

# Women and Old Age

The last fifteen years were characterized by a remarkable impetus in the U.N. international activities. They started with the celebration of the International Human Rights Year in 1967, followed by the 1968 Fiftieth Anniversary of the first installment of the parliamentary franchise for women and, later on, by the Women's International Year in 1975, the International Year of The Child 1979, the IYDP in 1981. Problems of the elderly will be a major theme to be observed by the World Assembly in 1982.

If we take a look at each of the above activities, we shall see that women are particularly concerned with each of them. If they all aim at the rehabilitation and application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of U.N. in 1948, it is especially woman's rights as a citizen, a daughter, a wife, a mother and a worker that should be rehabilitated because, all through the eight thousand years of patriarchal domination, most of those rights were denied to her.

Women are more concerned with the problem of old age than men. The number of widows everywhere is larger than that of widowers, not only because women have a longer life expectancy than men but also because they usually marry at a younger age, the difference ranging from five to ten years or more. Traditions require women to take care of the aged and the sick. The wife takes care of her old husband, but a widow with no female progeny rarely finds anybody to take care of her.

Many people believe that persistence of family traditions in the Arab East and the importance of the family institution guarantee the good treatment of parents in their old age. Nobody has yet made a thorough investigation of the real status of the aged in this region. We know that people in general follow the habit of saving appearances and of pretending that all is well within their homes. Geriatrics, the branch of medicine that deals with the problems and diseases of old age, is almost nonexistent. Proper care of aging people in hospitals and in old people's homes is a matter of doubt. Every individual worries about old age. Because women are financially and socially less privileged than men, they are more apt to be victims of this worry.

For women of the Third World, the theme of the elderly, which will be observed by the World Assembly in 1982, should carry a particular importance. Their problem is not limited to old age insurance or to the care they should receive when they are sick or disabled. There is also the problem of occupying them with useful activities upon retirement, during the "third age", when they are still able to work. As in the case of the handicapped, there are stereotypes to be fought and a new mentality to be developed. The handling of the topic on an international basis proves the existence of a developing interest in the fate of the aged and will hopefully yield good results.

Since a preview of the status of the elderly is scheduled as a major theme of the World Assembly in 1982, in this issue of Al-Raida we take this occasion to publish two articles about this topic, in preparation for the International Year for the Aged which will be probably declared in the near future.