

# First Woman Information Minister in Jordan

Leila Sharaf, one of the most politically and socially active public figures in Jordan, was appointed Information Minister in the newly formed Jordanian Cabinet in January 1984. Who is this woman and how did she come to hold this important post?

## A Short Biography\*

- Leila Sharaf, born Najjar comes originally from Lebanon. She grew up there and completed her high-school education with the Lebanese and French Baccalaureat in the “Ahlieh” school in Beirut.
- Between the years 1962 and 1965 she worked, while studying at the University, as a news presentator on Lebanese television

---

\* This short biography is based on 2 interviews made with Mrs. Leila Sharaf before she became Minister of Information. The articles can be found in:

– Feyrouz February 26, 1984, p. 76-77.

– Sayidaty, Vol. 3, No. 149, January 16-22, 1984, p. 20-23.



- She graduated in 1965 with a **Masters from the American University of Beirut**.
- During the same year, she married **Abdel Hamid Sharaf**, a colleague of her at University and one of the members of the Jordanian Royal Family.
- She moved with her husband to Jordan and during their first two years there, their first son, Nasser, was born.
- From 1965-67, her husband was appointed Minister of Information in Jordan.
- In June 1967, after the Arab-Israeli War, Abdel Hamid Sharaf was appointed Jordan's Ambassador to the U.S.A.
- During her five years stay in the USA as a diplomat's wife, Leila Sharaf became President of the **Islamic Women's Association**, which encouraged cultural and social exchange between Islamic and Western countries.
- She was also member of many diplomatic clubs which grouped wives of ambassadors and politicians in Washington.
- Leila Sharaf was also President of the **Cultural Islamic Association**, which organized seminars and cultural evenings in conjunction with the big universities and museums in the USA, like the Metropolitan Museum for instance.
- Mrs. Sharaf was also President of the American University of Beirut Alumni Chapter residing in North America, more than 3 thousand in number.
- In 1972, Abdel Hamid Sharaf was appointed Ambassador of Jordan at the United Nations and in 1976 the couple returned to Jordan where Abdel Hamid became President of the Royal Hachemite Council.
- In 1979, Mr. Sharaf became Prime Minister of Jordan till his untimely death in July 1980.
- Before and after her husband's death, Mrs. Sharaf remained active in the social and political spheres. In 1977 she founded the **Association for Cerebral Paralysis** and was its president for 2 years. She was also Vice President of the **Royal Jordanian Society for the Protection of the Environment**.
- At the time of her appointment as Minister of Information of Jordan, Mrs. Sharaf was Vice President of the Committee of the **Jerash Folkloric Festival**, a well known cultural artistic festival that takes place annually in the ancient city of Jerash in Jordan.
- Leila Sharaf has a second son, Fares, who is 13 years old.
- About her role as a mother Mrs. Sharaf says that she treats her two sons like friends and insists on respect and democratic discussions.
- **Her hobbies** are the theatre, classical music and reading. Her favorite books are political memoirs. The last book she read was **The World is made of Glass** by Morris West. Before that she read the memoirs of: Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, President Anouar Sadat and Laurence Olivier.
- Leila Sharaf **speaks four languages**: Arabic, English, French, Spanish, and a little bit of Hebrew.
- **Her motto in life**: **The woman who works a lot can work more.**