

From Kuwait

The Struggle for Women's Suffrage

(...) Although Kuwait has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the government made reservations to both treaties noting that they are inconsistent with Article 1 of its voting law, which denies women's suffrage. In March 2000, the United Nations Human Rights Committee urged the Kuwaiti Government to "take all the necessary steps to ensure to women the right to vote and to be elected on an equal footing with men, in accordance with Articles 25 and 26 of the Covenant.

The suffrage movement in Kuwait has a long history. In 1971, following a conference on women's issues in Kuwait, a bill was submitted to the National Assembly granting full political rights for women. The bill was only supported by 12 of the 60 members of the Assembly. Subsequent legislative initiatives for women's suffrage were introduced in 1981, 1986, 1992 and 1996 but political support has never been strong enough. In 1994, the Women's Issues Network (WIN), a coordinating committee for 22 non-governmental organizations, launched a Blue Ribbon Campaign in support of women's rights to vote and to stand for elected office. The campaign aims to raise public awareness about the exclusion of women in Kuwait from political participation. On 28 October 2000, a public demonstration was held in front of the National Assembly at the commencement of its fourth session, calling for the amendment of the Election Law to give women the right to vote.

Although in November 1999 the National Assembly again denied women suffrage, the 32-30 vote was the closest in Kuwait's 37-year parliamentary history. Despite the vehemence of the opposition, the movement for women's suffrage is gaining support and Kuwaiti women are hopeful that they will soon win their long-awaited political rights. In October 2000, the National Assembly reconvened. In considering the bill that was introduced in July, its members will once again have an historic opportunity to change the law so that no country in the world denies only women the right to vote.

<http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/suffrage.htm#kuwait>

From Afghanistan

Afghanistan's First Female Governor

Habiba Sarobi is Afghanistan's first female governor, a major advance in a society where, only four years ago under the Taliban, women were denied everything from lessons to lipstick and forced to wear the all-covering burka.

It is not a job for the faint hearted. Afghan governors are stereotypically gruff, bearded men with a penchant for fighting, sweet tea and smoke-filled-room politics. Ms. Sarobi, a mild-mannered mother, comes to work with a suitcase and her secretary.

Formerly the Minister for Women's Affairs, she said she had turned down an ambassadorial job to demand the governor's post from President Hamid Karzai. "He was surprised," she said. "His first question was, 'Do you think the people will accept you?' I said, 'Definitely, yes'." (...)

Nobody expects an overnight revolution. The obscurantist edicts of the Taliban are an unhappy memory: Afghan women can vote, work and go to school; a quarter of all seats in next September's parliamentary vote are reserved for women; in Kabul, increasing numbers are shedding their burkas. But civil rights do not necessarily mean human rights. Despite billions of dollars in aid, health and education facilities remain dire. For example, giving birth in Badakhshan province claims the life of one in every 15 mothers. This is the highest maternal mortality rate in the world. In the deeply conservative south, most women spend their lives hemmed in by high walls and overprotective men. Forced marriages and domestic violence are rife across the country. Last week a woman in Badakhshan was stoned to death for adultery, the second such killing since the Taliban's overthrow in 2001. (...)

Ms. Sarobi recently toured Europe to rally sympathetic ears and deep pockets to her cause. She needs much of both. But she will also benefit from the considerable political capital invested by President Karzai. Even the former governor, Muhammad Rahim Aliyaar, has lent his support, at least for now. "It's too early to judge whether a woman can succeed. That will take six months or a year," he said. "But I believe that most people are behind her, and so am I."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,1470090,00.html>