

## Mrs. Khadijah Bint Ahmed:

Minister of Women's Affairs,  
Industry And Tourism In Mauritania

Mrs. Khadijah Bint Ahmed is Minister of Women's Affairs, Industry and Tourism in Mauritania. With a degree in Economics from the University of Mohamad V in Morocco, Mrs. Bint Ahmed worked her way up in the Mauritanian government. At first, she held various posts in the Central Bank: Head of Research, then Director of Loans Budget, and later Director of Loans. Her first official appointment in the government was as Minister of Mines and Industry in 1987.

Mrs. Khadijah Bint Ahmed has developed goals and programs for each of the three branches of her ministry. For Tourism, she calls and encourages local and foreign investors to undertake touristic projects in her country. In Industry, she says that a Corporation for Industrial Development has been created for the purpose of improving and expanding the sector. And as far as Women's Affairs are concerned, Minister Bint Ahmed insists that bank facilities for women in need of loans must be made in order to support women in taking part in the economic development of the country.

In an interview with an Arab Business Magazine\*, the Minister spoke in details about the plans and concerns of the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

She said; «The Ministry is new and was founded only one year ago. Women have a big share in it. The truth is that this step is the coronation of a policy devised in 1984. The purpose of the policy and the ministry is to give Mauritanian women the opportunity to participate in society so that half of the population would not remain inactive in the national efforts for development».

«Since 1984», she continued, «many Mauritanian women have been assigned to very important positions in the government, and women have begun to share various fields with men».

In line with this policy, the ministry's primary goals is to improve social and financial awareness of Mauritanian women.

«What remains is the problem of facilitating the procedure for getting bank loans for women who cannot present collateral fundings. We are doing our best to assist women in this problem and help them in undertaking local investments.»

\* Source: *Al-Iktissad Wal-Aamal*, Arab Business Magazine. Fortnightly published in association with The Financial Times Mid East Markets. March 1990 issue, pp. 44-45. (Arabic Reference).

## Easy Credit For Women

«Our goal is to reach women who have been bypassed by the traditional banking system and to bring them into the economic mainstream», Ela Bhatt of Ahmedabad, India, the current Women's World Banking (W.W.B.) chairman.

Women's World Banking (W.W.B.), which celebrated its tenth anniversary in April, is unlike any other financial institution. At a time when governments are raising billions to revive the economies of Eastern Europe, **The group**, which has its headquarters in New York and 47 affiliate chapters on six continents, **arranges for women who have no collateral to receive commercial loans.** Many of the loans are so small that most banks would not consider them worth the paperwork. Hence, one of its smallest loans, of \$50, went to a woman in India who used the money to build an oven so she would sell chapati, or flat bread. One of the largest loans helped raise \$1 million to start a dairy cooperative in Thailand.

Under the loan-guarantee program, the international organization of W.W.B promises to be responsible for 50% of a loan, while the local chapter takes on an additional 25%. The rate of repayment has been 99% so far, and W.W.B has suffered only \$35,000 of losses in nearly \$12 million in loans outstanding.

By helping women achieve greater economic independence, the organization has prompted social change. For instance, the Kenya branch of London-based Barclays Bank, which works closely with the local W.W.B group, no longer requires a husband's signature when a woman gets at a loan.

W.W.B plans to offer more financial services worldwide. «In the past ten years we have focused on access to credit. In the next ten years we will be helping women find investors for their businesses, helping them get more training and developing larger markets,» says Nancy Barry, who will become the next president of the group in September.

As Christine Gorman of Time International puts it: Not bad for a bunch of women used to find themselves laughed out of the bank.

Incidentally, W.W.B was founded by Michaela Walsh (former partner in a wall Street financial firm), with six other businesswomen from around the world.

\* Taken from «Women Start Taking Credit» article by Christine Gorman in *Time International*, No. 23, June 4, 1990, p. 44.