

Education and Employment in Kuwait

In Kuwait, education and work are the most essential and determinant factors in society. *Dr. al-Rumeihi*, in the introduction of a book on «Kuwait» (*), quoted this statement from *al-Rihani* who observed these two characteristics in the Kuwaiti society fifty years ago.

Education, as many economists have observed, has a positive influence on economic participation. With the rise of oil prices in 1973; the oil revenues transferred Kuwait to one of the greatest Per Capita income countries in the world, \$22,840 in 1980. The oil revenues have multiplied educational opportunities and created new jobs. Article 40 of the constitution states that «Education is a right for Kuwaitis, guaranteed by the State... (and) in its preliminary stages shall be compulsory and free in accordance with law». The history of female education in Kuwait dates back to 1937, when the first girls' elementary school was opened.

In 1960, the first six Kuwaiti women received their college degrees from Cairo University. In 1963, *Loulua al-Qutami*, a pioneer of women's rights, founded the Kuwaiti Women's cultural and Social Association. In 1970, the number of college graduates rose to 215, and 5 held graduate degrees.

In the same year, 99 per cent of women college graduates were employed and 50 per cent worked as teachers. Kuwaiti women hold important posts in the Ministries, although they are still not sent abroad as diplomats. Among the most prominent women in gov-

ernment is *Fadda al-Khaled* who was Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education in 1981. Education among Kuwaiti females was very significant. Over the last decade, the number of Kuwaiti female graduates at Kuwait University was nearly twice the number of Kuwaiti male graduates.⁽¹⁾ Here one should also consider the propensity of males to study abroad.

There has been a remarkable increase in the number of Kuwaiti women in the labour force, from 1 per cent in 1957 to 3.2 per cent in 1975 and 5 per cent in 1980. The majority of women work in the government sector. They work as teachers in girls' schools, in the Ministry of Education, in health and social services. Women have also entered the private sector; many are running their own business and some are involved in making investment. In the Souq al-Manakh stock market crash, the assets of 89 people were frozen, among whom 26 were women.⁽²⁾

What is expected from Kuwaiti women? What more needs to be achieved? According to *Nora al-Falah* «women in Kuwait have to learn from the experiences of women in various other societies, women who have been struggling to ensure equality between the sexes. Then, Kuwaiti women will be able to create in this country the first movement to liberate women and in the process, at the same time, develop their entire society».⁽³⁾

(*) *Kuwait*. Published by the Government of Kuwait to commemorate the 25th anniversary of independence. 1986. p. 7.

(1) Annual Statistical Abstract, 1984, Kuwait, p. 313.

(2) The Middle East, October 1985, p. 8.

(3) Al-Falah, Nora. «KUWAIT: God's Will — and the process of Socialization», in *Sisterhood is Global*, Robin Morgan ed., p. 413.