

WOMEN HELPING WOMEN



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Call to Action!

by Roula Attar

The Jordanian Women Helping Women (WHW) Network is delighted to present yet another distinguished issue of its quarterly newsletter, a regular publication that is now nearing its second anniversary. Individuals and organizations alike have been very supportive of the newsletter and have contributed several articles and news pieces to this and previous issues. The publication is being lauded as an impressive resource for anyone interested in Jordanian politics, with special focus on women's political participation. Credit goes to the newsletter's hard-working editor-in-chief and contributors, of course, but also to you, the readers, who see the value of such publication, and promote it to your friends and contacts.

As you'll see from the various articles featured here, as well as coverage of numerous activities, significant work is being done to promote women's political participation in Jordan. The Network's monthly speakers' forums, for example, are increasingly attracting strong participation from men and women alike who are interested in being up-to-date on the key policy issues facing the country. There is a growing sense of activism and citizens are becoming better aware of the role they can play in the country's political processes in general, and in supporting women in particular. The WHW Network is responding to this trend by providing a constructive venue for its members and affiliates to exercise that role and to positively contribute to getting women elected to public office. The Network currently operates through the following six specialized units:

- The Research and Knowledge Management Unit;
- The Training and Consultations Unit;
- The Membership and Outreach Unit;
- The Media and Communications Unit;
- The Public Events Unit; and
- The Fundraising Unit.

Additionally, the Network is supported by an NGO Coordination Committee with representatives of leading women's organizations in the country. An Executive Committee also steers the Network's strategy and work. Additionally, a Youth Committee is currently being established to better engage young Jordanians in the Network's mission and work.

The WHW Network has proved to be pioneering in its work thus far. As the Network progresses towards becoming a truly independent Jordanian entity, however, it needs your support to continue to thrive. All WHW Network members and supporters are welcome to actively volunteer for the units above. I would like to take this opportunity to issue a call to activism for anyone and everyone who would like to support women's political participation in Jordan. While much has been done so far, there's so much more to do and it can only be done with your involvement. The Network is here to help. You simply need to get involved! Become a member today and support women's political participation...Be part of the positive change!



The Jordanian Parliament in its Second Ordinary Session (October 5, 2009 to February 5, 2009)

Discussion of 23 draft and temporary laws, with 71 other draft and temporary laws still awaiting discussion

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At a time when 40 draft and temporary laws were endorsed in the current Parliament's first ordinary session, the second ordinary session, which ended on February 5, was confined to discussing 23 draft and temporary laws only.

Legislative "idleness" was evident in the MPs' performance during the second ordinary session, since 71 draft and temporary laws were not discussed and were instead postponed till the extraordinary session (expected to convene in May), or the third ordinary session, scheduled for next Fall.

According to official observations and press reports, certain parliamentary committees had no draft or temporary laws on their agendas to discuss throughout the entire ordinary session, such as: The Labor and Social Development Committee, Al-Badia and Rural Committee, the Palestine Committee, and the Public Freedoms and Citizens' Rights Committee.

There are 14 Permanent Committees in the House of Representatives. Temporary Committees can also be formed, such as the Investigation and Follow-up Committee, and other specialized committees, mainly the Investigation in Industrial Cities' Tenders Committee and the Investigation in the Failure of Al-Karama Dam Committee, both of which did not complete their work yet.

It is important to note that the current Parliament did not discuss the Audit Bureau reports and the Summary of Violations reports for the years 2000 to 2006. It also did not discuss the Audit Bureau Annual Report for the year 2007, despite the fact that the Economic, Legal and Financial Committees were the most active in Parliament.

Complete achievements of the 15th Jordanian Parliament and detailed news on the laws endorsed during the second ordinary session can be accessed through the Jordanian Parliament's official website at www.parliament.jo.

Political Party Affairs

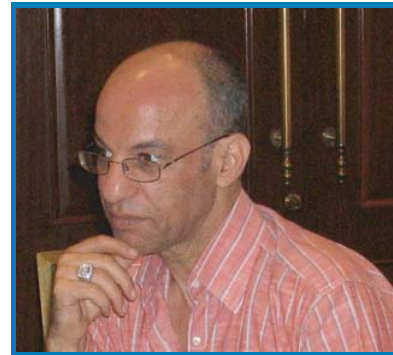
The Presence of Women in Leadership Positions within Political Parties Encourages Other Women to Join

Amman – Women Helping Women Network Newsletter

Women's participation in political parties is crucial to women's political development and there exist today good indicators for women's active engagement with parties in Jordan. Continuous media outreach to parties serves as a means to follow-up on what the parties provide, in terms of women's political empowerment programs. The Women Helping Women newsletter's interest in this issue arises from a sincere desire to encourage women to join political parties, to inform them of new trends in this regard, and to ensure the continuity and progress of political programs that address their issues. As such, newsletter staff recently sat down with the secretary generals of several political parties to discuss the state of women within these parties and the availability of women's empowerment programs.

Dr. Mohammad Abu Bakr, Secretary General of Dua' Party

In an interview with Dr. Mohammad Abu Bakr, Secretary General of Dua' party, he expressed that his party enjoys the largest number of women members compared to others, indicating that women represent 40% of the party's 650 founding members, with additional members being recruited as the party expands its work in various governorates. Abu Bakr also added that youth comprise a majority of Dua' party members, with more than 70% of the members being under the age of 35. Women and youth thus constitute a key focus area for the party.



Dr. Mohammad Abu Bakr

Abu Bakr confirmed that women hold several leadership positions with the Dua' party, explaining that the Trustees' Council, which acts as the party's Executive Bureau, is comprised of 15 members, four of whom are women. One of these is the Assistant to the Secretary General for Women's Affairs and another is "Regional Chair", while the others chair various party committees.

Despite objections to the new Political Parties' Law, Abu Bakr acknowledges that the law contributed to successfully engaging women in political parties and to their assuming leadership positions within these. The party also worked to nurture women's political activism through their party membership. Additionally, the party established small development projects that aimed at assisting women in villages. These projects provided women with jobs and, as a result, led to most of them joining the Dua' party.

In addition to these efforts, the Dua' party established several women's committees' in the governorates, mainly in Karak, Irbid, and Zarqa governorates, in addition to the central committee in the capital Amman. Women's committees conduct educational workshops for women in various fields in cooperation with private institutions and civil society organizations. They also provide workshops and courses that teach women various professions, which have proved successful and have attracted a large number of women since they first began a year ago after the party's re-registration under the new Political Parties' Law.

Political Party Affairs

Mr. Mohammad Al Qaq, Secretary General of the Pan-National Movement for Direct Democracy

In a direct interview with Mr. Mohammad Al Qaq, Secretary General of the Pan-National Movement for Direct Democracy, he explained that "since women represent half of society, and since they have an obligation to share half of society's duties and are entitled to half of its rights, then this can only be possible through the actual implementation of direct democracy, which does not discriminate at all in rights and duties between men and women."

"Evidence of the party's major interest in addressing women's issues, is the large number of women founding members - 225 out of a total of 533 members - who played a major role in allowing the party to fulfill the registration requirements under the new Political Parties' Law."

He added that "evidence of the party's major interest in addressing women's issues, is the large number of women founding members -- 225 out of a total of 533 members-- who played a major role in allowing the party to fulfill the registration requirements under the new Political Parties' Law."

He pointed out that "in line with the new Law, preparations are underway to conduct a workshop and launch the 'third party Conference,' with a view towards restructuring the party's organization based on new realities." He also emphasized that "women will have a major role to play, alongside men, in all of the party's committees and boards, which should reflect their overall presence in the party and in society as a whole."

Dr. Saeed Th'iab, Secretary General of the Popular Unity Party

Addressing women's party membership and representation in party leadership positions, Dr. Saeed Th'iab, Secretary General of the Popular Unity Party, noted that the "Party's understanding of women's rights is based on the fact that women play a major humanitarian role in society," adding that "our progressive vision of woman's role in society and her role in public life, together with our conviction that she is capable of managing senior, middle and basic leadership positions, as well as the removal of structural barriers that she may encounter in our party, positively impacted her participation in the party activities. 29% of the party's founding members are women, 48% of women members are working women, 7% of them serve on the Central Committee, 14% are members of regional leadership commissions, and 20% are leaders within the student union."



Dr. Saeed Th'iab

Th'iab pointed out that "the party's recognition of the important role women play led to its establishment of a popular feminist framework, the Union of Jordanian Women, whose vision, goals, and scope of work were identified in a special program, during its early establishment by the Union's Preparatory Committee."

The Union is a public democratic framework within the Popular Unity Party that operates with an objective vision, fully recognizing the value of public service, and achieving the party's goals through implementing the party's political, social and economic programs and contributing to positive democratic change." He further explained that "the Union seeks to change traditional views on the role of women, and to address women's issues, which are really societal issues."

Dr. Hazem Qashou', Secretary General of Al Ressala Party

Speaking on the same issue, Dr. Hazem Qashou', Secretary General of Al Ressala Party, indicated that "the importance of women's participation was emphasized in the Party's message and that since youth represent 76% of the Jordanian population, it is essential to benefit from its capabilities, regardless of its gender." He added that "women constitute 35% of the party's membership and that they represent 20% of the elected leadership."



Dr. Hazem Qashou'

Dr. Qashou' explained that "in some governorates, such as Karak and Irbid, the percentage of women's participation in the Party reached 50%, largely because women head the Party's branches there, with Lawyer Nahla Al Khawaja in Karak and Lawyer Ala' Al Qaffi in Irbid." He also confirmed that the "high level of women's participation in our Party encouraged the membership of other women, since women proved to be the best recruiters of additional women members, even though the Party does not differentiate between men and women internally. We have adopted special incentives for women to attract them to the Party and we provide them with the opportunities to exercise their roles. We have a large number of active women members in the governorates, which is a good start for wider women's participation."

He stressed the "important role that the Party plays in promoting awareness and encouraging women to become more active in political life and public institutions, which is in line with the new Political Parties' Law that provided public funding for party work and contributed to improving parties' image in society and in turn women's participation within political parties. For example, the party gave ample space for women to partake in workshops and seminars and supported them to become leaders within the Party establishment. We also worked on making women better aware of the importance of their representation in parliament and through the quota system."



Three Administrative Regions in Jordan and a Government-Appointed Commissioner for Each Region

It is widely recognized that “administrative decentralization” is a noble goal that democratic societies aspire to achieve, which is why His Majesty King Abdullah was very interested in the “regionalization” initiative and directed government and the various political entities to work on it in a clear and serious manner.

A specialized royal committee was formed to put together the best plan for achieving effective local governance in all of the Kingdom’s areas, based on each region’s needs and priorities. The main idea, according to Prime Minister Nader Al Dahabi, is to realize public participation, justice and development, through free direct elections. The PM also stressed that the government would complete the regionalization project in a comprehensive manner, to achieve decentralization and include citizens in the developmental decision- making process.

The PM's and others’ statements to the media on the regionalization project helped to mitigate previous concerns expressed by politicians, the public, as well as observers and experts in state affairs.

The Premier explained that there would be three administrative regions in the Kingdom namely: Al Yarmouk Region with Irbid as its center, including the governorates of Irbid, Ajloun, Al Mafraq and Jerash. Raghadan Region with Al-Salt as its center, including the governorates of Al Balqaa, Madaba and Zarqa. The third region is Mu'tah with Karak as its center, including the governorates of Karak, Al Tafileh, Ma'an and Aqaba. These administrative divisions would take into consideration the Petra Region Authority Law and the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Law. The PM also said that the government would start activating decentralization by providing the governorates' executive and consultative bodies with authority over developmental planning, whereby each governorate would be responsible for defining its priorities and mechanisms for their implementation.

During His visit to Madaba in February, King Abdullah declared that Madaba would be the first governorate to experience the application of decentralization, to be followed by all other governorates. This pilot phase would continue until 2011, when all required legislation and recommendations would be ready for the implementation of regionalization. 2011 would also witness elections for the various regional and municipal councils, as well as Parliament. These would be held after the introduction of necessary amendments to the Municipalities' Law and other legislation, including the Elections Law, though observers don't anticipate a change in the one-person, one-vote system.

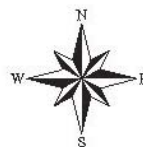
Other changes pertaining to the regionalization project include the establishment of a council for each of the three regions consisting of 10 elected members for each governorate and one government-appointed member. The total number of council members would be 44, in addition to the Commissioner, who is administratively linked to the Prime Minister and appointed by the government.

The regionalization project drew various national reactions. Journalist Samih Ma'aitah, for instance, stressed "the importance of having a clear vision for the regionalization project to ensure a reasonable dialogue." He voiced concern that preparatory work on this project would be shelved, once again, as it happened in the past with this initiative, saying "I am worried that the transfer of the regionalization file from one government to the other would jeopardize its completion. We need at least two years to implement this project and precedents in Jordan reveal that governments traditionally do not last for that long." Ma'aitah believes that "all that is agreed upon must develop into a national project, regardless of whether governments stay or go. Otherwise, the entire initiative would be lost."

In a related development, the Jordanian National Commission for Women prepared a memo requesting that the government provides women with a proper "share" of seats in the regional councils that are expected to be formed in the future.

Municipal Affairs

Zarqa : Seven Municipalities



No	Municipality	No. of Members	Head of Municipality	No. of Female Members	No. of Male Members	Women Quota Winners	Women Winners Outside Quota
1	Al Halabat	8	Khalaf Hleil Merhej Thiab	2	6	2	0
2	Al Dieil	8	Nidal Ekryyem Saleem Al Awadat	2	6	2	0
3	Al Hashmieh Al Jadideh	9	Oqlah Mohmmad Okleh Al Zyoud	3	6	2	1
4	Bereen Al Jadideh	7	Mohammad Bakheet Hilal Al Ghweir	2	5	2	0
5	Al Rseifeh	13	Mousa Ali Al Sa'ed Khalifeh	3	10	3	0
6	Greater Zarqa	16	Mohmmad Mousa Hlal Al Ghweiri	4	12	4	0
7	Al Azraq Al Jadideh	9	Kamal Nofal Mansour Atta	4	5	2	2

WHW Network Members

Dr. Rula Qawas: the First Jordanian Woman Specialized in Feminist Studies and a Leader in Changing Thought Processes and Critical Analysis Related to Women

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Feminist studies in Jordan are viewed by some as “standard” studies directed against men, religion and the predominant culture. Some even believe that they seek to erase the national culture.

Dr. Rula Qawas, Program and International Relations Consultant and Head of the Knowledge Production Unit at the Jordanian National Commission for Women, states that "the reality, which many people do not realize, is contrary to the prevalent mentality. Feminist studies actually strengthen and develop the national identity by shedding light on Jordanian women's achievements, and attempting to identify their various needs."



Dr. Rula Qawas

In her interview with the newsletter's editor, Dr. Qawas, who previously served as the Director of the Women Studies Center at the University of Jordan, expressed her sorrow for "the lack of specialized experts in feminist and women studies in Jordan, since the majority of those who teach feminism, gender, and women-related subjects are not specialized in women studies, but rather in humanitarian studies." She noted that "one of the female students at the Women Studies Center was awarded a scholarship to Canada in 2007, to conduct her postgraduate studies and obtain a PhD in women studies. When she returns, she will be among a few pioneering women in this field." It is worth mentioning here that Dr. Rula Qawas is herself the only Jordanian woman to date to hold a PhD in feminist studies.

Dr. Qawas stressed the "importance of developing the Jordanian feminist discourse and producing knowledge on Jordanian women, which would be to their benefit as it will reflect their 'real' image and become the scientific alternative that depicts their status." She explained that "all what is available now is western literature that addresses the situation of Jordanian women, with an obvious lack of national literature on the matter." She asks "why should the West write about the Jordanian woman in a different light and establish an image of her that is far from the real image?"

To combat this trend, Dr. Qawas emphasizes the need to "conduct quality studies that would develop the 'research spirit' in female Jordanian academics and encourage them to provide accurate scientific work, which can be done through training, workshops, seminars, and exchange of ideas," adding, "we must concentrate on women studies in all universities; such studies should be taught in various faculties too, to inform students of the importance of the subject, and keep the women's role alive and present."

Dr. Qawas had applied this through her work as an English Language and Literature teacher at the English Language Department, which, according to her, was short of references to the 'woman' component. She also referred to distinguished women in all fields of study, and added the subject of "feminist theory" to the Masters' level classes of the department.

"Why should the West write about the Jordanian woman in a different light and establish an image of her that is far from the real image?"

Commenting on the Jordanian woman's achievements, Dr. Qawas said "the Jordanian woman's journey is still full of obstacles which can be overcome by women themselves, by thinking more positively and rejecting the culture of 'fear' and 'shame,' thus enhancing their self-confidence and developing their capacities to achieve success, without depending on others."

Dr. Qawas concluded by expressing her sorrow for what she termed as the "scattered efforts of women in Jordan," and attributed that to "the various organizations' inability to network and coordinate among each other, which ultimately hinders the fulfillment of desired goals and stalls achievement."

Samira Zaytoon, the Only Female Lawyer Elected to the Council of the Jordanian Bar Association since its Establishment

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Since the establishment of the Jordanian Bar Association, and for the past thirty years, the only woman who was elected twice to the Association's Council is Samira Zaytoon, who served during the Council's 34th session (1999 to 2001), and again during the 36th session (2003-2005).



Samira Zaytoon

Zaytoon is considered the first woman to competitively win a seat in the Council, and the second woman to serve in the Council after the late activist and lawyer Emily Bisharat, who ran uncontested in the sixties.

Zaytoon, who has been practicing law since 1990, ran again in 2009 for a Council seat, along with two other women candidates. Despite her strong chances, neither Zaytoon, nor her other female colleagues secured enough votes to win. Zaytoon came in the 13th place with 1,342 votes out of a total of 4,955 votes, representing the total number of eligible voters. There was a total of 35 candidates competing for 10 seats.

In an interview with the Women Helping Women Newsletter, Zaytoon said: "I faced many challenges, as did the other women candidates, which prevented me from winning, despite my promising chances. Running as an independent was one of those challenges. The candidates' lists posed a major challenge and took votes

"Women's engagement in political parties would reflect positively on the work of professional associations and women's role within these."

away for the independents. In the last election, there were two competing lists: the Islamists and the Nationalists, who sought to secure seats for their candidates and achieve a majority in the Council. This limited independent candidates' chances for winning, especially women candidates, who often run as independents."

Zaytoon explained that "other challenges are attributed to the modest turnout by women voters within the Association, even though there are 1,770 registered women members in the Association, in addition to 500 trainees." She also explained that "working within professional associations in Jordan requires working late into the day, which negatively impacts women who, generally speaking, have other social obligations and roles."

Zaytoon is "content" with her achievement at the Association, in comparison to the state of Jordanian women within professional associations, as well as their general weak participation as voters and candidates. She emphasized that her primary objective is to serve her colleagues and the legal profession, which she sees as "one of the most noble and important occupations in defending the rights of individuals to achieve justice." She highlighted the importance of having women representatives in the Council, whose presence, she said, "would serve issues pertaining to women lawyers and the legal profession as a whole," pointing out that the percentage of women in the Association exceeds a quarter of the membership.

Zaytoon, who has been the Chair of the Women's Committee at the Bar Association for ten years now and a member of the legal team at the Jordanian National Commission for Women since 1999, plans to run again in the Council's future elections, in an effort to further server women in the legal profession and in society in general.

Zaytoon would like to see at least one woman candidate on each of the candidates' lists in future polls, and encourages electoral groupings within the Association to attract women to their lists and activate their role. She also stressed the need to conduct awareness campaigns for women lawyers on "the importance of them being represented in the Association's Council, which would enhance the democratic process." She noted that "women's engagement in political parties would reflect positively on the work of professional associations and women's role within these." Zaytoon encouraged Jordanian women to be active in all areas, and not to surrender to obstacles that may stall their careers and professional advancement and prevent them from attaining advanced decision-making positions.

Forum on "Education and Higher Education in Jordan and the Arab World" Emphasizes the Importance of Quality Evaluation of Academic Programs and Highlights the Status of Women in Arab Universities



Amman- Kholoud Al Khatatbeh

The Women Helping Women (WHW) Network and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) held the second event in the series of monthly Speakers' Forums in late January on the topic of "Education and Higher Education in Jordan and the Arab World." Dr. Hanan Ibrahim, Head of the Regional Operations Unit and Dr. Ali Yaghi, Assistant Project Manager for the UNDP-funded regional project on "Enhancement of Quality Assurance and Institutional Planning in Arab Universities," presented two papers at the session, which was attended by representatives of political parties, civil society organizations, women's groups, as well as members of Parliament. A lively discussion took place and comments were focused on the regional report issued by the project.

In her presentation, Dr. Ibrahim stressed the importance of teaching feminist theories at Arab universities to mobilize students politically, urging that "we should teach subjects that shed light on women's issues and interests, either directly or indirectly, in order to build awareness among students about this and other issues."

Speaking in terms of women's ratios in higher education, as concluded while implementing the UNDP-funded project, and through its four phases of review of academic programs at Arab universities, Dr. Ibrahim explained that "the number of male academics is higher than that of females, even though the ratio of female to male students in the education programs of participating universities, was 57% females compared to 43% males."

She also spoke of "the patriarchal psychology" applied in some universities and practiced against women academics and faculty members, either directly or indirectly, and sometimes in a negative manner. She added that "women academics often feel inferior to their male counterparts and unfulfilled in their academic role, noting that they are sometimes themselves part of this psychology. What the Jordanian woman faces in academic institutions is similar to what she faces in many other public institutions, in terms of exclusion of her family members from her health insurance benefits, the pressure exerted on her when she goes on maternity leave, in addition to other forms of direct or indirect harassment."

Dr. Ibrahim criticized some women academics who fight other women and who “guard the patriarchal institution and condone its mal-practices against women,” adding that, “this reveals a general ignorance of feminist thought.” She called for “establishing a culture of belonging to women's issues among women academicians themselves, to increase the number of women in this field, and in turn empower them.” She also noted the existence of “only three universities in the Arab world with departments for women and feminist studies, at a time when the focus should be on raising the level of students' awareness vis-à-vis women's issues, to ensure that women's social and psychological behavior is not typified in a non-scientific manner. The integration of feminist discourse in all courses helps to rectify many wrong beliefs about women.”

“We need enlightened women to achieve justice and equality.”

Dr. Ibrahim also pointed that “feminist speech in Islam piqued the interest of universities in the West, causing them to integrate it within the theories they teach. It is now a widespread discourse in the West.” She concluded by saying that “we need enlightened women to achieve justice and equality.”

The second presentation was given by Dr. Ali Yaghi who talked about the project's experience in evaluating academic programs at Arab universities, the conditions of the universities, as well as students and women in higher education. Dr. Yaghi pointed out that “knowledge is one of the undermining aspects which hinder economic progress in the Arab region, as concluded by the First Arab Human Development (AHDR1).” He stressed the importance of “setting a clear strategy for higher education development in the Arab region and linking it to economic needs.”

He also introduced the project and its objectives and referred to the participation of a number of Arab universities. He briefed the audience on the training of academic representatives at these universities and the provision of continuous technical support for participating universities, explaining that “the project provides three independent tools to guarantee the quality of academic programs and enhance them. It aims at increasing the capacity of institutional planning at Arab universities, reviews and evaluates universities' programs, and tests graduates of the evaluated programs, in addition to developing a statistical database for universities.”

With regards to the review of academic programs, Dr. Yaghi added that “programs have been evaluated through four phases and sessions that included: evaluating computer science programs in 15 Arab universities from 2002 to 2003, with the participation of the University of Jordan and the University of Zarqa from Jordan. Then the project evaluated business administration programs in 16 Arab universities from 2003 to 2004, with the participation of the University of Jordan and Al Yarmouk University. Education programs in 23 Arab universities were also evaluated from 2005 to 2006 with the participation of the University of Jordan, Al Yarmouk University and the University of Zarqa. In the last phase, Engineering programs were evaluated in 19 Arab universities from 2007-2008, with the University of Jordan and the University of Science and Technology participating in this phase.”

In evaluating student performance, Dr. Yaghi illustrated that “throughout the project's duration, graduate students in the evaluated programs were also tested, by means of international measuring tests. 1800 students were tested in Computer Science and Business Administration programs from 2003 to 2004, with the participation of students from Jordanian universities that were members in the project: Zarqa Private University, University of Jordan, and Al Yarmouk University. Additionally, 1200 Arab students were tested in Education programs from 2006 to 2007, with the participation of students from the University of Jordan and Zarqa Private University.”

In terms of other project components, Dr. Yaghi stated that "a statistical database been developed for participating Arab universities, according to joint international standards and specifications. This component included working with 27 representatives from 15 Arab universities from the years 2002 to 2004."

"The expansion in establishing universities in Jordan had a negative impact on the outcomes of education, given that the majority of these universities were established as a result of pressures and specific interests."

Commenting on the presentation, MP Hani Al-Nawafleh, member of the Education Committee in the Lower House of Parliament, pointed that "the expansion in establishing universities in Jordan had a negative impact on the outcomes of education, given that the majority of these universities were established as a result of pressures and specific interests."

Dr. Yaghi concluded that "the project resulted in spreading the culture of quality in the Arab world. It proved that the evaluation of educational programs remains a central and strategic demand, despite the absence of an authority that obliges universities to address the results. However, the project's achievements and reports constitute a call for major change in Arab universities."

The Women Helping Women Network's Forum on "Women in Islam"

Al-Faouri: "We have to rise to the level of Islam's culture and universality, to converse with others and respect them. 'Gender' does not only refer to women; it also includes men"

Qawas: " 'Gender' is just a scientific term that reflects the culture it exists in"

Al-Rawashdeh: "Women's participation and involvement in political, economic, and social work is a duty dictated by religion and good citizenship"

Al-Saket: "We must reform laws and legislation and return to Shari'a so that women can enjoy the rights granted to them by Islam"

Amman- Women Helping Women Network Newsletter

The Women Helping Women (WHW) Network and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) held the third event in the series of monthly Speakers' Forums, on February 23, 2009, on the topic of "Women in Islam."



Dr. Nawal Al-Faouri, member of the Jordanian Senate, and Dr. Mohammad Al Rawashdeh of the Fikh and Law Studies Department at Mu'tah University, presented papers during the session.

In her presentation, Senator Nawal Al-Faouri explained that "despite the fact that the term 'gender' is only recently being used, its roots are actually founded in Islam. There are many gender issues in Islam including 'Human Rights and Women in Islam' and Islam's perspective on both of these."

Senator Al-Faouri spoke of the "misconception" related to the term 'gender' and how it is viewed to be related to "women only," adding that, "gender is defined as a group of social roles carried out by men and women. The problem came about while struggling to overcome these misconceptions and gender was categorized according to a social structure of specific roles for women and specific roles for men."

She stated that gender is related to the environment from which women's and men's roles arise. She sees that these roles are subject to change as life changes and ideology advances, and that they are affected by current political, social, and economical circumstances. She also pointed out that "it is clear that speaking of 'gender' and relating it to women only, is simply unjust. It should be emphasized that any injustice inflicted on women is actually inflicted on all human beings. We should support human beings who are subject to injustice. 'Gender' does not address women only; it equally entails the roles of men and women."

She also spoke of the growing international interest in 'gender' and the change in roles in accordance with changes occurring in society, for many reasons, the most important of which include technological and informational advances, as well as access and exposure to other cultures through the media, which led to the development of new concepts that must be studied.

Senator Al-Faouri also addressed the reasons for focusing on women in the 'gender' concept as a means to benefit from women's capacity in serving their society, in view of the pressure and challenges inflicted upon them by the community. She emphasized the importance of women's organizational and constructive role in civil society organizations, in addition to their productive role in the workplace.

She also explained that there are many humanitarian needs according to the 'gender' perspective for both men and women, such as the basic needs for shelter, food, clothing, and social and economic security, while other general needs include improving one's social status and the need to feel personal and human security. This applies to women who need to enhance their feelings of personal security, as they face violence directed at them, whether at the political legislative level or among their families and in the workplace."

Speaking on 'Islam and Gender,' Senator Al-Faouri cited many references from the Holy Quran and the Sunnah, pointing to equality between men and women in Islam, with differences in the roles, along with their complementary nature. She criticized the gap between Islamic teachings and their application in real life. She also pointed to Islam's call for dialogue, respecting others and standing on common grounds for common understanding, adding that "we have to rise to the level of Islam's culture and universality."

For her part, Dr. Rula Qawas, former Director of the Women Studies Center at the University of Jordan and an expert on feminist studies, stated that "the term 'gender' is misunderstood and considered a foreign paradigm that has been brought to us." She stressed that "it is simply a scientific term and that problems occur when translating the term, which expresses the culture it exists in."

Activist Anas Al Saket also commented that "we must reform laws and legislation and return to Shari'a so that women can enjoy the rights granted to them by Islam." Adding that "when we talk about the role of women, we have to also talk about the role of men. We do not ask for complete equality between men and women, as there are biological differences. What we want is justice and effective participation by both, to achieve the public interest. We have to think about projecting the right image of Islam."

The second presentation was given by Dr. Mohammad Al -Rawashdeh of the Fikh and Law Studies Department at Mu'tah University, who discussed the role of women in political and social reform from an Islamic perspective. He explained that "we cannot hold women accountable for what they have given to society, until we give them all their rights and remove all political, social, and legislative obstacles that hinder their progress." He spoke of the "women's cause" and the importance of demanding women's full rights and strengthening their reformist role in society, asserting that the woman is neither the opponent of the man nor his competitor, and that "both men and women decide women's rights."

Dr. Al-Rawashdeh explained that "the Holy Quran affirms women's participation in social and public life, but the jurists exaggerated in giving excuses and limiting women's role, as there are no definite texts in Shari'a that prohibit women's participation in public and social life. Additionally, a woman's work in politics is not only limited to her assuming political office, but also entails her participation in political issues, reform, training, and rehabilitation." He concluded that "successful development and a civilized democratic society could not exist without women's participation, and without their active engagement in political, economic and social work. This is a duty dictated on women by religion and good citizenship."

Women Helping Women Network Hosts the Minister of Municipal Affairs at a Discussion Forum on the Topic of Regionalization

Abu Hdeib: *“An elected council representing the local community...is the most capable of accomplishing each region’s advancement”*

Al Rai, April 4th, 2009

Amman- Kholoud Al Khatatbeh- Opinions varied between supporters and opponents of the regionalization project in the March 31st discussion session that brought together Minister of Municipal Affairs Shehadeh Abu Hdeib and MP Falak Al Jama’ani, in addition to a number of MPs and party representatives, as well as politicians and activists in public work.



H.E. Shihadeh Abu Hdeib
Minister of Municipal Affairs

Some MPs considered the regionalization plan to be a purely development one and expressed that the government has rushed into its implementation. Members of certain political parties supported the idea and asked that the parties be strongly represented in the regions and in all aspects of the project to better serve citizens. Other political party members, however, completely opposed the idea and called it a “means to bypass real political reform.”

For his part, Minister of Municipal Affairs Abu Hdeib said that an elected regional council that represents the local community will be most capable of identifying priorities and achieving each region’s advancement, by implementing projects that benefit citizens in these areas.

Abu Hdeib asserted that various previous projects that cost millions of dinars failed because they were not built on the basis of public participation. He added that the existence of 40 elected persons in each region would definitely create a state of discussion that benefits the council and the citizens of that region, and would ensure that gains are fairly distributed among them.

Abu Hdeib pointed to the weakness of community monitoring of projects which led to the failure or the lack of implementation of 30 - 40% of them. Therefore, the selection of the Madaba governorate is not meant to be an example on the idea of regions, but will instead serve to evaluate citizens’ satisfaction with established projects and their reactions towards them, as well as to determine if these projects were successful in engaging citizens in local development.

Abu Hdeib also asserted the importance of proceeding carefully and slowly with the idea of regionalization and evaluating every implemented step as it happens in order to determine whether to move forward or not.

In the same discussion forum, which was hosted by the Women Helping Women Network in cooperation with the National Democratic institute of International Affairs, MP Falak Al Jama’ani disagreed with many of her fellow MPs and considered regionalization a form of an advanced political democratic state that Jordan is in desperate need for.

Al Jama'ani said that "isolating the various components of reform is a confusing matter;" adding that "there will be no successful administration without political reform, which is the basis." She also said that "economic development does not exist without political development, political reform, real democracy, and political parties. National performance is a comprehensive process which cannot be divided."

"Economic development does not exist without political development, political reform, real democracy, and political parties. National performance is a comprehensive process which cannot be divided."

She pointed that the regions' project is a direct activation of the Jordanian Constitution, which considers the nation as the source of authorities. Al Jama'ani wondered how the nation can be the source of authority if the general state's activity does not include substantive public participation in decision-making.

Al Jama'ani asserted her unlimited support to regionalization and considered the idea of slowly progressing with its implementation as a valid one, as it takes into consideration long-term objectives and emphasizes the importance of evaluating every step after its completion.

In an intervention from MP Tharwat Al Amro, she expressed that in her opinion, the government rushed into starting the implementation of the regions project, and that this project should be limited to a developmental role, given that it would be difficult for it to succeed outside this framework due to the nature of the Jordanian society and the challenges it faces. Some MPs agreed with Al Amro and added that the government indeed made a mistake by rushing into starting the project before conducting a national dialogue and a public referendum on it.

Dr. Malik Al Momani, Secretary General of Al Wasat Al Islami party, criticized those who oppose the idea of regions since he sees it as a key demand that will allow for effective local community participation and for the achievement of justice and democracy.



Al Momani pointed to the development gap between the capital Amman and the other governorates, as well as the centers of governorates and remote areas. He believes that this project will alleviate this gap or even close it completely, especially if it was well-studied and well-implemented.

For his part, Secretary General of Dua' party, Dr. Muhammad Abu Bakr, opposed the idea of regions and considered it "a tactic to bypass real political reform" and marginalize certain political actors. He wondered if Jordan is ready for this type of project at this time and encouraged the government to review and benefit from some other countries' experiences in this area.

Activist Kaltham Mreish also intervened to point out that the regionalization project will contribute to the creation of a "congestion" of elections in the future, and that the Jordanian citizen will become confused and therefore unable to choose the best candidate to achieve the public interest. She also said that "we should benefit from our previous experiences."

In speaking on the topic, a representative from Al Ressala party also said that parties are still absent from such critical national projects and wished that parties will be represented in regionalization initiatives and in all projects that affect citizens because administrative development should occur in parallel to political development.

As for MP Daif Allah Al Qallab, he explained that he is with the idea of regions if it is to be studied carefully and "if we learn from previous mistakes, such as the municipalities' experience."

Party activist Sami Shreim considered the regions project to be one entailing administrative, financial, and legal chaos, especially that since its implementation requires amending tens of laws and could take up the agendas of the future 16th and 17th parliaments.

Regarding women's participation, Minister of Municipal Affairs Abu Hdeib pointed to the government's serious efforts to set up a quota for women in the regions' councils, which would probably be 20%.

In conclusion, Al Jama'ani asserted that the regionalization project is still being studied and to be implemented successfully, it requires organized visits to public and official figures to come up with recommendations that support legislative work and regulations that organize the roles and responsibilities of each of the regions, saying that "multiple legislative bills are needed to guarantee success and achieve the desired goal."

Feature Story: Jordanian Women in the Public Security Field



"Having policewomen in the field has now become a public demand that is generating a sense of relief among many sectors of society, especially women and the elderly, since women have proved themselves in this field and are recognized for their courteous demeanor when dealing with citizens, a factor that has also contributed to changing previous negative misconceptions about women working in this field."

Distinguished Jordanian Women in Public Security and Pioneers at the Middle East Level

Amman - Women Helping Women Newsletter

The Jordanian woman has achieved success in political, economic, and social areas, and distinguished herself in recent years in fields that were previously exclusive to men and deemed socially unsuitable for women.

One of the many examples that are worthy of respect and appreciation, is that of traffic policewomen, whom we see in the streets of the capital Amman and the streets of certain other governorates, organizing traffic, working within the cadre of the "radar" vehicles to monitor vehicles on the road, and assisting citizens, especially in emergencies.

There are also policewomen that drive motorcycles, a first of its kind phenomenon in the region, as well as some that drive tow-trucks, in addition to other distinguished women in this field. Jordan has always been one of the pioneering countries in the region in many aspects, including the early adoption of women's empowerment strategies and programs and the encouragement of women's participation in the workforce, which is largely attributed to the progressive vision of this country's leadership.

Jordan's openness to the world and to other cultures, had resulted in the society's advancement as a whole, leading to a change in the negative perceptions and social image with regards to women in specific careers. This also helped distinguish women's presence in the public security field, where they are fully supported by officials and directors of the various public security departments, and are awarded financial and moral incentives to enhance their national role.

Feature Story: Jordanian Women in the Public Security Field

During an interview with the newsletter's editor, Sergeant Basma Al-Hajaya, the head of the corps of policewomen working in the field, explained that "the idea of policewomen working in the field emerged towards the end of the eighties, but did not fully develop at that time, due to the social perceptions at the time, which led to the enrollment of only a limited number women in police service. The idea matured in the year 2002 and continued to gain ground with an increase in the number of policewomen working in the field and in various governorates."



Sergeant
Basma Al-Hajaya

Al-Hajaya said that policewomen undergo training in traffic operations and relevant traffic issues prior to assuming their field posts. She added that "policewomen in the field have proven their competency by working in areas that were previously only reserved for men, such as the technical investigation of accidents, and the preparation of draft accident reports for relevant authorities, before actually working in the field."

She explained that "for the first time in the Middle East, the Jordanian policewoman drove motorcycles and vehicles specialized in towing cars." Al-Hajaya also spoke of the distinguished field policewomen who work as drivers and traffic police officers that set up radars, monitor speed and report violations.

Al-Hajaya believes that "having policewomen in the field has now become a public demand that is generating a sense of relief among many sectors of society, especially women and the elderly, since women have proved themselves in this field and are recognized for their courteous demeanor when dealing with citizens, a factor that has also contributed to changing previous negative misconceptions about women working in this field."

It is worth noting that, according to Al-Hajaya, traffic policewomen would rather stay in the field than move to other police departments. They enjoy special privileges and take part in such skills-building workshops as those on dealing with the media and people with special needs, in addition to foreign language courses.

Al-Hajaya commended Traffic Sergeant Kholoud Al Neimat, who received 'The King Abdullah Award for Distinction' in 2002 and 2007 as 'the Best Support Employee.' She also mentioned that the number of women enrolled in the traffic police force is increasing and is attracting many young women. She concluded by attributing women's advancement in this sector and Jordan's pioneering leadership in this area to the major efforts and support extended by Their Majesties King Abdullah and Queen Rania to policewomen, and to those in the field in particular.

Feature Story: Jordanian Women in the Public Security Field

Lara Al Twal: First policewoman to drive a tow-truck in the region

As a follow-up to the above interview, the newsletter's editor went out to the field and met several distinguished policewomen to hear their views on their work. The first meeting was with tow-truck driver and accident representative, Sergeant Lara Na'el Al Twal, who was in the midst of towing a car that was obstructing traffic in downtown Amman. Lara is considered the only policewoman in the Middle East to drive a tow-truck. She first enrolled in the police force in 2003 and spent five years in traffic police. Speaking of her experience, Al Twal said that "in the beginning, I worked as a traffic sergeant with the field police and then took a course on accidents, after which I became an accident representative. I continue to deal with accidents

today, in addition to my work as a tow-truck driver for a year now." She added: "I wanted to prove that the term 'difficult' does not exist when there is real will, and I wanted to develop policewomen's work and to become one of the first women to affect development and change."



Lara Al Twal

Lieutenant Mariam Al-Bawab: Traffic officer

Traffic Officer and Lieutenant Mariam Al-Bawab was also interviewed during her working hours in East Amman, as she was monitoring speed and seatbelt usage on the roads, while always being ready to deal with any accident that may occur. Al-Bawab has served in the policewomen force for 18 years now, five of which were spent dealing with traffic management. She admits that she felt uneasy at first when she was transferred from her department and office work to the field, but it was her husband's and family's support that made her accept and adapt to working in the field.



Lieutenant
Mariam Al-Bawab

She added that "after working in the field, I have come to enjoy it and wouldn't want to work anywhere else, especially since what I do has a major humanitarian aspect, in terms of helping the injured, assisting the sick and saving lives, which gives me utmost happiness. This job in particular requires someone that is convinced of its value and that loves it, in order to continue in it."

Speaking of early job challenges, she said that "at the beginning, we were faced by resistance from many citizens and drivers who refused to provide us with their official documents and licenses when they were stopped for traffic violations. We had to approach them professionally and politely, until they would be convinced that we, like policemen, were simply carrying out our duties. Today, we sense the citizens' respect and appreciation for our work through their friendly and cooperative attitude. They have also come to prefer dealing with us then with policemen, because of our courteous demeanor. They actually miss us on our days off!"

Feature Story: Jordanian Women in the Public Security Field

Officers Samira Edaibat and Faizeh Hwaimel: Motorcycle drivers

The newsletter met Officers Samira Edaibat and Faizeh Hwaimel as they were getting ready to go to their work from the field policewomen center in "Al Mahatta" area in Amman to talk about the nature of their work, bearing in mind that there are only three policewomen in Jordan working as motorcycle drivers after having successfully passed all required training courses. While other women attempted to qualify for these jobs, they were unable to successfully complete the training courses.

Samira and Faizeh joined the field traffic department four years ago and decided to partake, along with eight other young women, in the first course conducted in the Middle East for policewomen that want to drive motorcycles. They welcomed the challenge and wanted to prove their ability to drive motorcycles, just like men, in addition to their strong will and their love to the nature of this work.

While their families were at first opposed to the idea of them driving motorcycles, they eventually accepted it, largely because of Samira's and Faizeh's strong will and determination to work in the field that they love. They added that "after we succeeded in our careers and received media coverage for our work, they saw our distinction and were very happy with our efforts. They are now proud of us and give us constant support to move forward."

Officer Edaibat and officer Hwaimel emphasized the importance of the media and education and the big role they have played in changing the negative societal views on women in these jobs, adding that "shedding light on women's distinction and achievements in this field, as well as the importance of their participation in this sector, in addition to the financial and moral support they get, have definitely changed many misconceptions around policewomen's work in the field."

Officer Kholoud Al Neimat: Police Force Liaison

Sergeant Kholoud Al Neimat was a field traffic sergeant, a civilian traffic investigator, a motorcyclist traffic sergeant and a traffic monitor working on the radar. She now serves as "Police Force Liaison," meaning that she supervises a team of policewomen by allocating daily tasks, coordinating holidays, enrollment in courses, and weekly meetings under the supervision of the field policewomen officer.

Of all the jobs she's held, Al Neimat prefers her work as a field traffic policewoman because it was a new idea then and it suited her sociable personality and her quest for distinction. Working in the field also allowed her to interact directly with citizens, which built her practical experience.



Officer
Kholoud Al Neimat

Al Neimat emphasized the success of the idea of having policewomen in the field in Jordan and the increasing numbers of young women wanting to join this field, in addition to the great support afforded to policewomen from all sectors in Jordan.

Feature Story: Jordanian Women in the Public Security Field

Maha Al Ajarmeh: Accident representative and former traffic officer

Officer Maha Al Ajarmeh has been working in traffic police for four years now, three of which were spent as a traffic officer in the field. Upon completing a traffic investigation course, she moved to work in technical investigation and is now an Accident Representative in the field where she investigates accidents that are recorded against anonymous culprits, follows up on them, and submits the required reports for the Public Security Department and for the insurance companies in order for citizens to be able to repair their damaged vehicles. She also investigates accidents and provides "kroka" blueprints to be used in determining responsibility.

Maha says that she loves field work and finds herself in it, especially since she deals with all sectors of society, which helps to positively develop her personality. She also points that her sister's work as a policewoman is what encouraged her to take the decision and join the force after high school. Her family encouraged her from the beginning, as it had encouraged her sister before her, which also motivated other young women in the family to join the policewomen's force.

Bara'a Mohammad Kassem: Field traffic officer

Bara'a has been working as a field traffic officer for eight months now, motivated by her love for this type of work since childhood, in addition to her parents' support and encouragement to take part in this noble sector and its role in serving society.

She pointed to the weather changes as the only real obstacle at the beginning of her work but she got used to it with time. Bara'a praised the way citizens treat traffic police-women in the field and their respect and support for them. She sees that the majority of citizens view policewomen as more capable of dealing with citizens in a calm and polite manner.

Bara'a asserted that her work in the field is fun and not tiring, as the policewoman's working shift does not exceed four hours a day. She spoke of the fact that she deals with tourists and foreigners who speak English and other languages on a regular basis, which motivated her to take English language courses. She also values the good relationship policewomen enjoy with officials, which is based on mutual respect and appreciation, adding that policewomen are afforded impressive financial and moral incentives for their work. This ensures career stability and drives them to always perform well in their jobs.

Various Local News

The Continued Presence of the Four Women Ministers in Al-Dahabi's Government after the Reshuffle, a Positive Move that Enhances the Role of Jordanian Women

Amman- Women Helping Women Network Newsletter

Citizens agreed that the continued presence of the four women ministers in Prime Minister Nader Al-Dahabi's cabinet, following the last government reshuffle, is a positive move that reinforces and respects the presence of Jordanian women in the executive authority. They also see the decision as one that reflects the government's current direction in focusing on the role of women in decision-making positions, and providing them with additional opportunities to implement their programs.

Commenting on this, Communications Engineer Firas Abdul Majeed said that "prior to the government reshuffle, there were strong rumors predicting the departure of all four, or at a minimum three, of the women ministers. These speculations stirred concern among analysts and supporters of women, who viewed any potential government decision pertaining to the women ministers as a test of how serious the government really is in its commitment to political reform and positive change."

Abdul Majeed noted that "everyone agrees that the government's credibility is illustrated through its levels of distinction and achievement, but that these must be accompanied by strong support for the role of women. In the case of the women ministers, this meant giving them additional opportunities to continue the work they started at their ministries, since the time they've spent in office thus far is insufficient for them to prove their abilities and to allow for a fair evaluation of their work." He also added that "extending the term for the four women ministers in the new government received a positive response from the vast majority of Jordanian society, who viewed this as an advanced step on the part of government towards enhancing the role of Jordanian women leaders in decision-making positions."

For her part, AdDustour journalist Jumana Selim praised the premier's decision with regards to extending the term for the women ministers in his cabinet, stating that this reflects the premier's sound belief in the effective role women play in decision-making posts. She expressed that "having four women ministers in one cabinet is an achievement and distinction in itself, as it indicates women's special status

"Having four women ministers in one cabinet is an achievement and distinction in itself, as it indicates women's special status in society in general and at the executive level in particular."



H.E. Maha Khatib
Minister of Tourism and Antiquities



H.E. Nancy Bakir
Minister of Public Sector Reform



H.E. Hala Latouf
Minister of Social Development



H.E. Suhair Al Ali
Minister of Planning and
International Cooperation

Various Local News

in society in general and at the executive level in particular." She added that Jordanian women are reaping the fruits of their hard work, competency and loyalty in serving their country.

Selim also pointed out that the premier's decision was hailed and appreciated within media circles, as it affirmed Jordan's commitment to democracy and its respect and appreciation for women leaders. She hopes that there will be an increase in the percentage of women's representation in all decision-making positions in the future, as this reflects positively on the Kingdom.

Finally, activist and doctor Sumaya Abu Qartoumi expressed her optimism in the future of Jordanian women and pointed to women's achievements at the regional level, saying that "throughout the last decade, women have actively participated in decision-making and attained senior leadership positions, which made Jordan one of the leading countries in empowering women in various aspects."

She hopes that the situation of women in political parties develops further, adding that "even though there is noticeable improvement with regard to women's presence in political parties, their engagement continues to fail short of expectations. We look forward to the day when the Jordanian woman is present in the legislative and executive authorities based on political party work. It is then that we will be able to honestly say that she has overcome the various challenges in her way and that she achieved equality with women in advanced countries." Abu Qartoumi also commended the Prime Minister's extension of four women ministers' term, describing it as "a smart move."

In this respect, many citizens hoped that the government's decision was based on an extensive study that aims at further developing women leaders' performance. They also stressed that choosing women for decision-making positions and for the executive authority should always be based merit and professional expertise, and away from any other considerations, so that the desired objectives can be adequately achieved.

The 36th Issue of 'Tychee' Magazine

The 36th issue of 'Tychee' magazine, which addresses feminist achievements, has now been published. This issue includes an interview with Princess Wijdan in Rome, coverage of a children's writing seminar, studies on "Amman at Dawn," the discourse of the "Feminist Novel," profiles of Jordanian women pioneers such as Munifeh Al-Jazi, an international literature file on Nancy Huston, translations on 'The French Feminist Movement,' in addition to cinema and theatre.



The magazine highlights Jordanian women's successes in various fields, focusing on their creativity and providing them with a special platform for publication and effective communication. It aims at promoting cultural activism among men and women and encouraging cultural and literary exchange with specialized cultural and translation centers that are focused on women's literature, including, among others: the Moroccan Writers Union, the Arabic Studies Section in Italy, the Jordanian Consulate in Italy, the Egyptian Storytellers' Club, and women's research centers.

Various Local News

Tychee's Seminar on 'Amman's Image in Feminist Literature'

Amman- Women Helping Women Newsletter

"Amman in Jordanian Feminist Literature" was the title of a seminar organized by 'Tychee House,' which also publishes 'Tychee Magazine,' whose Editor-in-Chief is the Jordanian writer Basma Al-Nsour.

Throughout this seminar, speakers agreed that creative Jordanian women had tried hard to draw a comprehensive picture of the 'Ammani' place in their literature, and may have faced various obstacles, especially that little has been written on the city, and that its places were not deeply present in the memory of its intellectuals.

Commenting on this, novelist Samiha Khreis asserted that her writings on Amman were similar to 'cultivating' in a 'virgin' land. Her novel *Nara*, attempted to create a picture of Amman in the 1930s, depending on imagination rather than documentation, or copying from a previous image. She said that "my novel *Nara* reveals Amman's imperfections, even though I belong to the city, and despite the fact that my love for it was always present during my writing."

Critic Rifkah Doudin stated that "the social reality encountered by a Jordanian, and especially an 'Ammani' female writer, could weaken her interest in the place." Adding that "female writers had introduced Amman as a family-oriented city, which reflects the familial and tribal nature of society."

In turn, critic Nazih Abu Nidal noted that "the size of the place in feminist work is larger than that in male work. This indicates that the Jordanian woman tries to refrain from talking about her private issues and the details of her secretive life, resorting instead to describing the outside world, as illustrated in the biography of Thuraya Malhas."

On another note, novelist Fairouz Al-Tamimi said that "there is a hostile relationship between Amman and the characters in her novels, even though the city provides the freedom these characters seek."

Storyteller Khalil Qandeel viewed Amman as "a city that punishes the writer everyday, imposing on him or her the need to suggest a 'program' to write on." He explained that "for male and female Jordanian writers alike, Amman does not belong to the category of cities with a ready and comprehensive program. Instead, it invites you to develop a continuous and intertwined relationship with it."

For her part, storyteller Sahar Malas spoke of her storytelling experience and her writings on the 'Ammani' place. She said "when I recall the first places I lived in, especially Sakf Al-Sail, Raghadan, and Jabal Al-Jowfeh, I find them equally dear and harsh and lonesome, and this is what I have reflected in my book *The Candle and the Shadow*."

Another storyteller, Jamileh Al-Amaireh said "the eighties and the nineties have witnessed the growth of a generation of female writers who succeeded in depicting the 'Ammani' place by introducing it in stories and novels." She also pointed to the experiences of many female writers in this area.

Various Local News



Members of the Arab Women Regional Network of Metropolis Provide Gaza Donations to the "Kuluna Ahl" Initiative and Liaise with Fellow Members in Gaza

Sunday, January 25, 2009

The Arab Women Regional Network of Metropolis / Regional Office-Amman organized a meeting in January for several of its members from Jordanian municipal councils and the Greater Amman Municipality. The meeting was attended by Ms. Muyassar Al Saadi and Ms. Bushra Al Ruzi from the Greater Amman Municipality, Ms. Alvera Jraisat Deputy Mayor of Fuheis municipality, Ms. Suad Al-Habashneh from the Greater Zarqa municipality, Ms. Mouzah Freihat from Kafaranja municipality, and Ms. Zahra Al-Mahasneh from Al-Naseem municipality.

The meeting was aimed at providing donations for the people of Gaza through the "Kuluna Ahl" (We Are All Family) Food Bank Initiative. Attendees also expressed their sympathies and condolences by communicating with Engineer Hala Al-Zibdeh, one of the women members of the Gaza municipal council, who expressed her deepest appreciation for the Network's initiative.

Participants at the meeting also commended the Network's efforts to support its members and provide them with the opportunity to meet and share experiences. They also expressed their appreciation for the "Kuluna Ahl" initiative and its role in achieving social development and fighting poverty. Addressing the meeting, Mr. Othman Al-Shawabkeh, the "Kuluna Ahl" Coordinator, explained that the initiative was launched by the Greater Amman Municipality last year, in order to distribute charity packages to needy families in Amman. Similar packages were recently sent to the people of Gaza, through the Hashemite Charity Commission.

Regional and Global News

Asma' Abdul Hamid: First Veiled Muslim to Enter Politics in Denmark

April 23, 2009

Copenhagen (AFP)- Asma' Abdul Hamid, a Dane from Palestinian origin, entered history in Denmark as the first veiled Muslim to participate in a municipal council session as an alternate member.

Abdul Hamid, 27, is a member of Odense's Municipal Council, the third largest city in the Scandinavian kingdom. She was elected to this post as a member of the leftist 'Union List'. On Wednesday, April 22, she attended her first municipal council meeting, taking the place of an original council member who was on vacation.



Asma' Abdul Hamid

The session was attended by various media outlets that rushed to cover the historic event, which marked the entry of the first veiled Muslim woman into Denmark's political life. Abdul Hamid told Journalists "I want to be evaluated for what I carry in my head, rather than what I wear on my head, for my policy positions and my views, as opposed to what I wear or the way that I greet others."

Asma' received more than 500 votes during the 2005 municipal elections, qualifying her to be the first alternate member from her party. She is also an alternate for MP Johan Shmidt- Nelsin, a member of her party in Parliament. Since the November 2007 elections, the possibility of her sitting in Parliament in his place caused a wide political debate in the country, especially among the conservative right.

Professor Peter Sibergh of Odense University said in a statement to the regional 'Fyens Stiftstidende' newspaper, that the participation of a veiled Muslim woman in a municipal council meeting is "an important event in Danish political life," adding that "it will affect the now long ongoing argument around the veil, because now we have an example of a veiled Muslim woman who is an elected council member, demonstrating that things evolve in Danish society."

First Saudi Woman Enters Government as Deputy Minister of Education for Girls' Affairs

Amman - Women Helping Women Network Newsletter

In an unprecedented development in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Noura Al-Fayez, who previously worked as an academic in the Public Administration Institute, was appointed Deputy Education Minister for Girls' Affairs, in a country that does not yet allow a woman to drive a car, or to travel or marry without the prior consent of a male "guardian" from her family.

The Saudi monarch, King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, conducted a wide cabinet reshuffle on February 14, 2009, which resulted in the appointment of a woman to the Saudi government for the first time. The King was himself responsible for the first partial municipal elections that took place in the Saudi Kingdom in 2005, when he was Crown Prince.

According to observers, amendments made by King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz are considered the largest throughout the past two decades and represent a major turning point and a new beginning. The amendments come in the larger context of pushing Saudi society towards more openness and increased cultural and religious tolerance. Observers anticipate positive changes in the Ministry of Education's Girls' Affairs now that Noura Al- Fayez assumed her new position.

From the Editor - In- Chief

Women's Pressure Groups...and in Jordan??!

Kholoud Al Khatatbeh

Groups working on behalf of women's issues, such as the League of Women Voters in the United States, represent a large and growing force that influences the political authorities' decisions, as they relate to the specific issues these groups adopt. Such organizations also stand as a unified force that affects change in the local community, by helping direct the community's attention and support to these issues.

Pressure groups are a group of people or institutions uniting in various forms and drawn together by common interests. They work to achieve their goals through utilizing various techniques of persuasion and methods of pressure on the political authority, to bring it to respond to their requests. They do not aim to achieve any financial gain or reach power. Pressure groups also provide information and studies to the political authority to help it reach sound, realistic decisions. Accordingly, they act as a channel through which citizens can practice their rights.

During my visit to the city of Chicago in the state of Illinois last year, and while meeting activists from the League of Women Voters, I was curious about this group's mission and activities. I learnt that they were established in the United States in 1920, the same year when American women were granted the right to vote. This organization hence took upon itself the task of attracting and encouraging women to participate in the electoral process, and became known as a women's pressure group, according to Ms. Esta Kallen, an officer at the League.

Women represent 85% of the organization's members, while the remaining 15% is composed of male members, mostly husbands of female members. The organization has its own list of issues that it advocates for, focusing mainly on health, the environment, and the use of nuclear energy, in addition to adopting unemployment issues and defending immigrants' rights in America. The organization had played an effective role in pressuring the US Congress while discussing laws concerning immigrants, which resulted in their favor.

It is also worth mentioning that pressure groups conduct studies in all fields relating to their priority issues and provide this research to Congress to serve as a reference to its members as they debate laws. Such groups have offices in Washington, DC to pressure congressmen, in addition to other offices located in different US states. Members of these groups are volunteers who serve their communities and work towards creating positive change.

During the last US elections, the organization's offices in Illinois encouraged citizens to practice their electoral right and vote, without being biased towards any candidate or party. It published elections awareness literature and implemented a project for students who were not yet of voting age by providing them with information on campaigns and campaign history. The program taught students the process of elections through the concept of 'mock elections,' which also positioned the students to encourage their parents to vote. The aim was to increase voter turnout in Illinois, a state that is traditionally known for its low turnout rates, despite its sizable population.

Educating school students in a state that has a large number of immigrants, is intended to reflect positively on families who receive encouragement from their children, and accordingly participate in the elections. Ultimately, the organization encourages voters to vote for candidates whose campaigns address their demands and concerns, which is in the community's best interest.

This leads us to the question of how can we apply this in our own society and form pressure groups to serve public interests. In particular, how can we establish Jordanian women pressure groups, who would work on positively influencing women's issues and challenge laws that are unfair to women, while also empowering women politically and in the decision-making process? I believe that this can be achieved through raising women's awareness of the importance of supporting other women and also choosing those that are genuinely concerned with women's issues.

In Jordan, we have several local and international institutions and organizations that succeeded in this approach and helped to advance women's status, particularly in the last decade. However, despite these groups' unified goals, they have not yet fulfilled their objectives to the desired level. We need to form pressure groups that act in harmony while respecting each other's individual strategies and work, as well as their volunteers' political, partisan and institutional affiliations. Such groups should bring together representatives of political parties, social sectors, women leaders and women's organizations, in addition to those who believe in volunteer work, to effectively advocate for public issues, such as women and children's issues, civic freedoms, health, and education.

It is evident that we also need strong organizations and research groups, composed of experts and scholars, to conduct studies and research that would assist members of parliament and political leaders as they debate and decide on legislation, including for instance laws related to elections, women, and personal status.

In conclusion, it is important to point to certain women's organizations' efforts to build support for specific issues, or call for the continuity and/or dismissal of laws that have a negative impact on women and society. Their role was and should continue to be one of partnership with other groups and institutions, and not one of competition. Such organizations could constitute the base for strong Jordanian women pressure groups or 'lobby' that would affect positive change for the benefit of society in the future.