

## The Fate of Women In Yemen After National Unification?

Yemen - political unification (North and South)!

What is in store for women?

Which formula will the unified government adopt with respect to women: that of the traditional North Yemen community; or that of the progressive South Yemen community?

**In South Yemen**, women are fearful that the growing influence of fundamentalists will curtail the rights and liberties they have come to enjoy. Thus, there are growing indications that restrictions will be placed on women in schools and at work.

**In North Yemen**, women hope that the progressive and liberal status of their Southern sisters will be nationalized; and consequently, improve their own situation.

Mrs. Najwa Yehya Zabarrah, Director of Public Health Education in North Yemen, said that the women of the North are looking forward to the unification of the country that was announced in May, 1990\*. She stated that at least one woman might be appointed to the office of vice-minister in the unified government.

Mrs. Zabarrah said that the women are hopeful that the unified government will introduce a Family Law based on the progressive laws that were being implemented in South Yemen before unification. Hence, according to these laws, women have more rights in marriage, divorce and maternity matters.

For instance, in North Yemen, based on the Shari'a\*\*, a man is allowed to have four wives. Whereas, in South Yemen, a man is allowed to marry more than one woman only under one condition: the approval of the first wife.

In North Yemen, women are not permitted to interact with men in schools. Furthermore, almost all the women wear gowns which hide every part of their bodies except their eyes.

Whereas, in South Yemen, women may interact with men in schools, and they are allowed to dress as they please.

The rate of working women in South Yemen is also higher than in North Yemen.



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In light of all these differences, Mrs. Zabarrah hopes that the rights of women of the North will improve and that the unified government will support women and encourage their emancipation.

In July 1990, the unified government of Yemen decreed that the Southern laws concerning women and the family are nationalized - Consequently, Yemeni women, both Northern and Southern can breathe more easily and can get to work immediately.

**Yemen Arab Republic, North Yemen:** capital San'a; area 75,000 sq. miles; pop. 6,700,000; official language Arabic; religion, Moslem, SW Arabian Peninsula.

**People's Democratic Republic Of Yemen, formerly Southern Yemen Republic:** capital Aden; area 180,000 sq. miles; pop. 1,600,000; official language, Arabic; religion, Moslem; location, SE Arabian Peninsula.

☆ *Al-Anwar* daily newspaper, 7/6/90. (Arabic Reference).

☆☆ Islamic Law.

Source: *The New College Encyclopedia*. New York: Galahad Books, 1978.