

Women's Social Welfare Activities in South Lebanon

The district of the South in Lebanon, more than any other district, has born the brunt of the war. It has been, and continues to be, the field of confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Women of the South have been particularly active in voluntary social work and first aid activity. Two of these women volunteers have been interviewed by al-Raida. The first was Mrs. Fatima Khalifeh, a member of the "Social Committee of Jabal Amil Women" and an active worker in projects of assistance to the displaced and the refugees.

Q — What factors aroused your interest in voluntary social work?

A — It may have been a natural bent. In my childhood I enjoyed helping the needy. In 1957, when I was still a teen-ager, I volunteered to collect a sum of money to spend on a surgical operation needed by a poor young girl who had been accidentally shot in the throat. I also think that I owe particularly to my father my interest in public service. His house was always open to needy people and to social leaders who met to discuss ways of helping the public and solving general problems.

Q — What have been your main activities in social work?

A — I have been and continue to be a member of the "Social Committee of Jabal Amel Women", founded in 1970 and grouping a large number of women volunteers, including Mrs. Dunia Mroweh Munajjed. This society succeeded in founding 13 centers for health education, teaching local crafts and fighting illiteracy. In each center, a social worker and a visiting physician were secured, and a library was started. The most important achievement of the Society was the founding of the nursing school which offered a three year training course leading to a higher diploma in nursing. The Lebanese Government recognized the high standard of this school by taking charge of 80% of its expenses. All these projects were suspended because of the war...

Q — We would like to hear about some of your most rewarding experiences in the field.

A — Two years ago, when I discovered the spread of scabies among the displaced, I instantly started a campaign against this skin disease by organizing an advertising and information campaign in the refugee camps, and distributing gifts to those who kept their rooms clean. Another exciting experience was my trip to Egypt and my interviewing the first Egyptian Lady, Jihan el-Sadat, to ask her help for the admittance of two Lebanese handicapped children in the "Egyptian Institution



for the Handicapped." My request was granted and I had the opportunity to visit a number of flourishing social welfare organizations in Egypt.

After the meeting we had with Mrs. Fatima Khalifeh we met Mrs. Dunia Mroweh Munajjed, another prominent pioneer in the welfare projects of South Lebanon.

Mrs. Munajjed reported about the projects which the society had to give up because of the war. One of them was that of reviving the silk-worm-raising industry in the South, a vital project which caused her to effect a worthwhile trip to India where she obtained ample information on the production of natural silk and the use of machines for local silk weaving.

Q — Have you made any effort to resume some of the activities that the war has blocked off?

A — The nursing School will be reopened with the help of the St. Joseph University which has agreed to provide technical guidance while we take charge of the financial and practical needs. Some of the social welfare centers have been restored; they continue to offer health guidance, first-aid lessons and sometimes family-planning advice.

The project which we now expect to carry out is the training of local social workers who would gradually replace those coming from other districts, who have to face difficulties connected with lodging and adjustment. The YWCA has accepted to assist in training our girls; as to financing the project, we mainly depend on the "International Save the Children's Fund."

It is interesting to note here that Mrs. Munajjed who once taught journalism at B.U.C. and has been teaching this course at the Lebanese University, has a daughter who has majored in sociology and who will hopefully follow in her mother's steps.