

## The Status of Women in Lebanese Legislation

'Law' is an awe-inspiring word. It makes the innocent feel secure and strikes the guilty with panic. Law is supposed to protect the weak and restrain the powerful. But can we say this about Lebanese laws and the position of Lebanese women within their country's legal system(s)?

The following file about women in Lebanese legislation basically tells the Lebanese version of the story of discrimination against women in civil and religious laws. It depicts the flippancy of legislators who feel no qualms about granting women rights and responsibilities equal to those of men in the opening articles of the law of the land, then withdrawing a lot of these rights in discriminatory civil laws and in religion-based family laws that discriminate not only between men and women but also between members of the same sex who belong to different confessions. The Lebanese legislator also seems to find no problem in ratifying international agreements, with or without reservations, while allowing laws that contradict the terms of these agreements to rule people's lives. On a more positive note, the file includes some amendments of laws in the direction of equity and some work done towards more amendments.

The file includes three articles that refer to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Nada Khalifeh explains the grounds and some terms of the Convention, arguing against Lebanese reservations to some of its terms. Alia Berti Zein reviews discriminations against women in the Lebanese penal code, in the light of CEDAW; and Azzah Shararah Beydoun recounts the reactions and recommendations of the CEDAW Committee when it met with a delegation representing the Republic of Lebanon in July 2005 at the UN headquarters in New York.

The inequality between the rights of Lebanese men and women within the family are discussed in three other articles. Thus,

Sonia Ibrahim Atiyah, after giving a historical background and before suggesting needed improvements, describes discrimination in inheritance laws, at the gender and confessional levels. Lina Osseiran Beydoun discusses discrimination between men and women in the right to pass their Lebanese nationality to their spouses and offspring; and Marie-Rose Zalzal gives a thorough account of the legal complications that face individuals within mixed marriages, as well as the advantages they reap.

Some situations that may arise within the family are discussed by Mirella Abdel Sater McCracken, who tackles violence against wives as well as against foreign domestic workers, and by Arlete Juraysati who gives a detailed legal account of what social benefits the families of working women are entitled to and what procedures are to be followed in order to gain access to these rights. Within the same framework of Juraysati's article, Iqbal Doughan lists the pending amendments required in order for working women to acquire their full rights, equal to those of their male colleagues.

The article of Arda Ekmekji deals with legislation related to politics. It discusses the option of establishing a quota system to insure women's participation at the levels of representation and political decision-making.

Of a more general nature is Najla Hamadeh's article on the philosophy of change in codes of law and factors that impede change or enhance it. Also, the file includes a roundtable discussion on the advantages and/or disadvantages of having religious laws and courts for family status instead of civil laws and courts. For this last rich discussion that includes very revolutionary and very traditional (positivist) positions, we thank Dr. Bechir Bilani, Mohammad Matar (Attorney at law), Mr. Ahmad El-Zein (Attorney at law), Judge Arlete Juraysati and Dr. Ibrahim Najjar.

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