



The First Woman Minister in the Syrian Government

In the Arab World today, Women's claims for political rights seem to be reaching fulfillment. After the appointment of a woman to the ministry of social affairs in both Egypt and Iraq, Syria followed suit in 1976 by appointing Dr. Najah Attar to the ministry of culture and national counseling.

Najah Attar belongs to the new generation of progressive intellectuals in Syria. Born in 1933 in a family known for its openness to modernism, she distinguished herself during her school days by participating in the students' political movements and collaborating to various magazines. Her family has produced a number of prominent writers. After obtaining

a licence in literature, from the Syrian University of Damascus, in 1954, she decided, in spite of her marriage the following year, to work for a Ph.D. in literature at the University of Edinburgh, England. In 1958, she received her degree and for 3 years she occupied a leading position at a government secondary school. She was promoted to the post of secretary and, later on, to that of director of the ministry of culture and national counseling. While in this position, she continued her literary activities, became a member of the Executive Council of the Arab Authors' Union, published articles in papers, prepared literary studies and joined in the publication of two books entitled: "Who Remembers Those Days?" and "War Literature".

When she was appointed minister in 1976 she defined her policy by saying that her chief concern would be the abolition of illiteracy and ignorance in its various forms. The cultural identity she aimed to create was one of liberation and progress.

In her declarations she condemns the idea of art for art's sake. "The people of the Third World", she says, "cannot afford to encourage aimless, non-committed cultural production. Their press, their literary output and the rest of their mass media should aim to free the masses by carrying out a campaign against under-development. It should free men and women from slavery to the past, and awaken a consciousness of needs and potentialities".

Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr's Trip to the United States

Dr. Abu Nasr, director of the IWSAW, undertook an informative trip to the U.S.A. for seven months, during which she attended several women's conferences. Among these were, 1) The Conference on Women and development held at Wellesley College, and reported on in this issue; 2) The "Workshop on Arab Women Studies", also held at Wellesley College and reported on elsewhere in this issue; 3) The International Wingspread Conference, where women from the Third World met to discuss and set guidelines for cooperation among countries in research in identifying needs and sharing information.

The Director visited women's groups in different parts of the

U.S.A., and shared in discussions about the following subjects: adult education, new areas in vocational training, critical reviews of children's books and programs presenting a stereotype image of woman, women's study centers in universities, research on women, women's areas in government departments, national commissions, on the observance of International Woman's year, documentation, etc.

Among other activities were included, 1) her meeting with U.N. Commission for Women and other U.N. agencies concerned with the integration of women in national development, 2) her meeting with the

Executive Committee of AWI, to discuss plan of cooperation among 9 women's colleges in Asia, 3) a survey of literary programs and collection of information about this activity, 4) contacts with women's magazines ready to publish research or information about Arab Women and send the Institute informative material in Arabic or in English, 5) lecturing to different groups on the Institute and on the status of Arab women 6) meeting church groups who indicated interest in supporting the Institute's project. Finally, the prospects of fund raising and preparation of projects for the Institute absorbed a large share in her IWSAW activities.