

LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE AT AUB

DECEMBER 10 - 14, 1979

The "Conference on Leadership and Development in the Arab World" which took place at the American University of Beirut, Dec 10-14, 1979, covered a long program of sub-topics included in this broad and important topic. We shall report here on the session which discussed "Women Leaders in Modern Arab Society: a Changing Perspective." Two women researchers from Egypt read papers dealing with the subject, which were discussed by those present. The first, Dr. Nadia Halim Suliman, senior expert at the National Center for Social and Criminological Research, showed that feminine leadership asserted itself through social service and not through the control of the sources of production. Women's associations succeeded in obtaining many feminine demands regarding social status and family laws. Egyptian, and other Arab women proved their efficiency when they participated in national demonstrations and other forms of patriotic struggle.

In 1975 the number of women's associations reached 200 all over Egypt, 72 of them in Cairo. The work of association leaders and board members has been mostly voluntary. Their activities are all embracing: social, cultural and educational.

Dr. Suliman then presented the biographies of five women leaders in social work, all of whom came from families of the higher stratum of society and had completed their secondary or their university education. She remarked that in the past, women leaders depended on their own financial resources, their work was voluntary; nowadays

social work has become a profession, mostly under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs. She finally expounded the advantages and disadvantages of feminine voluntary leadership.

Dr. Suha Abdel-Kader equally stated that most women leaders in Egyptian society have tended to emerge among the upper-middle and upper classes of urban society. This fact is due to socio-economic and historical factors.

As discussant of the above papers, Dr. Julinda Abu-Nasr, director of IWSAW, pointed out that leadership characteristics take shape through appropriate training in home and school. Our training methods, based on sex discrimination, do not encourage the formation of leadership among women. Certain studies carried out by IWSAW concerning the image of woman in textbooks and mass media and socialization patterns confirm this stereotyped orientation and show the need of a new one, free from the impact of the past.

Dr. Sophie Saadeh denounced the influence of religious legislation on the social status of women and emphasized the necessity of change.

Finally, a parallel was drawn between the ups and downs of national movements and those of women's movements in Arab countries. The obstacles arising from status differences which stand in the way of women's general emancipation should be fought and wiped out. This recommendation applies more particularly to deprived rural districts where the majority of women are illiterate and ignorant.