



Baghdad Women's Meeting

(March 4 - 8, 1985)

Women in the world celebrate women's day on the 8th of March every year. Iraqi women celebrate their day on the 4th of March to commemorate the day the General Federation of Iraqi Women (G.F.I.W.) was founded in 1969.

This year the G.F.I.W. invited 400 women delegates from 56 different countries, and representing various women's organizations and political parties to participate in the celebration of their 16th anniversary.

The celebrations started on the morning of the 4th of March, wreaths were laid on the Martyr's monument, an oval shaped turquoise edifice standing on the banks of the Tigris river. It was followed by a visit to the G.F.I.W.'s headquarters, and a photograph exhibition of the works and achievements of the Federation with samples of handicrafts made by women from various parts of the country.

The next three days were spent at al-Rasheed Hotel where the Baghdad women's conference was held. Women delegates presented their studies about the aims and achievements of their respective organizations during the women's decade, while officials of the G.F.I.W. presented several papers concentrating on:

- Women and legislative policy in Iraq (see article p. 5).
- Iraqi women and decision-making.
- Rural women in Iraq.
- Iraqi women and war.
- The G.F.I.W.'s preparation for the Nairobi conference in July 1985.

Mrs. **Manal Younis**, Chairwoman of the G.F.I.W.

opened the conference by saying that the 3-day gathering was very important for coordination and exchange of experience among women and for serving women's liberation around the world.

She expressed hope that the meeting would be an opportunity for women to learn more about each other's problems and concerns and set up strategies for the year 2000.

Concluding her speech, Mrs. **Younis** said she hoped this gathering would give delegates the opportunity to observe the achievements of Iraqi women and unite in the call for peace around the world.

Among the interesting research papers presented in the Baghdad meeting was one titled "Iraqi Women and the Integration of Development in Rural Areas". The study revealed the Iraqi leadership's concern to narrow the gap between the living standards in urban centers and those in rural areas. It described some of the efforts made towards improving the status of women and mentioned the setting up of medical centers, agricultural cooperatives, illiteracy campaigns and rural workshops.

Women delegates were taken on a field trip to the outskirts of Baghdad to visit an all-women's farming cooperative. They were warmly welcomed by the rural women dressed in traditional black robes and were offered coffee, sweets and bread made in clay ovens (tannour). (See photo)

Women visitors had the opportunity to see products of the farm and ask questions about the organization of the cooperative. "What is particular about this farm,"

said its Chairman, "is that it is run on a cooperative basis and operated by women only". These women do all the field work by themselves without the help of men and they live in little compounds near the fields, with their children. "Their men are fighting on the front" she added. The farmer-women looked healthy and happy and proud of their work, they were ready to answer all our questions and mixed gladly with women of different cultures.

Back to Baghdad, the visiting delegations were taken to a fine arts exhibit of modern Iraqi artists, many of whom were women. The display included sculptures, ceramics, calligraphy, jewelry, oil paintings and water colors. The most impressive were the jewelry items made of old beads, semi-precious stones and silver and gold inspired by old Babylonian and Sumerian models.

The third day was concluded by the Festival of Young Arab Poets, attended by foreign and local visitors, which took place at the hotel. Poets recited their works, some especially written for the occasion. They came from Iraq, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and North Yemen.

Two of the most impressive participants were Dr. **Suad as-Sabbah** of Kuwait (see Al-Raida No. 32, p. 10) and **Moncef al-Mezganni** of Morocco who recited parts of a long epic poem.

On the last day of the conference (March 8), the participants were taken in the morning to the big celebration hall and its surrounding gardens to watch various Iraqi ethnic groups perform their folkloric dances in colorful costumes. The afternoon was spent listening to concluding reports and plans of action for the future, especially for the Nairobi conference.

What did the participants learn from their Iraqi experience and what were their comments in general?

Lebanese head of delegation, Dr. **Fitna Messaykeh**, said that "the Baghdad meeting was an opportunity for Arab women to share their views and experiences with women of the world and that all delegations stressed the need for peace in human societies to enable women to raise their families in a stable environment".

Mrs. **Fawzia Mohammed Ibrahim**, head of the United Arab delegation said that, "although it was her first visit to Iraq, she did not feel a stranger because the women spoke the same language, had similar histories and the same aspirations".

Fatima al-Zahabi, head of the Moroccan delegation and Deputy Chairwoman of the Federation of Moroccan women, said that her second visit to Iraq and attending the present meeting in Baghdad has been a rewarding experience. She also added that the Iraqi



Rural
Women
Offering
Bread

woman was a model of struggle, with a deep sense of responsibility towards her country.

Member of the Indian Parliament, Dr. **Najma Haibatullah**, said about her third visit to Iraq, "that one cannot separate women's issues from other issues of society, particularly if one bears in mind the importance of peace as a goal of the world women's decade". Dr. **Haibatullah** believes that women can play a significant role in establishing peace in their countries by pressing their respective governments to find the proper environment for peace, she thinks that "instability is a great impediment to the realization of the goals of the women's decade, especially equality with men and integration in development!"

To conclude this report on the Baghdad World Women's Meeting, the participants were overwhelmed with the spirit of friendship, hospitality and warmth. Iraqi women who participated in this conference, whether an official, a delegate or a guide were a striking example of the great steps achieved by the women of Iraq during the past 15 years. Many women wore their military suits, all were energetic, friendly and helpful. They were proud of being women and of their role in building their society. Iraqi women present at the conference represented jobs which ranged from bus drivers, school teachers, airport officials, government employees, science researchers, airport officials, government employees, science researchers, ceramic artists and painters or sculptors. They portrayed women at their best, fully satisfied with their lives and achievements, and proud to be Iraqis.

Report and photos
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