

IWSAW: Fourteen Years of Sustained Effort

«In your school, do you organize cleaning campaigns for the purpose of arousing social consciousness among both students and community?»

This question was asked by the coordinator of a panel discussion which brought together a number of school teachers coming from various parts of Lebanon. While the questioner waited for an answer, one of the participants raised her hand to say: «That is not our business. It is the duty of the municipal council.»

The person who raised the objection was the headmistress of a coeducational village school. While she spoke, a little frown darkened her placid face.

«But who is the municipal council?» Asked the coordinator without waiting for an answer. «Its members are people like us. They were elected by the community and were entrusted with the task of providing the village or town with water, lighting, cleanliness and other necessities. If they fail in their task, we have the right to question them. It is our duty to supervise and promote every project that serves the public welfare.»

The headmistress shook her head and did not answer. I could see that she was a person who recoiled from innovation as from a mortal sin. The idea of a cleaning campaign seemed to her ridiculous. She and her students followed a program which had been dictated to them and which they were not allowed to change or criticize. They needed someone who had the power to shake off their apathy and break down the barriers that surrounded them. This task had to be undertaken by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, founded at B.U.C. in 1973, with the aim of awakening dormant minds, particularly among women who form half of the population and who should be able to play an active role, not

*only as mothers, housekeepers or teachers, but also as participants in all fields of development. In order to have an accurate idea about women's needs and potentialities, a research program was undertaken, a documentation center was established at B.U.C. Library, a bibliography of English and French works on women was published while a compilation of Arabic works on the same topic was started. Besides the quarterly newsletter, **Al-Raida**, issued in both Arabic and English and containing up-to-date information about the Institute's activities and women's problems and achievements in the Arab world, a series of publications in Arabic and English were put forth, dealing with the legal status of women, their artistic and literary output, their role in industry, in education, etc. A valuable publication called, «The Basic Living Skills Program», with audiovisual material, was prepared for the benefit of semi-illiterate women. If we add to the above sketch, the organization and the attendance of international conferences on women and of workshops on children's literature, we may conclude that IWSAW has been fighting on several fronts. In spite of obstacles created by the Lebanese war and by the slaves of tradition, the Institute has carried on the task of spreading awareness regarding woman's liberation in the Arab World. Its latest step has been the organization of exhibits and public lectures in cooperation with the Goethe Institute and other Cultural centers in Lebanon. After fourteen years of sustained effort, the seeds that have been planted will not fail to grow and produce fruit.*

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