

Dr. Badria Al-Awadhi, a champion of human rights

While we care to emphasize the needs and shortcomings of Arab women of to-day, we should not forget that there exists among them a minority group who act like the leavening agents that accelerate change in their environment.

Kuwait is one of the Arab states that have used their flood of oil wealth for national development and social welfare. Women's education receives special attention from the government. In 1974 the number of women students was 42% of the total number; yet the percentage of working women did not exceed 5% of the labor force. Against this alarming contradiction, the Family Revival Association took certain decisions to promote women's interest in work. University professors denounced traditions that impede woman's integration in development and started a campaign against apathy toward work.

Dr. Badria Al-Awadhi is one of the few university women whose intellectual ambition was not deterred by social restrictions. She chose to specialize in international law, a non-traditional major, which she studied first at Cairo University, then at London University where she obtained a Ph.D. in 1975. Her special field of study was "International Law of Sea Pollution", which she handled in a thesis entitled "Legal Aspects of Maritime Pollution with Particular Reference to the Arabian Gulf." Right after that, she took up teaching at the Faculty of Law and Shari'a, Kuwait University and, within 4 years, was promoted from the position of lecturer to that of head of the Department of International Law, Assistant Professor and Dean of Faculty. Within the interval of 6 years, she attended 15 international conferences dealing with international law, human rights, education and environment; wrote 3 books on international law and a fourth on the rights of children in the legal system of Kuwait; assessed theses and articles dealing with legal problems and delivered several conference papers on questions of pollution and the teaching of human rights. She is currently a member of 14 national and international organizations.

A brief look at her books will show that Dr. Al-Awadhi is not only a meticulous researcher but also a committed writer. In her book on "Rights of the Child in Kuwait," she lists these rights in the Kuwaiti constitution, social laws, penal code and personal status laws, in order to compare them with the International Declaration of the Rights of the Child, proclaimed in 1959; then she gives a list of recommendations which she urges the government to adopt for the purpose of making Kuwaiti laws conform with international ones.



In her other book, "The Law in Relation to Local and International Events", she uses her legal knowledge to criticize government indifference toward pollution in the Gulf waters. She attacks the personal interests which direct the application of laws, the exploitation of office for personal profit, and the injustice done to women in depriving them of leadership positions. She deplores the recent wave of unrestricted divorces spreading over the country and gives practical recommendations for its limitation.

One of the questions she discusses in this book is the danger of including sectarian stipulations in the constitution of a state as, for example, in the Iranian constitution which declares that Shi'ism is the religion of the State. Such a declaration will create bitterness among the Sunna, as well as fanaticism and arrogance among the Shi'a who form the majority. It seems illogical, she says, to emphasize the rights of the majority while it is rather the rights of the minority that need protection from neglect and infringement. What if other countries with a Shi'ite minority in their population should retort with a similar declaration in their constitutions?

Dr. Al-Awadhi exemplifies the Arab woman who believes in the necessity of putting personal freedom above traditional considerations, and general needs above personal interests. Her specialization in international law, while it spurred her national feeling, has helped to make her internationally minded, ready to support justice and human rights.