



# WOMEN HELPING WOMEN

Jordanian Women's Election Network

July - September 2008

by *Roula Attar*

A new Political Parties' Law took effect on April 16, 2008 and resulted in the registration of 14 parties, down from 35. The parties include 12 old parties that rectified their status in accordance with the law, as well as two totally new parties. Seven can be characterized as opposition and seven as centrist parties. Existing political parties that did not rectify their status in accordance with the 2007 law either voluntarily dissolved themselves, or were dissolved by the Ministry of Interior (MOI).

While the new political parties' law entails a provision of public funding for political parties, it leaves it to the Cabinet of Ministers to agree on mechanisms of disbursement and issue the executive regulations that detail those. The annual budget that was passed by Parliament earlier this year includes a line item for party financing, in the amount of JD 5 million. In September, the Cabinet approved a decision to allocate 50,000 JDs of public funds per year for each of the 14 licensed parties, to be disbursed in two 25,000 JD installments in December and June of every year.

While the amount would not completely fulfill the parties' financial needs, it would help the parties to reach out to larger segments of society and to cover some of their operational costs. When the parties registered under the new law, they expanded their memberships and had to establish a presence in at least five governorates. They now need sufficient resources to maintain that and public financing would help.

No one can deny the existing negative perceptions of political parties in Jordan. Parties are regularly attacked for failing to organize and deliver, without the slightest acknowledgement of their continued hard work and commitment to public service and to democracy. Jordanians at all levels are quick to dismiss the existence and role of parties in political life, citing 50 years of history as reason for why political party life can't flourish.

Effective political parties are the cornerstone of a democratic society, however, and the future of Jordan will be more prosperous with their active participation in political life. Today, the parties are better organized and more serious than ever. They have worked hard to register under the new law and they must be supported in their efforts. Jordanian women should especially be involved in party life because their participation will enrich the parties and enable them to better understand and fulfill citizens' hopes and aspirations.

#### Administrative Team:

Roula Attar, Country Director, Jordan - NDI  
Nvart Taminian, Administrative and Finance Officer,  
Jordan - NDI

#### Consultative Team:

Rima Mulhim, Consultant  
Kholoud Khatatbeh, Media Consultant

For more information, please call +962 6 461 2527

#### IN THIS ISSUE

**Parliamentary Affairs:** Parliament's Extraordinary Session

**Political Party Affairs:** Financing Political Parties - List of Registered Parties - Interviews with Women Party Activists

**Municipal Affairs** : Interview with a Municipal Council Member - Educational Forum for the Greater Amman Municipality

**Various News** : Updates from the WHW Network and its Partner Organizations

**Regional / Global News** : Doha Leadership Academy

## Parliamentary Affairs

### Parliament's Extraordinary Session

- The 15<sup>th</sup> Parliament opened its extraordinary session on June 1, 2008. The 40-day session focused on the draft laws identified per the Royal Decree that convened the session. Parliament officially completed its first year when the extraordinary session concluded on Saturday, July 12, 2008.
- The number of laws that Parliament reviewed and passed during the first ordinary session was 40 temporary and draft laws. An additional 24 laws were completed during the extraordinary session, for a total of 64.



***Per Article 82 of the Jordanian Constitution, a Royal Decree was issued calling on Parliament to convene for an extraordinary session as of June 1, 2008 to discuss the following laws:***

1. Temporary Law 54 of the year 2002 - Law on Public Health
2. Temporary Law 29 for the year 2003 - Amendment Law for the Law on Public Health
3. Draft Law for Amending the Law on Public Health for the year 2006
4. Temporary Law 31 for the year 2003 - The Public Association for Food and Drug Law
5. Draft Law on the Jordanian Chamber of Agriculture for the year 2008
6. Temporary Law 44 for the year 2002 - Agriculture Law
7. Temporary Law 47 for the year 2001 - Traffic Law
8. Temporary Law 53 for the year 2002 - Amendment Law for the Traffic Law
9. Draft Traffic Law for the year 2008
10. Draft Law on Gendarmerie Forces for the year 2008
11. Draft Law for Amending the Public Gatherings Law for the year 2008
12. Temporary Law 58 for the year 2001 - Law on the Council for Professional and Technical Education and Training
13. Draft Law on the Council for Professional and Technical Employment, Training and Education for the year 2008
14. Draft Associations Law for the year 2008
15. Draft Amendment Law for the Law on the Rights of the Disabled for the year 2008
16. Supplemental Draft Law for the General Budget Law for the 2008 fiscal year
17. Draft Law for the Budgets of Governmental Departments for the 2008 fiscal year
18. Draft Law for cancelling the Law on the Jordanian Investment Institution for the year 2008
19. Temporary Law 16 for the year 2002 - Law on Financial Loans
20. Temporary Law 48 for the year 2003 - Amendment Law for the Law on Financial Loans
21. Draft Law on Financial Loans for the year 2008
22. Draft Amendment Law for the Companies Law for the year 2008
23. Draft Law for cancelling the Law on the Port Corporation for the year 2008
24. Draft Amendment Law for the Law of the Jordanian Maritime Authority for the year 2008
25. Draft Amendment Law for the Transportation Law for the year 2008
26. Draft Amendment Law for the Labor Law for the year 2008

## Political Party Affairs

### *Jordanian Council of Ministers Issues Regulations for Public Funding of Political Parties The Minister of Interior Announces the Disbursement of 50,000 JDs for Each Party Per Year*

At a session chaired by Prime Minister Nader Al-Dahabi in late August, the Council of Ministers issued the executive regulations for the public financing of political parties.

Following the session, Minister of Interior Eid Al Fayez announced that according to the regulations, the government will contribute the amount of 50,000JDs annually to each party, to be paid in two installments : the first in June and the second in December of each fiscal year, provided that the party is in compliance with the regulations. Mr. Al Fayez explained that this contribution would cover overhead and operational costs such as building rentals and staff wages.

The Political Parties' Law stipulates that parties deposit the funds in Jordanian banks and that expenditures be subject to the approval of the highest executive body within the party, as outlined in its internal bylaws and taking into consideration party members who are authorized to sign.

The Minister explained that these regulations come in accordance with a line item in the state budget that allows for public funding for political parties from the main treasury fund. The disbursement of these funds is to be implemented based on the conditions, principles and spending policies stipulated in the Political Parties' Law.

## A LIST OF THE 14 JORDANIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

*The Parties that were licensed in accordance with the new Political Parties' Law this year*

1. Dua'a Party
2. The National Jordanian Party
3. Al Ressalah Party
4. The Democratic Popular Unity Party
5. The Democratic People (Hashd Party)
6. The Centrist Islamic Party (Al-Wassat Al-Islami)
7. The National Movement for Direct Democracy
8. The Islamic Action Front (IAF)
9. The National Constitutional Party
10. The Arab Baath Socialist Party
11. Jordan's Communist Party
12. The Baath Arab Progressive Party
13. Al Hayat Party
14. The Unified Jordanian Front Party

**Women political party activists agree that parties should merge in order to be more effective and they call upon the government to provide parties with funding**

Jordanian women political party activists agreed that strengthening the role of national party movements and decreasing their number would contribute towards establishing strong active influential political parties that are capable of fielding strong candidates for the next parliament.

They also demanded that the state provide parties with public funding to assist them to fulfill their roles. Furthermore, they emphasized the role of Jordanian women in political parties and professional unions, which builds their confidence, abilities and political skills.

They also criticized the one-person, one-vote election law as an obstacle to political party development, calling for a modern law that allows for a proportional list system where party candidates would be elected to parliament.

The women spoke of the challenges that have faced democratic life in Jordan for the last two decades, including what resulted from the martial law period of 1957-1989, which negatively impacted citizens' participation in parties. That said, the Jordanian leadership, represented by His Majesty King Abdullah II, continues to support initiatives that aim at enhancing political development in Jordan, as well as supporting Jordanian women's advancement in all sectors, with special focus on political participation.

The problem lies in the parties' weak performance thus far, in addition to existing cultural views in developing countries that limit women's political participation.

**Haifa Al Bashir**

**" There is no real political development without political parties and civil society organizations "**

Member of the Executive Bureau of the National Constitutional Party Haifa Al-Bashir, who was first active with Al Wa'ed (Promise) party in 1993, sees that the political arena in the country only has room for three to four active and effective political parties that represent the various national currents.

Al-Bashir insists on the importance of women's participation in political life, saying that women's withdrawal from parties is unacceptable, because party work allows women to prove themselves and achieve political gains. She points to many successful models of women in parties who are a source of pride to women and society, despite their small number.



**Haifa Al Bashir**

She sees that "while political parties have been operating for years now, they have not yet been able to deliver and their work hasn't been strengthened in the way that it should have. This is due to the need to amend the election law so that it's in line with modern life and to adopt the party list system, as well as encourage the election of women ". She called on the government to support the parties financially and to continue to rely on women's quotas for the time being, as long as the formula for winning is amended so that it's not based on the percentage of voters per district, which now prevents the election of women from the capital and other big cities.

**Weak participation by women in professional unions**

Al-Bashir recognizes the need to empower women in public life through fair legislation and positive social trends, as well as the provision of work opportunities, in addition to maintaining the quota system in the law as a temporary measure, until the democratic process matures by the formation of active parties. The reality is that no real political development can take place without parties and civil society organizations.

According to Al-Bashir, Jordanian women have not contributed to the professional unions to the extent possible, especially since unions have welcomed women for decades and because working within unions is considered an advanced phase of democracy. Al-Bashir hopes that women will know their rights and the importance of their role, first within the family, then within society and in public life. She believes that "when man realizes the important role that woman plays and stands by her side, and when he understands that he must share family duties and responsibilities, then women will have the time to exercise their role in public life".

### **Emily Naffa'**

#### ***"A price paid for political party membership"***

#### ***House arrest, ban on travel, harassment and confiscation of her books***

Jordanian Communist Party member and lead activist Emily Naffa' is considered the first woman union member to lose her job as a result of her political views and party membership. She spoke to the WHW Newsletter about her motivation for joining the Communist Party and the challenges she faced in her political and partisan journey.

Naffa' explained that she had chosen to join the Jordanian Communist Party because of her conviction that it fights for marginalized segments of society, including women. She herself fought to liberate the Jordanian woman from the limitations placed on her, demanding her equal treatment to men politically, economically and socially.

She pointed out that she reached leadership positions within the party as a result of the communists' support for woman's political role, and her personal perseverance, sacrifice and sense of responsibility. She recalled organizing "the women's rally" in 1957 against the Baghdad Alliance, as well as another in 1969 against the "Israeli military show" in Jerusalem. Her political role had resulted in the loss of her job in 1963, when she was fired and denied work in one of the Jordanian banks. Despite this drawback, she was elected to the party's central committee that year and then in 1970, she was elected to the political bureau.

She listed several harassments she had encountered throughout her political life including being subject to house arrest for six months, banned from travel for more than 10 years, stalked together with her visitors, and having her house searched on regular basis, in addition to having her books and documents confiscated, and being deprived of a job due to the authorities denying her a security clearance.

#### ***"An impeding perspective"***

With regard to the current status of women in political parties, Naffa' believes that the previous "harsh" experience that women political activists faced had negatively impacted their participation once parties were licensed in 1992/1993.

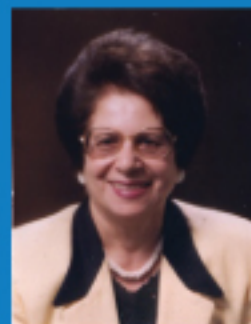
According to Naffa', women's participation in parties is very limited, since they constitute a mere 5.6% of the members in the parties' founding committees. A 1996 poll also showed that their participation in leadership posts does not exceed 3%.

Naffa' criticized some political parties' "impeding perspective" on women's role and performance and their lack of trust in their abilities. She was also critical of the various social restrictions imposed on women, thus depriving them from fully practicing their political rights within parties.

#### ***"An immediate necessity"***

Naffa' spoke in favor of the merging of political parties with similar agendas, citing successful past experiences in this area. She believes that this would help "decrease their number and further enhance their ability to defend the interests of various classes and social groups".

Naffa' views women's participation in political parties as an "immediate necessity" since political parties represent the most advanced means of political organization. She believes that women are traditionally marginalized in society and that parties represent a platform for them to defend their rights and reach decision-making positions.



*Emily Naffa'*

**Nawal Al Faouri*****"No Political Party can be effective without the participation of women"******"Women are welcomed to the 'first' and 'middle' rows of the party, but things turn 'tough' when they compete for decision-making positions"***

Al Wasat Al Islami party leader and Senator Nawal Al Faouri acknowledges that women's representation in parties is low, largely due to the nature of political party life in Jordan and the fact that parties' performance has yet to meet expectations at the political, economic and social levels. She also attributes women's "weak participation" in political party life to "controversial views" regarding women's political participation, typical in third world societies.

**Nawal Al Faouri**

Al Faouri states that there continues to be major challenges facing women and that what is required is a drastic change in attitudes, culture and norms, as well legislation that favorably reinforces this change.

Al Faouri points to several positive elements in the new political parties' law, such as public funding for parties, requiring a minimum number of 500 founding members, as well as encouraging parties to empower women and youth to reach leadership positions within the party structure.

She also emphasizes that while she supports having a smaller number of parties, those on the scene must have a "wide presence" and must be able to effectively "compete" for the democratic "rotation" of power. The problem is larger than the political parties' law, she says, and entails the need for "a true commitment to democratic culture and human rights".

Al Faouri sees woman's participation in party life as one of her basic national rights, as well as a right for society overall, because "prosperity cannot be achieved without the participation of all citizens, men and women alike, and no party institution can be effective without women's involvement".

***"The need to make women aware of their political rights"***

Al Faouri sees that "women activists and institutions are responsible for disseminating information and awareness regarding women's rights and for providing women with training and knowledge. That said, to achieve the expected levels of awareness, a major cultural transformation must take place and it must not be limited to women".

Al Faouri holds a PhD in Education and was the first woman to enter the Shura Council of a party in 1993 when party life was just starting. Her election was seen as a major step towards breaking obstacles to women's participation in Jordan.

Like many other Muslim women, Al Faouri is aware of the rights that the Islamic Shari'a has provided, including the right to engage in politics. "This is a right that Shari'a guaranteed, so why wouldn't we practice it!" she adds.

***"Long and hard journey"***

On women's advancement in parties, she states that "despite openness to women's participation in party life and the welcoming of their presence in the 'first' and 'middle' rows of the party structure, there is still resistance to their competing for leadership positions within the party".

"Reaching such positions," Al Faouri adds, "requires a genuine desire for public service, reaching out to people, dedication and hard work. These elements would enable a woman to compete for higher positions within the party, though she must keep in mind that the competition is tough".

### *Deputy Mayor of Fuheis Alvera Jreisat, Distinction and Big Accomplishments in a Short Amount of Time*

Deputy Mayor of the Fuheis Municipality Alvera Jreisat sets herself apart from others through her work and passion for public service. She is a sociable and energetic community leader who earned voters' respect in the last municipal elections, thus gaining the highest number of votes among male and female candidates alike.

If you were to tour the city of Fuheis, you would most likely see her standing with the cleaning workers in her area listening to their worries and concerns, or meeting with shop owners in the market, or visiting houses and conversing with homemakers about their problems. It is this loving social character that distinguishes Alvera Jreisat and brings her closer to the people of her district, which facilitates her work.



*Alvera Jreisat*

Speaking of her most important accomplishments since assuming the post of Deputy Mayor of Fuheis, Jreisat says that "from day one, I worked hard to achieve my goals and provide services to improve my town's conditions. I started working on developing the cultural aspects that distinguish Fuheis from other areas, and together with my colleagues in the municipality, I contributed to the Christmas and New Year's celebrations, when we set up the tallest Christmas tree in Jordan (14 meters). This had a positive impact and placed Fuheis ahead on the local tourism scene, and which we hope will become international. We also established the Fuheis Spring Festival and celebrated it on April 18, 2008. Jreisat added "I hope the festival continues as a special event like the Fuheis Cultural Festival, or the Fuheis Band, which I am trying to revive".

Jreisat spoke of her efforts to establish a "Friends of the Municipality Association" that aims at strengthening the local community's cooperation with the municipal council and its role in decision-making and policy development.

With support from the Mayor and municipal council members, she worked in cooperation with a number of schools in the area to establish the "Road and Traffic Awareness Committee" which seeks to introduce education to students and town residents. She had also contributed to the "Health Committee" and to the implementation of the "city cleaning project," as well as "the project to research obesity in schools".

Jreisat had worked with her colleagues to establish the "Higher Cultural Committee for the city of Fuheis". She states "I aspire for a beautiful and modern town, free of pollution. This can be achieved by relocating the cement factory that is currently here". Adding "We also look forward to developing the infrastructure and establishing craft areas and popular markets".

She looks forward to modernizing the transportation sector and to realizing other projects, currently under consideration, such as establishing a "folkloric village", restoring the old buildings, and introducing an "electronic municipality" run by qualified staff, in addition to providing entertainment and educational venues for children and youth.

Her current priority is to start a forum for women members of municipal councils "to exchange ideas and experiences, hence improving women's performance in local government".

With regard to the most important challenges that she faces as a member of a municipal council, Jreisat says that Jordanian society is still cautious about supporting women, while at the same time, she praises the progress that was obvious in the last municipal and parliamentary elections, which resulted in Mrs. Rana Hajayeh winning the mayoral race in Al Hassa municipality, as well as Dr. Falak Al Jam'ani becoming the first woman to be elected to Parliament outside the quota system.

In an effort to enhance knowledge and working in line with the Jordanian National Commission for Women on the implementation of the 'National Strategy for Women for the years 2006-2010', the Arab Women International Network of Metropolis / Regional Office - Jordan organized an educational forum on the 'Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women' (CEDAW) on September 15, 2008. Dr. Abeer Dababneh, an expert on women's issues at the University of Jordan, presented the session, which was attended by women councilors, directors and employees at the Greater Amman Municipality.

The Network aims to raise awareness among women with regard to the various laws and regulations related to their rights, since one of the key challenges to women's empowerment is the lack of proper knowledge of legislation. This was evident in the results of the various surveys conducted by the Network in order to inform its projects and design activities that address the real needs of women councilors and staff members. CEDAW is an international declaration on women's rights and a reference for legislation related to women. Countries that have signed on to the Convention are committed to implementing a series of measures to guarantee women's rights and equality in institutions. Convention oversight is the task of the 'Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women', which consists of 23 experts on women's issues from different UN member states. The Committee meets twice a year to review reports on compliance with the Convention's provisions that the signatory nations are required to submit on a regular basis.

## Various News

### WHW Network Events and Activities

- WHW Network Legal Consultant Samira Zaitoun conducted regular legal consultations for a number of Network members and women leaders during Parliament's summer extraordinary session. She especially worked with women MPs on various draft legislation such as the Public Health Law, the Law for the National Food and Drug Institute, the Traffic Law, the Public Gatherings Law, the Associations Law, and the Labor Law.
- The WHW Network organized a discussion session on the Alimony Fund Law in July 2008 for members of the proposed Women's Committee in the Lower House. Legal Consultant Samira Zaitoun presented a summary of the law and responded to questions and comments from participants, who provided for important observations on the draft bill. The session was attended by MPs Insaf Al Khawaldeh, Tharwat Al Amro, Amneh Gharagheer and Abdullah Al Jazi.
- In cooperation with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the WHW Network held a consultation session for women MPs on communication skills and media relations. The individual consultations were conducted by Mr. Eric Duhaime, a Canadian political party expert and the political and communications advisor for the Democratic Labor Party in the Quebec province.
- In cooperation with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the WHW Network also held a strategic planning workshop on July 21-22, 2008 for representatives of the following Jordanian women's organizations: Queen Zein Al Sharaf Institute for Development (ZENID), the General Federation for Jordanian Women (GFJW), the Jordanian National Forum for Women (JNFW), Family Guidance & Awareness Center and Arab Women International Network of Metropolis. Several women members of the Greater Amman Municipal Council were also in attendance. The workshop was facilitated by Mrs. Kenza Agerit, NDI Jordan's Senior Program Manager for Governance programs.





## Women Helping Women (WHW) Network Meets with Civil Society Organizations

With support from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the Women Helping Women Network (WHW) hosted a meeting for its NGO Coordination Committee at the Kempinski Hotel in Amman on August 18, 2008. The meeting aimed at introducing the Network and its various operational units such as the Training and Consultation Unit and the Media and Communications Unit which produces the regular newsletter.



The meeting focused on areas of potential cooperation between the Network and civil society organizations, including the use of the regular newsletter to highlight these organizations' activities and achievements, with the overall aim of strengthening women's political participation in the country.

The meeting was attended by representatives of the Jordanian National Commission for Women, the General Federation of Jordanian Women, the Jordanian National Forum for Women, Queen Zein Al-Sharaf Institute for Development, Arab Women International Network of Metropolis, the Arab Women's Legal Network, the Arab Women's Media Center, the Family Guidance & Awareness Center and the Women Studies Center at the University of Jordan.

Participants expressed admiration and support for WHW's mission and approach and are eager to strengthen cooperation with the Network. NDI Jordan Country Director Roula Attar had emphasized during the meeting that the Network seeks to complement and support civil society organizations ongoing work and activities.

## New Media Training Studio at the Arab Women's Media Center

With the goal of providing local and Arab media organizations with distinguished Jordanian and Arab women media specialists, and in order to increase the number of broadcast stations and affiliate organizations, Ms. Sana' Al Emam, Program Coordinator at the Arab Women's Media Center, recently announced that the Center has taken serious steps towards establishing a 'modern' Media Training Studio that meets the latest technical specifications.



This initiative will make a qualitative contribution towards supplying the local market with a cadre of qualified young media specialists by working to strengthen their skills and empower them to meet media challenges.

The proposed program consists of such training areas as introducing the mechanisms of journalistic editing, producing newscast and other broadcasting programs, conducting interviews and discussions, as well as training on how to use new technologies in the broadcasting field.

## Leadership Academy Brings Together Women from Middle East, North Africa

Women activists from seven countries in the Middle East and North Africa gathered for the Young Women Leaders Academy at Education City in Doha, Qatar, in July 2008 to help gain the intellectual tools, comparative knowledge, and practical skills to become leaders in their communities. The Academy was organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

The women learned from peers, established professionals, and NDI staff. They also participated in a panel discussion with three successful young female advocates and political activists in Washington, D.C., via a videoconference using classrooms at Georgetown University's campuses in Doha and Washington.



A participant from Morocco, Imane Tounsi, summarized the experience: "There is nothing more empowering," she said, "than young women leaders gathering to learn from each other."

Building upon the intensive academic and training components of the program, the participants have gone on to internships with parliaments, political parties and civil society organizations in their countries, giving them opportunities to put their new political advocacy and leadership skills into practice.

For more information on the WHW Network and to become a member or supporter, please contact NDI's offices in Amman:

P.O. Box 851219 Amman 11185 Jordan  
 Telephone: + 962-6- 4612527  
 Fax: +962 - 6- 4612571  
 Email: whw@batelco.jo