

Obituary: Farewell Rita

Guita Hourani

Dr. Rita G. Sabat, Assistant Professor of International Affairs at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Notre Dame University (NDU)-Louaizé, Lebanon passed away peacefully on December 29, 2013, after a long battle with breast cancer. Dr. Sabat is survived by her daughter Samira Haymen, her husband Jad Fadel-Hassan, her father George, her mother Yolande Saber, her brothers Toni and Gilbert, and their families. Dr. Sabat was born in March of 1974 in Lebanon to (Amin) George Sabat and Yolande Saber. She studied in Lebanon, Cyprus, and the USA and received a Ph.D. in International Affairs from Florida International University (2010). Since her appointment at NDU, she taught courses in the areas of international institutions, gender, non-governmental organizations, and development. As the only female professor in the faculty to date, she played an important role in developing both gender balance and a gendered approach to teaching in the Department of Government and International Relations at NDU. Dr. Sabat conducted extensive field research on the women's movement in Lebanon in the areas of human rights and peace and security, and on the use of the arts in peace-building for the Peace-Building Academy. She assisted in the design of methodologies of research for several projects and proposals including one on women-owned business, discrimination and corruption, and on conflict resolution through community-level case studies in Tripoli and Baalbek. Dr. Sabat served as a member of the Regional Network on Women, Peace, and Security, which aims at developing policies in the MENA region according to UNSC Resolution 1325, and was a member of the Technical Task-Force of the National Gender-Based Violence Unit, which is headed by the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs



Rita Sabat, 1974-2013.

and Lebanese-based NGOs, and an advisory board member for Abaad Resource Center for Gender Equality. She was also a senior consultant to the Lebanese Development Network (LDN) and its Carthage Center for Research and Information (CCRI) where she served as gender and human rights specialist. Between 2012 and 2013, and despite her illness, she presented her research on gender equality, women's non-governmental organizations, violence against women, and gendered human security in Lebanon at international conferences in Switzerland, the USA, India, and the Emirates. With LDN/CCRI she fulfilled her role as a gender expert for a Swiss labor policy project in five MENA

countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE) and in the same capacity for an International Labor Organization (ILO) project assessing the employability of the Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. Dr. Sabat has recently published a chapter entitled “Translating International Gender Equality Norms: The Case of Combating Violence against Women in Lebanon” in *Feminist Strategies in International Governance* edited by Elisabeth Prügl, Güelay Caglar, and Suzanne Swindle (Routledge Press 2012). She also guest edited an issue of *al-raida* on “Gender-Based Violence in the Arab World (2010-2011)”. Not long before she passed away, she spoke at a panel organized jointly by the Community Service Office (CSO) and the Human Rights Club (HRC) at NDU on the role of religion in stopping gender discrimination and at another event in New York co-hosted by the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), the International Peace Institute (IPI), and the Norwegian Mission to the UN where she focused on the connection between gender based violence in Lebanon and international insecurity.

The news of Dr. Sabat’s passing fell hard on her family, friends, colleagues, and students, who used social media extensively to mourn her and express their sorrow. There isn’t enough space in this obituary to share all that has been written and continues to be written on Rita’s Facebook timeline. It would probably suffice to mention some of the attributes that characterize these posts, including: her being genuine, passionate, giving, caring, committed, selfless, humble, enduring, spiritual, joyful, humorous, a good friend, a good teacher, and an excellent listener.

According to a friend of hers, who spoke to her four weeks before she left this world, Dr. Sabat stated that she knows God’s will and that she is ready to accept it. All of those who knew her through this and other ordeals testified to her brave, gracious and collected manners in dealing with life’s challenges. Another friend also stated that prior to her departure and although breathless from failing lungs, she spoke with deep passion and concern about the career of a friend/colleague of hers.

It is not surprising that the web posts mentioned above bestowed upon her the best attributes for, according to one of her students, Rita’s favorite quote was “work for a cause, not for applause; live life to express, not to impress; don’t strive to make your presence noticed, just make your absence felt”. Her absence will surely be missed.

With Dr. Sabat’s passing, the gender equality and human rights movement in the Middle East in general and Lebanon in particular loses a promising scholar and a staunch activist. A group of friends, students and colleagues, in Lebanon, Switzerland, and the USA, is in the process of establishing an endowment in her name that would help carry on her most endearing cause that “women’s rights should be a foreign policy priority”.

Guita Hourani is the Director of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center, Notre Dame University, Lebanon
Email: ghourani@ndu.edu.lb