

Integration of the Arab Woman in Development

Discussed at a U.N. regional conference

The Regional Conference for the integration of women in West Asian development was held in Amman, Jordan, 29 May-4 June, 1978. It was convened by the U.N. Center of Social Development and Humanitarian affairs, in cooperation with the Economic Commission for West Asia (ECWA). Ten Arab countries were represented by their ECWA members. The Arab League Secretariat and seven U.N. organizations were represented by observers.

At the inaugural session His Royal Highness Emir Hassan, spoke of the importance of developing human resources in West Asia and emphasized the role that women should play in Jordan's economy and public life, now that they have been admitted to the Council of National Guidance and given the opportunity to share in planning and executive action.

The U.N. assistant secretary for the center of Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs reported about the progress achieved on the international level by the integration of women in development, following the application of work programs and the preparation of regional work plans which took into consideration the specific problems of the various regions. She also indicated the positive results obtained from the establishment of the Voluntary Fund for Women's Employment and the availability of resources needed to finance the programs.

The executive secretary for the West Asian Economic Commission, Dr. M. Said al-Attar said that the regional plan of action in the West Asian countries received its inspiration and impetus from the political leaderships of those countries. He added that the general plan of action was based on the fundamental characteristics of the West Asian countries which though they represent a wide variety in the level of social and economic evolution, are

yet bound together by a common cultural heritage. Women, he said, should be given in the work programmes, every opportunity to serve in the various geographic, economic and social sections, so that they may fulfill their role as wives, mothers, home-makers and participants in economic development.

The work plans for the integration of women in West Asian development were reviewed and discussed by the participants. The delegate of the Voluntary Fund for Women's Employment indicated the importance attached by the U.N. to the national structures which should be capable of hastening the realization of equal opportunities for women in the developmental process. She mentioned, as a proof, two documents adopted by the general assembly in 1975 and 1976: "The World Plan of action" and The Programme of Woman's Employment for Equality, Development and Peace. "Some of the projects financed by the Voluntary Fund were mentioned by the Delegate, namely: the project of improved technology for extracting salt, based on the utilization of woman power; the project of regional workshops for the development of planning methods; that of creating mobile units for the training of rural workers, etc.

The Delegate explained that non-governmental organizations could request their government support of some of the projects submitted to the Center of Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs for the obtainment of financial help. Both men and women members of the same family could benefit from the Fund by commonly sharing in development. Projects supporting rural and bedouin women's participation fall within the criteria adopted by the Fund. The same is true of projects which aim at helping needy women.