

Arab Women Solidarity

Founded in Egypt in 1982, under the name of "Arab Women Solidarity" (AWS), this association obtained, in 1985, a consultative status, category 2, with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The founder is the well-known Egyptian feminist, Dr. Nawal Saadawi, whose experience as neurologist and clinical researcher induced her to write several studies and novels about the problems of the Egyptian and Arab women. This association is presented as an international, non-governmental organization whose aim is to serve as a means of contact and cooperation between the women of the Arab world in the fields of culture, economy, politics and social activities. Members include both men and women. Since 1982, the association has been able to hold a general conference for Arab women, to participate in several international conferences, to hold weekly discussions, to present films and recitals in its own recently acquired hall. It has also published six books dealing with women's problems and activities. It published a monthly paper containing news of the Arab women and, in 1988, started a non-periodical magazine of eight large sized pages, distributed in the whole Arab world and produced by a group of women and men, who believe that the liberation of men cannot take place without the liberation of women. The AWS is planning to organize in Cairo, in November 1988, its second Arab Women Conference, dealing with the general topic of "Modern Arab Thought and Women". It is in the process of collecting money to finance this conference which will be attended by Noura al-Falah (Kuwait), Ferial Ghazzul (Iraq), Marlene Waring (New Zealand), Dalal Bizri (Lebanon), Robin Morgan (U.S.A.), Alexandra Mikokie (Italy), and other outstanding feminists. In the editorial of the first number of AWS magazine, Nawal Saadawi insists on the idea that the large number of women's organizations in the Arab world is evidence of their general awareness of their oppressive condition and of their right to challenge it. The women's movement in Egypt and other Arab countries was not created by a government decree. It sprouted here and there in a variety of forms, with the hope that mutual contact and cooperation might finally lead to a large international union, including men and women, from all Arab countries, who believe that women's liberation is a necessary condition for the liberation of society as a whole. The ambitious plans adopted by AWS impose on it the request for financial help from every part of the Arab world but the continuous growth it expects to achieve requires the establishment of a permanent fund which would guarantee its expansion and stability.

While the staff of Al-Raida welcomes the newly founded sister magazine, it extends to the Arab Women Solidarity Association warm wishes for its growth and success, acknowledging its belief in women's liberation as the cornerstone of national liberation and social justice.

(Arab Women Solidarity, No.1, May 1988).

Toufiq el-Hakim: a supporter of an Arab Women's Party

Generally considered as a confirmed misogynist, Toufiq el-Hakim, the famous Egyptian writer, was one of the first supporters of the organization: "Arab Women Solidarity." Just before he died — while he was on his deathbed — he wrote a letter, addressed to the Women of Egypt, in which he urged them to organize a party whose object would be to defend their interests. To reach this end, they should elaborate a plan of action leading to the improvement of their status and the protection of their rights and those of men in general. The government must be ready to participate in the formation of this party because women's interests are an intrinsic part of those of society.

"Though I have always refused to join in any party" Toufiq el-Hakim adds, "I am ready to become a member of the women's party because I recognize its importance in our present circumstances, which impose on our women new responsibilities and raise before them intricate problems, without providing them with the necessary help in their homes and outside."

"It is the duty of the government to provide women with work, to create nurseries for the children of working women, to adopt the principle of equal pay for equal work in evaluating their work. It is the duty of men to help women secure suitable positions and enjoy the same rights that men have to promotion and development. A women's party is the only guarantee and the chief factor of women's liberation and evolution. Men have no other care but their own interests. Only women can defend and save women."

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