

Arab Women at the Rio Summit?

Why Environment again? But then, how many times have there been Earth Summits, if only for the purpose of reminding the world of an important issue: The Environment? This issue of *Al-Raida* does not pretend to be an expert in environmental science or in the political and economic debates and dialogues that surrounded the Summit. *Al-Raida* only wishes to shed some light on the place, the participation and the involvement of women in the struggle for protecting nature, improving the quality of life and saving the Earth.

Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, Director of our Institute and Dr. Raja Hajjar, Dean of Beirut University College took part in NGOs' activism at Rio, thus, participating in this call to raise environmental awareness and support a healthy planet. Upon her return, Dr. Abu Nasr told us of *Planeta Fermea*, the Women's Tent in the Global Forum, outside the Summit. "The Women's tent was one of the largest structures in Rio, and probably the most organized", she said. Daily events were announced to keep track of the development of activities and events around and in the Summit. NGOs, women's groups, and individual activists participated in panels, podiums, and discussions on various topics that are crucial to them in this context. (see page) 9. In this issue we also list a number of the women who were active and outspoken in important debates which took place in *Planeta Fermea*.

These women come from the United States, Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Europe, Africa, and other

countries but not from the Arab World. Arab women were not totally absent from the Rio Summit, for surely they participated with the delegations of their countries. For instance, Lebanese Parliamentary Deputy, Ms. Moawad is said to have made significant contributions to the Lebanese delegation.

However, strong, aggressive and loud Arab women's voices seemed absent in Rio and their NGOs were not in the front race for demanding and asserting issues of concern. As I prepared this issue I was constantly reminded of their absence. Arab women are quite active in their own rights and in their own countries. However, they did not enter the global debates openly. If they had, they might have made some progress in terms of pressure-building for better environmental policies and resolutions in their countries, but they would have also reserved a share in economic policies and NGO budgeting for the preservation of the Earth.

Nevertheless, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Beirut University College, and other concerned organizations are earnest and determined to bring women to the forefront of environmental issues in the Arab World. As previously announced our Institute is in the process of organizing a National Conference on Women and the Environment in October 1992, and an International Conference on Arab Women and the Environment in October 1993.

In December, this year, the High Institute of Public Health at

Alexandria University, Egypt is also holding an International Conference on Women and the Environment.

Naturally, these conferences will review environmental conditions in the Arab world, the link between the environment and women, the role of women in preserving the environment, how they can become pressure groups and active members of the ecological and environmentally conscious world community. These Conferences are intended to produce solutions, guidelines and action plans which include women in the environmental mission, propose means of improving women's conditions and their participation in maintaining healthy environmental parameters, and national sustainable development programmes and projects.

There is a general consensus that the awareness and responsibility of women is a major asset for the safeguarding of a healthy environment. Arab women are taking part in the plight, and their efforts must expand to include all sectors of society throughout the Arab world. It is our duties to assist them: first, by setting them on a proper and scientific track as the conference purposes, second by offering them assistance and coverage of their activities and potentials, through *Al-Raida* and other publications.

Sustainable development is intended as the ultimate outcome •

Randa Abul-Husn