

The Role of Women in the Making of Peace



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Once again, the lecture hall of the Alumni Club of the American University of Beirut (AUB) filled with lecturers and an audience ranging from scholars to students, journalists and lay-people.

The Middle East Council of Churches in collaboration with the Cultural Committee of the AUB Alumni Chapter invited four distinguished female scholars to discuss the Role of Women in the Making of Peace.

It was four in the afternoon, shortly before the fall of darkness. Instead of hurrying home to take care of the children or to take refuge from the awe stricken streets of the city, approximately fifty men and women attended an intellectual panel. The attendance was relatively high by war standards. I had been under the impression that people had become too tired to listen to «heavy» intellectual lectures especially those dealing with women. Fortunately, I was proven wrong. It was a good sign that women's issues have not been completely over-ruled by other political and economic problems which plague Lebanon.

The panel began with the welcoming note of Dr. Mary Mikhael on behalf of the Middle East Council of Churches. The emphasis of her opening statement was the need for women to participate at the decision-making levels of society in order to bring peace and prosperity. Then Dr. Mikhael introduced the panelists and their specific areas of concentration in the context of women and peace-making: Dr. Suad Hakim, a specialist in Islamic Studies, concentrated on the role of women in society. Dr. Nour Salman, a writer and education specialist, discussed the role of women in education

as well as the role of education in promoting peace. Mrs. Edvick Shayboub, a media specialist, dealt with the role of women in media and their efforts to propagate peace. Maitre Laure Moghaizel, a lawyer and long time feminist, discussed the need for women to participate in politics and political institutions in order to implement peaceful strategies.

1- Dr. Suad Hakim, on the Role of Women in the Making of Peace through society, pointed out that «Women have an instinct to be peaceful without being weak, and strong without being violent». «However, because of cultural, social and economic hinderances, women in Lebanon have not effectively participated in our war history» she claimed. Hakim insisted that women should play a dynamic role, lest they remain subordinate to men.

She concluded by calling upon women to continue preaching the language and logic of peace, and to find means of communicating this language to people and able associations in order to have them implemented on a massive scale.

2- Dr. Nour Salman, on education, emphasized that, both, men and women have a much needed role in peace-making through education. She strongly demanded that educational methods and policies of the past and the present be modified to promote peace not wars. Salman presented the current shortcomings of educational policies in a critical note hoping to inspire change for a better future. She touched upon the increasing rate of illiteracy: alphabetic, cultural and social, after the war. Hence, she insisted that present education lacks the element of realistic knowledge, «If it is not realistic, if it does not coincide with the reality of our lives, it cannot bring about the needed changes and much needed peace.» Salman pointed out that school curricula should not stop short of sex-education. They should teach motherhood and fatherhood in their proper social and cultural perspectives in order to give way to knowledgeable and peace-loving future generations.

3- Ms. Edvick Shayboub pointed out that the success of women in bringing peace through the media is very

promising. She pointed out that it is within the physiological nature of women to be messengers of peace and love in addition to their instinctive inclination to become journalists. Shayboub bases her optimism on the increasing number of female students in faculties of communication arts all over the country, despite the difficult times.

«The efforts of women to make peace, in the past, through the media have always been sabotaged by the political conspiracy against peace.» Shayboub specifically referred to the Peace March which was organized by our colleague at the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Miss Iman Khalife, on May 6, 1984⁽¹⁾. On the eve of the March, shells fell on the city crippling the thousands of women, men and children who planned to walk in the March, said Shayboub. However, she continued, the media coverage of the planned March and its sabotage was memorable and «gave women all the credit for trying to promote peace».

4- Lawyer Laure Moghaizel tackled the issue of the role of women in politics for making peace by asking three fundamental questions: Do women have a specific role in the peace process? Where were women and where were their political opinions during the war? What are the conditions needed to admit women into the political process for peace?

Moghaizel, basing her argument on previous research⁽²⁾, indicated that women are virtually non-existent in political parties, syndicates, unions, or other politically influential organizations. She concluded «the time has come for all the citizens, especially for women, to transfer their potentials from bearing the consequences of war towards building a peaceful society»●

(1) «No To The War, No To The 10th Year. Yes To Life - The 6th of May Peace March.» **Al-Raida**, Nov. 84 Vol. VII, No. 30, pg. 4, 5.

(2) «Participation of Women in Politics During the War.» **Al-Raida**, Aug. 90, Vol. IX, No. 50, pg. 3, 4.