAW. For instance, in both OPAAW adopted by the 2nd Ministerial Conference as well as the 6th Ministerial Conference, the following statement clarifies that the mistreatment of women, marginalisation and difficulties which “impede their participation in social life and other areas”.⁶¹ The Plan of Action maintains that “those difficulties emanate from non-Islamic traditions and practices as well as misunderstanding and misinterpretation of religion”.⁶² This makes it clear that the reliance on Islamic values as a guide for the advancement of women is ideal.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE OPAAW

The current Plan of Action technically comprises six labelled parts, namely, the “Introduction”,⁶³ followed by the “OPAAW’s Objectives”,⁶⁴ then by the “Sub-Objectives of OPAAW”,⁶⁵ the fourth part is the “Means of Implementations of OPAAW”⁶⁶ followed by “Conclusion”⁶⁷ and finally the “Mechanisms of Implementation”.⁶⁸ Initially, the “Introduction” part includes seven principle themes in preparation for the subsequent “Objectives of OPAAW”. To start with, the introduction establishes the primary reasons for having the Plan of Action and it highlights the firm belief shared by all OIC Member States that women should be given equal chance and relevance in contributing to their societies. The Introduction also makes the unequivocal stand that practises hindering women’s advancement are deemed by all Member States un-Islamic.⁶⁹ Furthermore, it affirms the need to work with other key international instruments in eliminating all forms of

discrimination against women.⁷⁰ Further elaboration on some of the critical aspects covered in the introduction, including the above is addressed in the analysis of the introduction section.

The second part of the Plan of Action is the “OPAAW’s Objectives” which are reasonably pithy and concise. The part allocated to the Objectives contains nine titled Objectives: “Decision Making Participation, Education, Health, Economic Empowerment, Social Protection, Protection of Women from Violence, Women in Crisis Situation, Women in Disasters and, finally, Women in Armed Conflict”.⁷¹ Each of these titles is followed by a short explanation that states the main issues and categories relevant to the Objective. The last four Objectives, addressed women in crisis zone and humanitarian related disasters, which unlike the other objectives are followed by a relatively lengthy explanation. How the Objectives are presented seem to dictate the broad use of phrases with wide-ranging meanings which allowed it to be as inclusive as possible while being concise. Consequently, reading the Objectives unaccompanied by the Sub-Objectives would give the incorrect impression of the objective being imprecise and too general.

The third and most central part is occupied by the “Sub-objectives of the OPAAW”. The significance of the Sub-objectives emanates from the fact that it includes both the nine Objectives combined with several detailed measures listed in dot points accompanying each objective. It may be relevant at this stage to reiterate that the details of each and every point in the Sub-objectives are agreed upon unanimously by Members States of the OIC. It is also critical to emphasise that the intention of each of these points is to ensure the achievement of the OPAAW Objectives. Hence, the understating of their details should be within the objective of achieving the advancement of women and promoting their status.

The content of the Sub-objectives confronts two entwined challenges. The first is to be able to encompass all aspects required to achieve their respective objective in its measures. However, while doing so, the second challenge is to avoid resorting to generalising

or the all-encompassing statements in an attempt to incorporate all aspects of the objective yet lose focus. In other words, the balance required from the sub-objectives is to encompass as many aspects without losing focus and precision in their meanings. It requires commanding the OIC Member States precisely with a practical language. Hence, it is notable that the language in the Sub-objectives rotates between specificity and generalisation. In some dot points, it can be described as detailed yet in other dot points, they are all-encompassing and comprehensive. Finally, it is notable that the language used to illustrate the Sub-objectives is chosen precisely and with an awareness of the controversy surrounding some of the concerns.

Both the Objectives and Sub-objectives are complemented and followed by the fourth section of the Plan of Action which incorporates the "Means of Implementation of OPAAW". The relevance of this part is arguably in its direct approach in allocating specific tasks that would ensure the implantation of the objectives. It essentially allocates the tasks in a precise method such as addressing "national institutions of OIC Member States to coordinate the work of various departments involved in the promotion of women and the implementation of OPAAW".⁷² Similarly, section A, point 1 of the Establishment of the Mechanism of OPAAW states that: "The OIC General Secretariat, particularly the Directorate General of Cultural, Social and Family Affairs shall be actively engaged in the implementation of the OPAAW".⁷³ The mechanisms are divided into two titled sections. Section (A) is titled "Establishment of the Mechanism of OPAAW"⁷⁴ which contains four measures. The main focus of section (A) is joining the relevant department of the Directorate of the General Secretariat and the OIC Member States directly, in a cooperation that would address the many aspects of the OPAAW. Section (B) of the mechanisms is titled "Implementation actions that should be taken at the level of Member States and the OIC General Secretariat, Subsidiary Organs, Specialised and Affiliated institutions"⁷⁵ which contains eleven measures. The relevance of section (B) is in establishing a number of vital administrative tasks,

some of which are on a large international scale.

The fifth section of the Plan of Action is the “Conclusion”. Unlike the previous version of OPAAW adopted in 2008, the Conclusion is technically not the end of the OPAAW adopted by the Sixth Ministerial Session in the development of women of OIC Member States. The short Conclusion in the final version of the OPAAW is technically followed by a section titled the “Mechanisms of Implementation”.⁷⁶ The conclusion is short and precise. It primarily reiterates the importance of the Plan of Action for all women in Member States. It also emphasises, with unambiguous terms, the need to work alongside other international instruments, specifying the CEDAW.

The last section of the revised OPAAW adopted in 2016 is the section titled: “OPAAW Mechanisms for Implementation”. Potentially, the relevance of this section is technically in acting as a matrix of Objectives and Indicators. The dot point content is specific, addressing details of each of the OPAAW objectives except for the last three. The three last Objectives in the “Mechanisms for Implementation” are all combined in one section which is most likely caused by the fact that they all address women in a crisis situation. The measures in this section intend to establish a means to determine the degree of success or failure of the plan within societies of Member States.⁷⁷ It is undoubtedly designed to lead to an ongoing reporting mechanism recognised and adhered to by OIC Member States.

The Mechanisms for Implementation section contains three columns. The first column summarises the Objectives of OPAAW in their original order. The second column addresses the measures to be implemented as many of the listed items in this column mirrors the Sub-objectives, although in specific subject matters they acquire a more hands-on language. The third column is the most explicit section of the Plan of Action. The details of this column in many ways defines the degree of success or failure of the Plan Actions as it allocates the bodies responsible for the required action as well as a given period of time for implementation; which is two years.

THE PRINCIPLE THEMES OF THE OPAAW

The OPAAW is an international human rights instrument concerned with the advancement of all women within OIC Member State. It is evident that throughout the Plan of Action, certain themes categorise its approach and method. Some of these themes, such as its particular dedication to the family or its referral to Islamic values, are unique to the OPAAW. Other themes, such as the upholding of the State as the primary accountable entity for its objectives, are dictated by its nature as an international instrument. Recognising the OPAAW themes provides the necessary depth for examining its contents. It is arguable that these themes do not only determine the OPAAW's approach but also define it as a unique international instrument.

Reference to Islamic Values

The relevance of Islam for the OPAAW is unsurprisingly prominent. In the revised Plan of Action adopted in 2016, both terms Islamic values and Islamic traditions are often employed. Throughout the Plan of Action, the relevance of religion appears in a number of places such as the referrals to Muslim women, non-Islamic traditions and the misinterpretation of religion. This use of religious grounds to justify, define or rationalise concepts in an international instrument is considered controversial.⁷⁸ Typically, the secular universal approach is the dominating method in a comparable international document to the OPAAW.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, in the case of the OPAAW, religious basis and the moral code in Islam is one of the foundations unifying Member States of the OIC. Hence, the Plan of Action puts forward Islamic principles as guidance and points them out as a source of a uniting objective.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to approach the OPAAW as a religious document. While it is guided by Islamic values, the Plan of Action is an international document, primarily agreed upon by States at the international political arena. Hence, it is not possible, for instance, to approach the OPAAW hoping to arrive at or understand a particular interpretation of a specific holy text. The primary objective of the Plan of Action is to introduce effective

policy measures and amends societal perceptions that would discriminate against women. In order to achieve these changes and implement the desired policies in Islamic oriented societies, it would be counterproductive to neglect the influence of religion particularly in refuting the discriminative practices against women. For instance, the introduction in the OPAAW makes what can be considered a formidable statement. It deems all oppressive behaviour resulting in the victimisation of the women as non-Islamic.⁸⁰ Practises causing the marginalisation and victimisation of women are described as: “Those difficulties emanate from non-Islamic traditions and practices as well as misunderstanding and misinterpretation of religion”.⁸¹

Furthermore, the influence of Islamic principles throughout the Plan is evident. On the other hand, the term Islamic values are directly linked to Member States’ international obligations. It is evident that the drafters of the Plan of Action were aware of the need to accommodate the universal approach while managing the relative perspective. For instance, the realisation that majority of the OIC Member States are signatory to the CEDAW. Hence, Member States refer to their commitments to the CEDAW in the OPAAW introduction.⁸²

However, it is notable that in the OPAAW, directly after the statement “Mindful of the commitment of the OIC Member States’ towards international conventions and instruments”⁸³ the Plan of Action adds “in line with Islamic values”.⁸⁴ The precise reason or reasons for adding the term “Islamic values”⁸⁵ to both statements related to “commitment to other international instruments” is difficult to determine. It is most likely caused by the general approach and overall methodology of the OIC. The OIC, time and time again, declares that it is extremely mindful of the will of the international commitment.⁸⁶ Within the OIC, there is a strong belief in an approach based on cooperation not only amongst OIC Member States but equally amongst all other international entities and perspectives. Hence, it can be argued that combining the Islamic values with other international commitment is caused by the desire to be mindful of both approaches, i.e., religious and

secular.

Finally, a cursory read of the Plan of Action gives the inaccurate impression of it being a religious instrument that is concerned with the wellbeing of Muslim women. The OPAAW makes no distinction in the care and concern for all women within OIC Member States.⁸⁷ The Plan of Action states unambiguously that it aims is “to improve the status of women in the Muslim world”.

Women in Crisis

The last three Objectives of the OPAAW are allocated for providing assistance to women during a crisis. The content of which is exclusive to the revised new Plan of Action. By complementing OPAAW with Articles addressing women during a crisis, the Plan of Action can be considered to be further equipped for achieving its ultimate objective in empowering women in OIC Member States. Particularly with the continual devastating events inflicted on societies of a large number of its States such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya and long-suffering of the occupied Palestinian people.

The measures addressing women in crisis zone are contained in Objectives Seven, Eight and Nine. They are chiefly concerned with providing both women and girls with the most protection, assistance and preventative measures. They also promote the role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The Objectives cover a wide range of circumstances such as natural as well as man-made disasters, foreign occupation, armed conflict and forced displacement. It emphasises repeatedly the necessity to place women and girls at the forefront of the efforts during these types of crisis.⁸⁸ It also, in two separate Objectives, Nine and Seven, repeatedly emphasises the necessity to involve women in the resolution and management of these crises. By involving women in the resolution and the management of the crisis, the OPAAW addresses the need to advance the status of women and counter related negative stereotyping. However, most critically, it addresses the need to protect and assist women during circumstances of overwhelming vulnerability and conditions that bypass questioning

their status within the society to threatening the core of their existence within human conditions.

By introducing the crisis situation, Objectives of the OPAAW arguably attempts to validate its ability as a living instrument.⁸⁹ It also demonstrates the need for an international instrument to confront the particular challenges of OIC Member States. Currently, the OPAAW is considered the only international instrument dedicated to the wellbeing of women while placing adequate focus on women during a crisis. Consequently, the relevance for the Plan of Action to the women within societies of the OIC Member States cannot be overstated. Arguably, thus, the significance of the OPAAW's approach in the last three Objectives presents it an exceptionally useful partner to the CEDAW.

Women in Rural Areas

Difficulties facing women in rural conditions are distinctly noted and addressed by the OPAAW. Drafters of the Plan of Action considered women living in rural areas to face condition that potentially makes them amongst the most disadvantaged. In fact, it is not an uncommon occurrence for women living in rural areas in the particular OIC Member States to live the entirety of their lives with no access to an adequate education.⁹⁰ Additionally, in some cases, women in rural areas would most likely to struggle to access vital health services. Even worse would be their access to appropriate legal services, compounded with extreme marginalisation during decision-making.

Hence, the drafters of the OPAAW integrated the necessity to attend to women living in rural conditions. Although unlike CEDAW,⁹¹ the OPAAW does not contain a specific Article or Objective dedicated to the advancement of rural women. Nevertheless, the Plan of Action places considerable emphasis on improving their conditions and addressing all types of difficulties. For instance, Sub-objective 5 (f) emphasises the need for the Member States' governments to be directly involved in improving "coordination and provision of government services to women"⁹² which is followed by emphasises on having to address particularly

on the needs of women in rural areas “including their access to health, education, economic opportunities and legal assistance”.⁹³ Furthermore, Objective 8 highlights the need to provide women in rural areas with humanitarian assistance.⁹⁴ Objective 8 addresses the protection of women during natural disasters with particular reference to women in rural areas. Additionally, Objective 7 specifies women in rural areas as the one the most disadvantage amongst women in a crisis zone. This Objective addresses providing protection for women in crisis situations. It states that: “Ensuring women’s and girls’ protection and access to humanitarian assistance during armed conflicts, natural and man-made disasters, foreign occupation, forced displacement and other vulnerable situations, particularly, rural women”.⁹⁵

Particular Focus on Education and Training

Education is the second of the nine objectives of OPAAW. The Objective in combination with its nine sub-objectives encompasses a wide spectrum of measures intended to advance the status of women via education. Nevertheless, it is evident from other Objectives that requesting education and training for women is not limited to the educational Objective alone and, throughout the entirety of the Plan of Action, drafters made specific emphasise and stressed on its relevance of education.

It is apparent that the drafters of the Plan of Action consider “education and training”⁹⁶ as a means to provide women with immediate and specific skills eventually to equip them to face relevant challenges of each Objective. For instance, one of the measures advocated in the Health Objective, as Sub-objective 3 (f) calls for “Providing health, education and training for women to equip them with necessary knowledge and skills in order to participate in decision-making processes regarding their healthcare”.⁹⁷ Similarly, the case in the second Objective related to education⁹⁸ or the Sub-objective (a) of the Fourth Objective related to economic empowerment.⁹⁹ The acute focus and integration of education and training in the OPAAW is evident that it is a fundamental methodology of advancing the status of

women. It eventually provides women with the chance of relevant involvement in their community and an equal ability to contribute to shaping and improving their societies.

The OPAAW identifies the need to emphasise and place considerable responsibility of governments and policymakers in OIC Member States. Hence, the unequivocal statements in Part Four (A): “The Means of Implementation of OPAAW”¹⁰⁰ for Member States to enact their obligations highlighted in the Plan.¹⁰¹ While the Sub-objectives rarely make direct statements to governments or policymakers, it is unmistakably implied throughout the majority of its points. In fact, it is possible to distinguish three methods the Sub-objectives of OPAAW identify as the responsibility of governments and policymakers.

It is the obligation of “Direct Involvement” evidently entailing the change within the government body or the society caused by the direct involvement of a government department or a government agency. For instance, Sub-objective 8 (a) states: “Enhancing capacities of governmental institutions and civil society institutions to prevent violence against women at the local, national and regional level”.¹⁰² It is possible to distinguish “Direct Involvement” into two forms. Initially, it could take both forms countering the negative circumstances which prevent the application of the objectives in OPAAW. The second form of Direct Involvement emphasises the need to enhance the conditions and the environment that would assist the application of the Plan of Action.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the OPAAW identifies a second method of involvement required by the governments and policymakers in Member States, which can be identified as “Indirect Involvement”. Indirect Involvement entails change caused by non-governmental entities such as civil societies yet supported directly by the government policy. Hence, the OPAAW frequently refers to the importance of coordination amongst government and civil society in order to reinforce and hasten the process of the Plan. For instance, Sub-objective 5 (c) states: “Engaging with civil society organisations carrying out activities in defence of women’s

advancement".¹⁰³

In addition, the OPAAW identifies the need for governments and policymakers to provide the appropriate environment for change considering all dimensions of the society. Therefore, the third method can be identified as "providing the environment of change". It is a truism that the advancement of the status of women is a project conditional to the involvement of every feature of the society. Nevertheless, the layers composing societies are not identical in each society and it changes in its influence from one society to another. The influence of religion on the structure and order of different society around the globe is evident to such predicament. For instance, the majority of OIC Member States has an element of Islamic religion accompanying or directly influencing the fabric of the society. While in other OIC Non-member Nations religion appears to have minimal effect on the order of the society. Therefore, the necessity in providing an environment of change reset in allowing every feature of the society, however, varies to contribute equally.

The approach OPAAW takes regarding governments and policymakers is not limited to organised civil societies and structural government change. Rather, it also extends to every element of the society, religious leaders, academics, women's rights activists in addition to all other possible forces of change within any society. For instance, Sub-objective 8 (f) addresses the need to utilise positive religious force within the society by engaging it.¹⁰⁴ It requires the government to assist its leaders to advocate the empowerment of women.¹⁰⁵ The Sub-objective requires "enhancing the role of religious leaders in the prevention of violence against women and girls".¹⁰⁶

Another force recognised by the Plan of Action in causing change and directing change is the ability and cooperate closely with media outlets. Hence, the OPAAW's Objectives explicitly addresses the role of media. It requests the Member States should "encourage the media to actively report on matters related to issues of women and their status"¹⁰⁷ and "Arrange and co-sponsor media conferences and events on the status of women".¹⁰⁸

Engaging All Layers of the Society

Since its conception of the OPAAW, it was apparent that it adopts the method of the outreaching to all elements that would advance the status of women. Hence, throughout the text of the OPAAW Objectives requesting the involvement of national and international efforts is evident. The Objective requests States to engage all civil societies, international media, researchers, human rights activist and community leaders. In fact, this request extends not only to forces within Member States but also non-Member States alike.

It is arguable that for the success of a Plan of Action to change the status of women requires a number of essential elements. One of which would be the manner and the capacity in which it engages the society. For that reason, OPAAW appears to introduce a number of measures to accomplish this critical element for its progress. For instance, in Part Four (B), the Plan of action expresses unambiguously the need for methods and means for actively engaging all parties in the objectives of OPAAW.¹⁰⁹ While point four calls all stakeholders; “Member States, OIC General Secretariat, all Subsidiary Organs as well as specialised and affiliated institutions to take an active role in the implementation of the measures introduced by the Plan of Action”.¹¹⁰ These measures include various means and mechanisms covering a wide range of influential outlets. For instance, sub-section 2 of Part Four (B) directly and indirectly engages academic and research institutions by advocating the need to develop strategies and comprehensive studies in line with the objective of OPAAW. The second recommendation in sub-section 4 supports advocating human rights in all Member States, in addition to advocating for the necessary financial backing to projects and programs that would promote human rights. It further emphasises the need to actively engage with civil societies at all levels in sub-section (7).

In all probability, for the Plan of Action to achieve its overarching objective, it cannot ignore the essential need to working with civil societies, in both member and non-Member States. Hence, the Plan of Action incorporated in Part Four relates to International Media. Most likely caused by the reason that the

drafters of OPAAW realise the influence International Media has on shaping the perception of Muslim women. Consequently, affecting the international perception of the Plan of Action since it is advanced by Muslim nations for the empowerment of women. Moreover, subsection 8 (B) calls on all stakeholders to convey on a global level the positive image of Muslim women as a respected and dynamic part of the Muslim world.¹¹¹ It also stresses in subsection 9 (B) the need to engage with international media outlets.¹¹² It essentially introduces the need to highlight matters, events that reflect positively on the status of Muslim women. Drafters of this point most likely reflect a common concern that Muslim women are internationally portrayed in an unwarranted negative perception. Finally, in subsection 10 of (B) OPAAW calls on stakeholders to arrange and co-sponsor media conferences and events related to advancing the status of women¹¹³. The importance of Media in enhancing the status of women is evident to the drafters of OPAAW, therefore, it has been gained a considerable portion of Part Four (B) of the “means of implementation of the OPAAW”¹¹⁴ section.

In short, the Plan of Action included a number of outreach measures. It places great focus on presenting Muslim women in a positive light throughout International media. It also actively engages civil societies at all levels; Member States and non-Member States alike. Additionally, it stresses the need to produce research and comprehensive studies in line with the objectives of the Plan of Action. And finally, it supports the financial backing of efforts aiming at advocating human rights within Member States.

Unfortunately, despite the unambiguous determination by drafters of the OPAAW to involve all layers of the society in the project of advancing women, it is safe to state that OPAAW is still an unknown project. The reality on the ground illustrates the relevant government departments are possibly the only entity aware of the objectives. Otherwise, the absolute majority within Member States are unaware of it. Consequently, forming a challenge for OPAAW; one that has the potential to be most detrimental yet extremely straightforward to counter.

Acute Dedication to the Family Unit

Family is considered by the OIC as the building block of society.¹¹⁵ In effect, for the OIC Member States, the relevance of the family unit and the significance of its wellbeing cannot be overstated.¹¹⁶ The relevance of the family unit for OIC Member Nations stems from both religious and cultural heritage. Both aspects seem to be inspirable aspects within OIC Member States' societies and are often accompanied by sound reasoning in support of the family unit. Hence, the OIC frequently and in various forums refers to the wellbeing of the family¹¹⁷ particularly while addressing social and cultural concerns and most critically when undertaking commitment for the OPAAW.

The focus on the wellbeing of the family unit in a plan of action dedicated to the advancement of women adds a unique and challenging dimension to the OPAAW. Unlike any other international instrument concerned with the empowerment of women, the OPAAW includes the family as a priority concern in the process of empowering women. It does not divorce the concept of the empowering women from the fact that women in most cases are an inseparable and vital part of the family. It is critical at this stage to draw a distinction between the first approach which focuses chiefly on empowering women within the family, while merely having the family unit in mind. In contrast with the second approach which advocates the empowerment of women primarily as part of the family.

The distinction between these two approaches seems to be the core difference in methodology and approach between the OPAAW and any other international instrument dedicated to the empowerment of women. The value placed on the wellbeing of the family as an equal focus on the empowerment of women has proven a matter of controversy. Many maintain that family structure throughout history has been one of the first offenders in discriminating against women.¹¹⁸ They argue that the current family structure has traditionally placed unequal powers in the hands of the male leaving women under at their authority¹¹⁹ which often result in unfairness and also a common cycle of

discrimination. By taking this argument at face value, it seems reasonable to focus solely on women, particularly within an international instrument dedicated to their advancement. Nevertheless, it is arguable that the advancement of women without any consideration to the family, which women are an inseparable part of, eventually will result in a culture of conflict. It has the potential to ultimately divide instead of combined.

In fact, it is critical to stress the unique approach that the OPAAW has taken to avoid the war amongst the genders. The war among genders would never benefit and prosper any society at any time in history as the society as a whole is established firmly with the harmonious participation and contributions of both genders that can offer offspring (child/children), i.e., female and male. It is very important to be conscious for any gender that, as of now, for some, with the exception of the son of Maryam (Mary) (peace be upon her), the Prophet Isa (Jesus) (peace be upon him), no human is born out of a single-gender either female or male. A human need both genders to play their respective role even before the inception in the mother's womb, throughout the life after the birth until death. Generally, no man would be pleased to witness the women they love and hold dear to their heart - such as daughters, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, nieces and the list can go on and on - to experience any form of abuse, violence and discrimination committed by their partners and others at any level for any reason. In the same vein, no woman would also be pleased to witness the men they love and hold dear to their heart - such as sons, fathers, grandfathers, brothers, nephews and the list can go on and on - to experience any form of abuse, violence and discrimination committed by their partners and others at any level for any reason. If the society is designed to discriminate against any gender one-sided, the above mentioned unpleasant situations are inevitable to witness in life in one way or another. Thus, it is an inherent obligation for a human to strike the balance between the genders in which both are empowered to live harmoniously. Accordingly, any regional or international convention or instrument that caters for the women's human rights and advancement of women should

not instigate or fuel the war among genders any further. In fact, this is exactly what the OPAAW is promoting, i.e., an approach of harmonisation among the genders. It bases the relations within the family or the society as a whole on the unquestionable need to cooperate in a spirit of complementing one another. The methodology of OPAAW places the family unit as an ultimate aim which assists the society to prosper together in a harmonised transaction.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, this paper explores the reasons for the OIC to propose the OPAAW as an international instrument for women's human rights in its Member States. In doing so, it provides the foundation for the overall examination of the Plan of Action. It examines the process the Plan of Action has undergone from its introduction in 2006 up until 2018. It highlights the amendments of the contents as well as changes in approach the two OPAAW encountered, and the current OPAAW can be considered to have, throughout the progress, acquired the elements of a greater potential for the advancement of women in OIC Member States.

Additionally, it provides an understanding of the institutional mechanisms for producing OPAAW. It analyses the relevant OIC methods of proposing and adopting the OPAAW while highlighting some of the obstacles and advantages resulting from such methods. It concludes that the mechanism of which OPAAW is critiqued and accepted amongst Member States eventually enhances the chances of the practical application of the Plan of Action within OIC Member States.

Furthermore, it draws attention on the content of the OPAAW amongst many other sources to conclude several unique OPAAW themes. The main theme presented in this paper eventually demonstrates the complexity of the OPAAW's task. It also highlights the uniqueness of the OPAAW approach compared to other international instruments, yet its ability to accommodate the most critical aspects of the advancement of women. Finally, the relevance of this paper in providing the analyses and

introduction to present OPAAW cannot be overstated. Since one of the potentially detrimental challenges to any plan of action aiming to develop societal perspectives is the lack of academic depth.

Notes

- 1 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "46 Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers", <<https://www.oic-oci.org/confdetail/?cID=11&lan=en>> (accessed 3 December, 2019).
- 2 See the OPAAW, Introduction 1.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "History", <https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=52&p_ref=26&lan=en> (accessed 1 January, 2018).
- 5 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "46 Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers", <<https://www.oic-oci.org/confdetail/?cID=11&lan=en>> (accessed 3 December, 2019).
- 6 See the OPAAW, Introduction 7.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Muath Khalil Amayreh, "A Critical Analysis of the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) as the Empirical Approach to Maqasid Al-Shari'ah", *Journal of Islamic Law Review*, Vol. 14, No.2 (July-December, 2018): 351-375.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Muath Khalil Amayreh, "A critical analysis of the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) as the empirical approach to Maqasid Al-Shari'ah", *Journal of Islamic Law Review*, Vol. 14, No.2 (July-December, 2018): 351-375.
- 11 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "History", <https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=52&p_ref=26&lan=en> (accessed 1 January, 2019).
- 12 Kayaoglu Turan, *The Organization of Islamic Cooperation: Politics, Problems, and Potential*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 13-15.
- 13 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "History", <https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=52&p_ref=26&lan=en> (accessed 1 January, 2019).
- 14 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "Charter of the Organisation of

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- Islamic Cooperation (OIC)", <oci.org/upload/documents/charter/en/oic_charter_2018_en.pdf> (accessed 3 December, 2020).
- 15 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "Interview with the OIC Secretaries-General Iyad Ameen Madani", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajQjFec9U_0> (accessed 1 January, 2019).
 - 16 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "Foreign Ministers", <<https://www.oic-oci.org/confdetail/?cID=11&lan=en>> (accessed 3 December, 2019).
 - 17 Ibid.
 - 18 Ibid.
 - 19 Ekmeleddin Ihasnoglu, *The Islamic World in the New Century: the Organization of Islamic Conference, 1969-2009*, (United Kingdom: C. Hurst & Co., 2010), 44-49.
 - 20 Kayaoglu Turan, *The Organization of Islamic Cooperation: Politics, Problems, and Potential*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 13-15.
 - 21 Ekmeleddin Ihasnoglu, *The Islamic World in the New Century: the Organization of Islamic Conference, 1969-2009*, (United Kingdom: C. Hurst & Co., 2010), 44-49.
 - 22 Kayaoglu Turan, *The Organization of Islamic Cooperation: Politics, Problems, and Potential*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 15-23.
 - 23 Ibid.
 - 24 See Charter of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Preamble.
 - 25 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "Foreign Ministers", <<https://www.oic-oci.org/confdetail/?cID=11&lan=en>> (accessed 3 December, 2019).
 - 26 In-depth analysis of the resolutions of the Foreign Ministers meetings demonstrates that it strongly reflects on meets conducted by the meeting of the Ministers in Charge of women. This was confirmed by training conducted at the OIC headquarters In Jeddah. Dr. Boubakri Maiga, Interview by Muath Khalil Amayerh, OIC headquarters, Jeddah, 05 March 2019.
 - 27 Dr. Jim Tintin, Interview by Muath Khalil Amayerh, SESRIC headquarters, Ankara, Turkey, 5 December 2018.
 - 28 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "Interview with the OIC Secretaries

- General Iyad Ameen Madani“, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajQjFec9U_0> (accessed 1 January, 2019).
- 29 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, ”Ministers in Charge of Women”, <<https://www.oic-oci.org/confdetail/?cID=35&lan=en>> (accessed 1 January, 2018).
- 30 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, ”OPAAW“, <https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/documents/opaaw/opaaw_en.pdf> (accessed 1 January, 2020).
- 31 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, ”Ministers in charge of Women”, <<https://www.oic-oci.org/confdetail/?cID=35&lan=en>> (accessed 1 January, 2018).
- 32 Dr. Jim Tintin, Interview by Muath Khalil Amayreh, SESRIC headquarters, Ankara, Turkey, 05 December 2018.
- 33 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, ”Foreign Ministers”, <<https://www.oic-oci.org/confdetail/?cID=11&lan=en>> (accessed 3 December, 2019).
- 34 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, ”Ministers in charge of Women”, <<https://www.oic-oci.org/confdetail/?cID=35&lan=en>> (accessed 1 January, 2019).
- 35 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, ”Resolution on Culture and Social Affairs Adopted by the 32nd Session of Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, 3/32-C on Social Matters”, <<https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=477&refID=35>> (accessed 3 December, 2019).
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, ”OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) adopted by Second Ministerial Conference“, <https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/documents/opaaw/opaaw_en.pdf> (accessed 1 January, 2018).
- 38 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, ”The Third Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of OIC Member States“, <<https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=3021&refID=1111>> (accessed 1 January, 2018).
- 39 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, ”The Fourth Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of OIC Member States“, <<https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=3020&refID=1110>>

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- (accessed 1 January, 2018).
- 40 The Fourth Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of OIC Member States has not been placed on the Website of the OIC. There is currently no means of accessing the document. Access to the document was obtained by Muath Khalil Amayreh during the month internship and requested permission to make this document public, however, received no confirmation as yet.
 - 41 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "The Sixth Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of OIC Member States", <<https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=2912&refID=1110>> (accessed 1 January, 2019).
 - 42 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "The Seventh Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of OIC Member States", <<https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=4421&refID=1249>> (accessed 1 January, 2019).
 - 43 Dr. Jim Tintin, Interview by Muath Khalil Amayreh, SESRIC headquarters, Ankara, Turkey, 05 December 2018.
 - 44 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "Resolution on Culture and Social Affairs Adopted by The Seventh Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of OIC Member States", <<https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=4426&refID=1249>> (accessed 3 December, 2020).
 - 45 Ibid., 7.
 - 46 Ibid., 16.
 - 47 See The OPAAW, Matrix of Measures and Mechanisms of Implementations.
 - 48 Organization of Islamic Cooperation, "OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) Adopted by Second Ministerial Conference", <https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/documents/opaaw/opaaw_en.pdf> (accessed 1 January, 2018).
 - 49 Ibid., 4.
 - 50 See the OPAAW, Introduction 5.
 - 51 See the OPAAW, Objective 6.
 - 52 See the OPAAW, Objective 7.
 - 53 The OPAAW, Objective 8.

- 54 The OPAAW, Objective 9.
- 55 See the OPAAW, Introduction; the 2008 OPAAW, Introduction.
- 56 United Nations Human rights Office of the High Commissioner, "the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)", <<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>> (accessed 1 January, 2010).
- 57 See the OPAAW, Introduction 7.
- 58 Republic of Iran, Republic of Somalia and Republic of the Sudan have declined becoming signatories to the CEDAW.
- 59 See the OPAAW, Introduction 1.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 See the 2008 OPAAW, Point 3.
- 62 See the OPAAW, Introduction 1.
- 63 See the OPAAW, Page 3.
- 64 See the OPAAW, Page 4.
- 65 See the OPAAW, Page 5-10.
- 66 See the OPAAW, Page 11-12.
- 67 See the OPAAW, Page 13.
- 68 See the OPAAW, Page 14
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