

Al-Makassed: The Impact of Education

«Education of women is the most potent factor in enhancing their integration in the process of social and economic development».

Tammam Salam

President of al-Makassed

The *Makassed* Philanthropic Islamic Association in Beirut was founded on Sha'ban 1, 1295 A.H. (July 16, 1878 A.D.) by a group of prominent men aiming at the development and progress of the indigenous community.

The fundamental guidelines that were delineated in the educational programme of *al-Makassed* focused on female education. The rationale behind starting the educational endeavors of *al-Makassed* with a girls school was their strong belief in the education of women as a vehicle for the advancement of the society and the family, and thus the nation. The opening of a girl's school in 1879 in Beirut was due in part to a strong faith in education as means of transforming the socioeconomic conditions of the family. Members of *al-Makassed* Association acknowledged the reality that the most pressing need of the community at that time was female education. Since educational opportunities were limited and class specific, the *Makassed* school was made free of charge so as to increase the access of education to all members of society. The first girls's school was founded by *Sheikh Abd al-Kader Kabbani*. The educational systems that existed at the time the *Makassed* was set up were the Ottoman public and the foreign missionary. The role of *al-Makassed* in setting private national schools was paramount in spreading female education. The first girls schools was located near Bab Idriss and started with 23 students and six teachers. With time *al-Makassed* achieved a remark-



able expansion in educational facilities and enrollments. This school is what became known in 1925 as «*Al-Makassed Highschool for Girls*»; its director was *Miss Julia Tohmeh*.

The *Makassed* focused on the emergence of national educational systems and the integration of long-term educational plans into comprehensive plans. The Association also tried to establish a certain balance between the different levels of education, as well as education for productive employment and rural development. The approach of educational development at *al-Makassed* was centered around human power development, trying to provide qualified humanpower to attain national development plans.

The future plans of *al-Makassed* involve carrying a feasibility study to assess the supply and demand of the labour market to limit the discrepancies that exist between female education and the socioeconomic needs of the country. *Mr. Salam* has also emphasized the need to spread education to all the rural areas of Lebanon, focusing on increasing female enrollments in vocational training and formal education, hence women will have more occupational options.

According to the President of *al-Makassed*, *Mr. Tammam Salam*, education is a catalyst for progress and growth. *Al-Makassed* aims at bringing up a generation that is aware, enlightened and productive, stimulating in all their students the pursuit of knowledge and inquiry.