

## Claiming Equal Citizenship: The Campaign for Arab Women's Right to Nationality

Women's right to equal citizenship is guaranteed by the majority of Arab constitutions, as well as by international law. Yet across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and the Gulf, women are denied the right to pass on their nationality to their husbands and children – a crucial component of citizenship.

In almost every country in the MENA and Gulf regions, women who marry men of other nationalities cannot confer their original nationality to their husbands or children. Only fathers, not mothers, can confer their nationality to their children.

Discriminatory laws denying women equal nationality rights undermine women's status as equal citizens in their home countries. Such laws send the message that women do not enjoy a direct relationship with the state, but must access their citizenship rights through the mediation of a male family member, such as a father or a husband. Until women in the MENA and Gulf regions are recognized as full nationals and citizens, they cannot participate fully in public life, nor claim the other rights to which they are entitled as equal members of their societies.

The denial of women's nationality rights also creates real suffering for dual nationality families living in the woman's home country. Children and spouses are treated as foreigners and must obtain costly residency permits. Children are often excluded from social services such as social security, health-care and subsidized or free access to education. In many countries, spouses and children have limited employment opportunities and are unable to own property. In terms of psychological impact, many women feel isolated and guilty because they feel responsible for the difficulties faced by their families, while children suffer from low self-esteem because of their second-class status.

The Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) joins with partners in the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf to call for:

- Legal reform enabling women to confer their nationality to their husbands and children without condition
- Full implementation of reformed nationality laws and equal access to these laws for all women
- Recognition of women as equal citizens in all areas of life

### Focus Countries

- Algeria: Centre d'Informatique et de Documentation sur les Droits de l'Enfant et de la Femme (CIDDEF) is coordinating the campaign. The nationality law was reformed in March 2005, allowing Algerian women married to non-nationals to

confer nationality to both spouses and children. CIDDEF and regional partners are monitoring the implementation of the reform.

- Bahrain: Bahrain Women's Society (BWS) is coordinating the campaign. Limited changes to the nationality law are under discussion in the Parliament for women married to Gulf citizens only. BWS and regional partners are calling for the recognition of nationality rights for all women.

- Egypt: Forum for Women in Development (FWID) is coordinating the campaign. The nationality law was reformed in July 2004 allowing Egyptian women married to non-nationals to grant nationality to their children only. FWID and regional partners are monitoring the implementation of the reform.

- Jordan: Sisterhood is Global Institute Jordan (SIGI-J) is coordinating the campaign. Current nationality law does not allow Jordanian women to confer nationality to either spouses or children. JCNW and regional partners continue to advocate for reform.

- Lebanon: Collective for Research and Training on Development-Action is coordinating the campaign. Current nationality law does not allow Lebanese women to confer nationality to either spouses or children. CRTD-A and regional partners continue to advocate for reform.

- Morocco: Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) is coordinating the campaign. The King proposed a new nationality law in a speech given in the summer of 2005 and a Ministry of Justice commission has been established to submit proposals to parliament. ADFM and regional partners are advocating vigorously for a 'no conditions' law, which will apply retroactively to pending citizenship applications by children of Moroccan women married to non-nationals.

- Syria: Syrian Women's League (SWL) is coordinating the campaign. Nationality law does not allow Syrian women to confer nationality to either spouses or children. SWL and regional partners continue to advocate for reform.

### Take Action

Help support the campaign for women's equal citizenship rights.

- VISIT our Claiming Equal Citizenship Campaign WEBLOG for personal stories, country updates, and recent campaign news.

- SIGN our petition calling for legal recognition of women's right to confer their nationality to their husbands and children and full implementation of this right in the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf.

- RAISE AWARENESS in the media. Write a letter to the editor, or an op-ed to your newspaper to express your concern.

- CONNECT US with women living in the focus countries married to non-national men. Encourage them to share their experiences on the Campaign WEBLOG.

For more details visit the WLP website on <http://www.learningpartnership.org/advocacy/campaign>