

'Women and Education' The National Council of Lebanese Women

Beirut, November 2, 1990

In preparation for its twelfth National Summit, The National Council of Lebanese Women organized a round table to discuss the issue of women and education in Lebanon. The purpose of the round table was to raise the problems women face in earning an education and putting it to proper use, and to propose potential solutions and plans of action. A number of distinguished education and media specialists, as well as members of cultural, educational, social and feminist associations were invited to contribute to the panels.

The agenda consisted of three consecutive panels over a period of seven consecutive hours.

(1) The Role of Women in Education and Culture

The panelist and the audience discussed the need for women to make time, away from domestic chores, for reading and acquiring general knowledge. The panelists also urged women to expand their academic and professional horizons beyond the scopes deemed acceptable and preferable for them in our traditional society. Hence, redefinition of the traditional boundaries would be a first stepping stone in overcoming the inferiority status assigned to women by society.

(2) The Education of Women.

The second panel reported statistics showing that the number of Lebanese female university students is becoming equal to the number of Lebanese male university students. According to the panelists, the ratio of female to male enrollment is approximately 50/50. One of the relevant suggestions for further emancipation is to work towards emphasizing the importance of educating females. Another important suggestion was to get all social groups and forces to support and encourage women to get into decision-making levels in society.

(3) The Role of Women in the Media.

This last panel commended the success of women's participation in the media, keeping in mind the difficulties of managing both a home and the steep demands of a career in the media. The quality of women's contribution and dedication to the media has earned them the added respect of their male colleagues.

However, one media specialist pointed out that women should play a more active role in trying to eliminate the sexist overtones from advertisements.

The National Council of Lebanese Women concluded this seven hour event with a cocktail and promises to tackle the various points which were raised. The Council's main objective is to encourage all women associations to pay more serious attention to what can be done for the development of Lebanese women after fifteen years in the abyss of war •

The Lebanese Association for Human Rights

Beirut, December 5, 1990

The Lebanese Association for Human Rights held a press conference to remind the Lebanese Government of the outstanding claims of women's rights in Lebanon.

Maitre Laure Moghaizel, President of the Association, surrounded by activists from the various Lebanese women's groups, called upon the government to live up to its commitments to protect human rights including women's rights as dictated by Lebanon's membership in the United Nations Council for Human Rights.

Maitre Moghaizel noted that for many years Lebanese women have demanded the cancellation and amendment of certain discriminatory laws. Yet, nothing has been done to this effect.

Maitre Moghaizel summarized these demands.

- A. The amendment of the following laws.
 1. The laws requiring women to have permission of husband in order to work or engage in commercial deals.
 2. The law stating that the credibility of a woman's testimony is equivalent to only one-third that of a man.
 3. The linkage and subordination of social security pensions for married women to the husbands' pension.
 4. The reduction of the sentence and the acquittal of perpetrators of crimes of honor.
- B. The Association demanded that women be incorporated and admitted to the decision-making levels of the government, municipalities, syndicates, and other socio-political and socio-economic offices. Maitre Moghaizel added that qualified women are abundant.

- C. Women be allowed to take part in representing Lebanon at international, regional and national conferences. Once again Maître Moghaizel referred to the insult Lebanese women had to endure when a man was appointed to head the Lebanese Delegation to the Conference of the International Year of Women organized by the UN in Mexico in 1975.
- D. To reinstate Lebanon as a member of the United Nation's Committee for Women's Conditions.
- E. Lebanon to ratify the agreement drawn by the Arab League and the United Nations calling not only for equality between the sexes but also for the inclusion of women in development and peace. Thus far, Lebanon is among the last few Arab countries who have not ratified this agreement.

Following the press conference, the ladies proceeded to take their demands directly to the President of the Republic, Mr. Elias Hrawi. The President commended the humanitarian role of the Lebanese women during the war. He praised their ability to cope with the difficulties and their instinct for peace. President Hrawi stated that the success of the second Lebanese Republic lies in the hands of the women as well as the men. He urged the women to prove themselves and to participate more aggressively in national reconstruction and development. He encouraged women to compete with men in the various fields and offices.

Will these demands be taken into real consideration and produce action or will they be stacked along with the previous claims on women's rights in Lebanon? ●

Women in The Lebanese Red Cross

By Rima Zankoul

The majority of us are familiar with the Red Cross and the Red Crescent's leading international paramedic services to humanity. They reach out to help people victimized by wars, poverty, malnourishment and other physical and social handicaps.

These organizations are apolitical and acultural. They are posted all over the world. Their system of operation in Lebanon and worldwide is based on seven general principles: humanity, volunteer work, non-discrimination, neutrality, internationality, independence, centrality of headquarters.

The Lebanese Red Cross (L.R.C.) was established in Beirut in 1945. When we took a closer look at it we noticed that **the majority of the staff, especially at the higher levels of administration, are women.** In fact, the

President of the L.R.C. is Mrs. Alexandra Issa El-Khoury and has held this post since 1964. Furthermore, heads of sections and administrative staff have a sliding majority of women.

Why so many women?. We wanted to investigate if there is any discrimination against men or women in this organization.

Mrs. Issa El-Khoury has been incapacitated by illness for some time and Mrs. Hind Saba is the Acting President. Mrs. Saba was eager to speak to us but could not get away from her busy schedule. Nevertheless, we were generously received by Mrs. Arslan of the Media Section. Mrs. Arslan confirmed the abundance of women in the establishment. She insisted that the Lebanese Red Cross has opened its doors for women to fulfill their natural aspirations for humanitarian services. She insisted that the volunteer status of the staff is the main reason for the supremacy of women over men. She explained that women can afford volunteer work more than men who have more imminent financial concerns and responsibilities in our culture. Men cannot afford to invest five to six hours of daily volunteer work and still manage to make a decent living for their families.

«Another point I want to stress» said Mrs. Arslan «is the great interest of women in humanitarian work. By virtue of their personality, women tend to be geared towards jobs which aim at helping and lessening the pain of people. Thus, the Lebanese Red Cross is filled with women working in its sections such as the blood bank, the youth section, the pharmacy, first aid and so on and so forth.»

We asked Mrs. Arslan if the women of the Lebanese Red Cross encounter any discrimination when dealing with institutions run by men. «No» she said. «The women of our establishment have earned themselves a good reputation for their accomplishments. They have proved to be highly qualified and are, therefore, treated with due respect and admiration.»

The dedication of the Lebanese Red Cross women is exemplified in the gigantic job they performed throughout the years of war in Lebanon. They dared to face crises and the dangers of strife and shelling, and have even lost colleagues in the violence. They insistingly stress the absence of any kind of discrimination in their operation. Mrs. Arslan concluded our encounter by saying «our achievements are due to our deep sense of duty and obligation to the service of mankind in Lebanon. We follow one basic principle: service, help and alleviation of sufferings. All other considerations are irrelevant to us.» ●