

Viewpoints and Voices from the Conference on Arab Women and Business Management

Myriam Sfair, IWSAW

Between presentations at the recent conference on "Arab Women and Business Management," IWSAW staffer Myriam Sfair conducted impromptu interviews with most of the presenters and some of the audience members. We present here some of the interesting voices and viewpoints that Myriam recorded. The comments of the conference participants contain valuable insights into Arab woman's role in management, the nature of the challenges she confronts, the future requirements for her continued success and progress in the professional world, and observations based on hard-won personal experience.

"When a woman finds herself unable to cope with her dual role as a mother and a career woman, her family should be given top priority....Career women often suffer internal conflicts of guilt and incompetence. Moreover, their families often feel let down. However, there is a personal satisfaction when they feel appreciated. Besides, children of career women value time and are more organized than other kids....The banking sector is very tiring, demanding and time consuming. It requires caution, devotion, analysis,

constant supervision and tact, as well as the ability to take the right decision at the right time. It is exhausting physically and mentally; however, with time it becomes like any other job: the more you master it the easier it becomes."

— Sabah Al-Muayyed
**Assistant to the General
Director, The National
Bank of Bahrain**

"My mother, who is an illiterate but very strong woman, encouraged me to actualize my aspirations and dreams....UNIFEM is not forcefully growing like

other UN agencies, due to the fact that women are not as ambitious as men and lack men's long-term vision and willingness to take risks Arab women are not focused enough and this is their weakness. We are here attending a workshop on management and we should concentrate on this specific topic and find new means to improve it and bring about more women managers.... Holding a conference on Arab Women and Management is a rare event, because management, although not much talked about, is very important. Creating a kind of network between Arab women concerned with management should be our aim because if we want to promote women we should make sure that they are at a decision-making level."

— Zouhra Mourabet
**UNIFEM Representative
Algeria**

"My parents, although well-off, encouraged me to continue my education, work and be self sufficient.... My father looks down upon people who do not work and considers their existence

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as meaningless.....My husband is very supportive and understanding due to the fact that we work in the same domain....Efficiency in one domain does not necessarily mean inefficiency in the other, i.e., it's not impossible to do, managing a job and a house....In Jordan, the government appreciates the work of the NGOs and the women's organizations. In rural, conservative areas, where women are restricted by their families to run for municipal office, the government took an active role by appointing a number of women.... In this conference there are two types of women: those who are interested in women's issues and the women's movement, and those who actually work, i.e., employers and employees. These two have different perceptions and viewpoints. Working women soon realize that there is no man/woman competition. Those who qualify, succeed. However, men are always ahead. Feminists are using the language they started out with over and over again; they lack innovation in tackling their problems.... The solution lies in the hands of the youth in challenging the existing social structure in order to bring about a gender-free society."

— Hala Al-Ayouby,
**Representative of the
 Business and Professional
 Women's Club
 Amman, Jordan**

"One can not develop without caring for the environment, which is not just water, air and soil pollution, i.e., the physical environment, but also an integrated social, economic and physical environment, for they are all inter-related.... Environmental issues ought to be integrated in all aspects of education.....Most of my work includes integrating gender and environmental issues into policy planning, which, in the

results in negative interferences and jealousy from colleagues, whereby they attempt to use my success as a means to diminish his accomplishments.....The fortunate educated woman has an obligation towards the unfortunate, illiterate one...by empowering these women and making them conscious of their capabilities.....If you train the mothers, you will get balanced men....We should get rid of the ingrained habits of the mind which restrict and inhibit progress."

— Dr. Samia
 Gallal-Saad
**Professor of
 Environmental
 Healthy
 Alexandria
 University
 Egypt**

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 encouraged me to
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"I started work when I was still a second year university student. My parents objected to my work on many grounds. They were surprised by my desire to work in spite of our favorable financial

situation....I was required to do quality control for Syrian products, and after working in that domain, I decided to establish a specialized center....I encountered a lot of difficulty and was faced by enormous obstacles, for it was the first private center of its kind in Syria and no one was willing to help me, although they all felt the importance and need for such a center....It took me two years to obtain a license, and the center is now affiliated with the Syrian Ministry of In-

Middle East region, is the hardest thing....My parents were very liberal and encouraged me a lot. On the other hand, my husband complains about my work, especially when I am abroad....I make an effort to cater to his every need, and when at home, I adopt the role of the traditional wife. I spoiled him and I should bear the consequences....My husband and I work in the same domain, and are professors in the same department....Our working situation often

dusty.....The impact of such a project is immense and our center is now considered a leader in this domain....Until now, there is no other private sector corporation licensed and supported by the government other than our center in the Middle East....The system in Syria supports women in general. There are laws that support the working woman. Moreover, if the number of children in a working place exceeds five, then the law obliges the institution to establish a nursery on the premises for the children of those working women....At my husband's workplace, there is a nursery of high standard that admits children at a very early age, two months and a half, so I had no problems....."

— Dr. Nazha Alyan,
Director
Industrial Observation
Center
Syria



A conference panel. Left to right: Dr. Najat Sanbary, Ms. Zouhra Mourabet, Minister Bahij Tabbara, Dr. Myriam Saleem, and Mrs. Aida Na'aman.



Dr. Walid Ammar answers a question during a panel discussion. Seated with him are, from left to right, Dr. Nazha Alyan, Mrs. Na'amat Kan'an, and Mrs. Muna Bouwarshi.



IWSAW Staffer Myriam Sfair interviews Nazha Al-Yan about her rich management experiences.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

In an effort to be as responsive as possible to our readers, we would like to know which of the following topics you would like to see addressed in future File sections of *Al-Raida*. Please choose three of the topics listed below and indicate the priority of preference of each of your choices (*e.g.*, write the number 1 next to the topic which interests you most, 2 next to the second most interesting topic, *etc.*). After you have made your selections, please clip out this questionnaire and send it back to us at the address listed below. Thank you in advance for your participation in making *Al-Raida* as interesting and as relevant as possible.

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- Other topics (_____)

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